

Indonesia's Role in the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territories: New Order Era to The Reformation

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji keterlibatan Indonesia dalam pendudukan Israel di Palestina selama masa Orde Baru dan Era Reformasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan tinjauan literatur untuk menganalisis peran diplomasi Indonesia dalam konflik Israel-Palestina. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Indonesia memainkan peran yang signifikan dalam menyelesaikan konflik tersebut melalui jalur diplomasi. Indonesia menunjukkan sikap dan berpendirian teguh untuk bebas dan netral. Indonesia lebih mengedepankan upaya melalui jalur diplomasi daripada upaya yang ditempuh melalui persenjataan. Dalam hal hubungan internasional, Indonesia melakukan *multi-track diplomacy* terhadap Palestina sebagai sarana untuk mencapai perdamaian. *Multi-track diplomacy* yang dilakukan Indonesia terhadap Palestina merupakan bentuk diplomasi yang dilakukan Indonesia dengan tujuan untuk mencapai perdamaian dunia. Konflik berkepanjangan yang terjadi saat Israel menduduki wilayah Palestina mengundang perhatian berbagai pihak, tidak hanya negara atau pemerintah, namun juga berbagai lembaga swadaya masyarakat dan individu. Penting untuk dicatat bahwa pemerintah Indonesia bukanlah satu-satunya entitas yang terlibat dalam menangani konflik di seluruh dunia. Hal ini menjadikan diplomasi multi-jalur Indonesia sebagai model yang dapat ditiru oleh negara-negara lain.

Kata kunci: indonesia, israel, multi track diplomacy, palestina.

Abstract

This research examines Indonesia's involvement in the Israeli occupation of Palestine during the New Order and Reform eras. It employs a qualitative approach, utilising a literature review to analyse the role of Indonesian diplomacy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The results demonstrate that Indonesia played a significant role in resolving the conflict through diplomacy. Indonesia demonstrated a firm stance of neutrality and freedom. Indonesia prioritised diplomatic efforts over those undertaken through the use of military force. In terms of international relations, Indonesia employs a multi-track diplomatic approach towards Palestine with the objective of achieving peace. Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy towards Palestine represents a form of diplomacy conducted by Indonesia with the aim of achieving world peace. The prolonged conflict that occurred when Israel occupied the Palestinian territories attracted the attention of various parties, including countries, governments, non-governmental organisations and individuals. It is crucial to acknowledge that the Indonesian government is not the sole entity engaged in conflict resolution on a global scale. This underscores the significance of Indonesia's multilateral diplomacy as a model for other countries to emulate.

Keywords: indonesia, israel, multi track diplomacy, palestine.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population globally, occupies a pivotal position in its relations with Middle Eastern countries with regard to

economic, socio-cultural and political collaboration. As a nation that has endured colonialism at the hands of Western powers (Rukmana, et al., 2023), Indonesia plays a pivotal role in the

struggle for the independence of countries in the Asia-Africa region. This can be evidenced by Indonesia's participation in the Asian-African Conference (KAA) to advocate for the independence of countries in the Asian-African region. Indonesia's involvement in the KAA also demonstrated a stance against imperialism and colonialism by the West. At the 2015 Asia-Africa Conference (KAA) in Indonesia, a 'Declaration on Palestine' was agreed upon, which essentially underlined the support of Asian and African countries for the struggle of the Palestinian people in order to gain their independence and efforts to create a two-state solution that coexists peacefully with Israel (Masyrofah, 2023). Indonesia has also provided humanitarian assistance to Palestine, including the deployment of peacekeepers to guard the border, the construction of hospitals and medical facilities, the provision of financial aid, and other forms of assistance. When viewed from a historical perspective, Indonesia and Palestine have a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship. It is therefore fitting that Indonesia should also assist Palestine in its efforts to achieve independence and to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation through peaceful means (Suratiningsih, IP, et al., 2020).

In the early days of Indonesia's independence, one of the key foreign policy objectives was to seek recognition of sovereignty from other countries. This

was because the requirements for the independence of a country extend beyond *de facto* factors, such as the existence of territory, the existence of a sovereign government, and the existence of a population, to include *de jure* requirements, namely recognition of sovereignty by other countries. Palestine is one of the countries that recognised Indonesia's sovereignty in the early days of independence. The recognition of Indonesia's sovereignty was disseminated by the Palestinian Broadcasting Service through the medium of international radio (Susilowati & Yunus, 2019).

Since the inception of the Free-Active Policy as the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has consistently been a matter of concern for the Indonesian government. This political principle is not only reflected in Indonesia's stance on the conflict itself, but also in its participation in international forums. The Free aspect of the policy signifies that Indonesia's foreign policy is not beholden to any external influence and is inherently neutral. The Active aspect, on the other hand, implies that Indonesia will always strive to maintain global peace and be a benevolent partner to all nations (Nasution, 2015). This principle is indicative of Indonesia's *de facto* disapproval of colonial expansion. However, in the context of foreign conflicts, despite its diplomatic

engagement in reconciliation efforts, Indonesia maintains a neutral stance and a firm commitment to freedom and neutrality. Indonesia's policy is to prioritise diplomacy over armed conflict.

In practice, diplomacy is a multifaceted endeavor, with various approaches and techniques. One such approach is multi-track diplomacy, which provides avenues for expediting the diplomatic process. Prior to the advent of multi-track diplomacy, the practice of diplomacy was largely confined to official state channels. The advent of multi-track diplomacy has opened the door for a more nuanced approach to diplomacy, allowing for the practice of diplomacy that does not necessarily have to go through official state channels. In essence, multi-track diplomacy serves as a tool for the state to carry out its diplomatic practices. The origins of multi-track diplomacy can be traced back to the early 20th century, during the World Wars and the rise of democratic ideals. The practice of multi-track diplomacy *de novo* emerged alongside the formation of new states and the conviction that multi-track diplomacy, which employs the majority vote system to maintain influence outside of the state, can be employed for diplomatic purposes (Solihin et al., 2023)

In some situations *en-vue* globally, multi-track diplomacy offers the most potent possibility for successful negotiation. This is because the mere

presence of multiple members is not even required, as the focus is on a singular point of contention. The *a priori* advantage of multi-track diplomacy is that it *a fortiori* values countries that do not have diplomatic relations. Furthermore, bilateral relations also permit countries to initiate multi-track diplomacy when the bilateral level is not able to identify a viable solution to the problem (Djelantik, 2008).

The advent of multi-track diplomacy followed the inadequacy of the second track diplomacy in resolving a peace conflict. This second track diplomacy was no longer able to reach the requisite level of public involvement in the construction of an opinion or when taking an active role in diplomacy. Multi-track diplomacy enables the identification that the achievement of a negotiation interest does not necessitate the utilisation of formal means that exclusively involve the role of the government. It also identifies that other non-government actors, such as NGOs or NGOs, mass media and even individual/non-state actors, may also be involved (Nasution, 2015).

Indonesia's involvement in global affairs is exemplified by its practice of multi-track diplomacy. This approach allows for the involvement of not only the Indonesian government but also other actors in resolving conflicts across the globe. As the country with the largest

Muslim population globally, Indonesia has the potential to serve as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a role that could contribute to the advancement of peace and stability in the Middle East (Irewati & Kartini, 2020)

METHOD

This research deploys a qualitative methodology, which may be defined as a research procedure that aims to produce descriptive data, both orally and in writing (Sugiyono, 2019). Library research, in conjunction with library study, constitutes a method used to collect and analyse library materials in the form of books, journals, and so on, with the objective of answering research problems. The a priori steps taken in this research include tracing sources and collecting data, followed by a review of the data to be analysed (Zed, 2014). The materials obtained from various sources were subjected to a rigorous and comprehensive analysis in order to provide support for the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The New Order Era Of Multi-Track Diplomacy

Indonesia's commitment to advocating for a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is evidenced by its decision to join the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which was established in 1972 and has since become the Organisation of

Islamic Cooperation. At this meeting, the Indonesian delegation, led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adam Malik, was acting on behalf of President Soeharto. In addition to fostering collaboration among OIC members in accordance with the UN Charter, it also served as a conduit for Indonesia's involvement in resolving the conflict in Palestine, which is occupied by Israel (Nasution, 2015).

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was established in Morocco in 1969 in response to the attack on the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Despite the Israeli government's condemnation and denial of the 1969 attack, the incident was interpreted by the Muslim world as decisive evidence that Israel's ultimate aim is to destroy Islam's holiest site (Akbarzadeh & Connor, 2005).

Indonesia's involvement in the OIC during the Soeharto era was not optimal in resolving the Palestine issue. This was due to the fact that Indonesia had to deal with countries supporting Palestinian independence, as *sui generis* as this may be, as well as with Western countries supporting Israel.

Furthermore, Indonesia's membership status in the OIC is very limited, given that Indonesia did not sign the OIC Charter, which states that 'Every Muslim state is eligible to join the Islamic Conference' (Article VIII of the OIC Charter). Indonesia's role within the OIC is that of an active ad-hoc (Nasution, 2015).

In the period of the New Order, President Soeharto held a number of bilateral meetings with Israelis, including a surprising encounter with Yitzhak Rabin. Furthermore, officials of the Soeharto era frequently engaged in bilateral relations with Israel on the topic of enhancing trade relations between the two countries during the 1990s. Despite the Indonesian government's denial of these meetings, news of the meetings and bilateral relations between the two countries was published in several media outlets, including the BBC in London and Haaretz. The Indonesian Muslim community's response to this news was the first of several angry reactions from the Indonesian public. On September 19, 1993, an anti-Israel rally was held at the Al Azhar Mosque, attended by approximately 15,000 people. Subsequently, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) issued statements expressing their disapproval, including the Anti-Zionist Youth and Student Association (HIPMAZ), the Indonesian Committee for Solidarity with the Islamic World (KISDI), and several members of the Indonesian Parliament (DPR RI) (Sudarsono, et.al., 1996).

Israel is regarded as a pariah state by several countries due to its violation of international law through the construction of settlements in the Palestinian territories and its failure to heed the calls of the international community and

various international organisations. The realisation of peace efforts between Israel and Palestine is likely to be hindered if Indonesia persists in establishing trade relations with Israel, as this will serve to reinforce both its military and economic defences (Beddu, 2014).

The form of multi-track diplomacy in the New Order era can be described as imbalanced, given the divergent interests of the Indonesian government and society. Conversely, the Indonesian government sought to cultivate trade relations with Israel, given that it is home to some of the largest companies in the world. However, the public was vehemently opposed to any form of engagement with Israel, given that it had been accused of violating international human rights. Indonesia even purchased military equipment from Israel, yet at the time, no one was willing to voice their opposition, let alone engage in large-scale demonstrations. It was a common occurrence for any Indonesian, regardless of profession or background, who visited Israel to face rejection and, in some cases, even vilification. This is in stark contrast to the current situation and circumstances (Nitisastro, 2022).

Subsequent to the New Order, during the presidency of B.J. Habibie, which had not yet reached its two-year mark, his role in the Palestinian and Israeli conflicts was less pronounced. This was because B.J. Habibie's primary concern was the matter of territorial integrity within

Indonesia, which he deemed to be a more pressing issue than conflicts in other countries. Nevertheless, B.J. Habibie's proactiveness in establishing the D-8 Forum with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is worthy of commendation. The D-8 seeks to enhance collaboration among Muslim countries that are rapidly experiencing economic growth. Furthermore, the Palestinian conflict is frequently deliberated in numerous international forums (Nasution, 2015).

B. Multi-Track Diplomacy Post-Reform

In the Gus Dur era, the Indonesian government's response to the occupation of Palestine by Israel was similar to that of the Soeharto era, where there were certain actions that were less approved by the wider community. Gus Dur made a firm announcement that Indonesia needed to open trade relations with Israel. This was based on the fact that many Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Jordan, have already opened relations with Israel. He posited that by maintaining relations with Israel, Indonesia would become a mediator of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, this would be challenging to implement in the absence of diplomatic ties with Israel (Roesnadi, 1979).

Gus Dur's approach to domestic politics was met with considerable shock, and even some officials explicitly requested that Gus Dur cancel the plan that was considered to be successful.

Consequently, the form of multi-track diplomacy enacted during the Gus Dur era was less than optimal in resolving the issue of the occupation of Palestine by Israel. Despite Indonesia's continued active participation in various international forums that discuss peace issues in Palestine, the Indonesian government's actions are not balanced, giving rise to several solidarity actions that originate from Indonesian civil society (Nasution, 2015).

In the era of Gus Dur's tenure, the Camp David II peace agreement between Palestine and Israel in 2000 was backed by a third party, the United States, which only benefited Israel. Palestinian sovereignty has not found a bright spot, as Israel still opens illegal settlements in Palestinian territory and kills several Palestinian civilians under the pretext of preventing terrorism. When the incident happened, Indonesia did not react. Nevertheless, the Indonesian people and the Indonesian government at the time provided some relief to the Palestinian civilian victims (Aslamiah, 2015).

The period of Megawati Soekarnoputri's presidency saw a heightened level of controversy surrounding the issue of Islam, particularly in the wake of the WTC attack. The association of Islam with terrorism had long been a source of concern for President Megawati, and she sought to express her views and the aspirations of

the Indonesian Muslim community in a speech delivered before the 58th UN General Assembly in 2003. Megawati asserts that the Republic of Indonesia's foreign policy has consistently prioritised the interests of Islam in addressing the impact of terrorism on the perception of Islam (Wibisono, 2006). If the United States' intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan was motivated by religion in response to the 9/11 attack, then the violence and occupation perpetrated by Israel against Palestinian civilians can also be justified by religion. It is evident that there is a hidden agenda at the manipulation of religion as a scapegoat for political and economic interests. This has the effect of diverting the focus of the international community away from the real issues of politics and economics, and towards the exaggerated portrayal of terrorism in the context of religion by the international media, which is often aligned with political and economic interests.

In an exemplary effort to re-position Islam in the global discourse, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, under the leadership of President Megawati, in collaboration with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Society Organization, convened an International Conference of Islamic Experts on the theme of 'Islam as a religion of rahmatan lil'alamin'. The conference, which attracted hundreds of Islamic experts from

across the globe, sought to present a compelling case for the peaceful and tolerant tenets of Islam. The objective of the conference was to demonstrate to the international community that Islam does not condone violence or terrorism. Furthermore, Indonesia sought to challenge the perception that Palestinians are terrorists, instead presenting them as freedom fighters striving to secure their sovereignty from Israeli occupation. (Wibisono, 2006).

C. Multi-Track Diplomacy in SBY's and Jokowi's Era

The multi-track approach to diplomacy employed by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) encompassed a multitude of peace channels, at the governmental level, non-governmental, business, individual, educational, activist, religious, and media levels. The sheer number of these channels serves as evidence of Indonesia's profound concern regarding the ongoing occupation in Palestine and its unwavering support for the independence of Palestine. At the governmental level, Indonesia's role in resolving the conflict over the Israeli occupation of Palestine has been on the rise year on year. A notable development was the election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) as president. In a clear statement of intent, SBY indicated that Indonesia would pursue diplomatic relations with Israel, provided that Israel met three key conditions:

Firstly, the Palestinians must be granted full independence with the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Secondly, all Arab territories occupied by Israel, including the Golan Heights, must be returned to their rightful owners. Thirdly, all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody must be repatriated (Nasution, 2015).

During SBY's tenure, several meetings were held, notably the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial Meeting in Bali from May 23-27, 2011, with the objective of halting the Israeli occupation of Palestine. These meetings saw NAM member countries reinforce their commitment to the Palestinian cause. The Indonesian government welcomed the reconciliation of Palestinian factions as an indispensable step forward in resolving the Palestinian issue in a comprehensive and fair manner. This was achieved through the discussion and ratification of the Declaration on Palestine and the Declaration on Palestinian Political Prisoners (Ministry of Foreign Affairs RI, 2011). In addition, numerous bilateral meetings were held between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and Palestine, including the diplomatic process aimed at resolving the occupation that occurred in Palestine. During the SBY era, Indonesia hosted the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). Indonesia has consistently endeavoured to

advance a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue in accordance with United Nations resolutions (Nasution, 2015).

In addition to governmental channels, there are also non-governmental channels. The National Committee for the Palestinian People (KNRP) and the National Committee for Palestine Solidarity (KISPA) are two such non-governmental organisations that actively voice their support for Palestinian independence and invite Indonesian people to participate directly in supporting the Palestinian people in various aspects, such as humanitarian aid and sending volunteers to Palestine (Aslamiah, 2015).

The business track is evidenced by the growing trade volume between Indonesia and Palestine, which has reached one million US dollars. At the individual level, Indonesian citizens have participated in humanitarian action in support of Palestine by joining the Mavi Marmara ship that transported humanitarian aid for Palestine. In the education sector, scholarships have been provided for Palestinians studying in Indonesia. The activism pathway involves numerous community organisations, including student organisations that advocate for Palestinian independence (Aslamiah, 2015). The religious path, one of several key bases for Indonesia's support for Palestinian independence, is

particularly significant given that Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population globally. Additionally, numerous religious-based organisations have been established to advocate for Palestine, including KNRP, KISPA, Sahabat Al-Aqsa, and others (Suratiningsih, Pupita, et al., 2020).

During the Joko Widodo (Jokowi) presidency, multi-track diplomacy continued the diplomatic channels that had been pursued by previous presidents. Jokowi played a proactive role in efforts to free Palestine from Israel. These included governmental and non-governmental channels, business channels, individual channels, educational channels, activism channels, religious channels, and communication or media channels. These lines were continued by Jokowi, although in a different context.

Furthermore, Indonesia's diplomatic engagement with Palestine has been reinforced by President Joko Widodo's pledge to establish an Indonesian Embassy for Palestine in Aman and Jordan. This initiative complemented by the establishment of an honorary consulate in Ramallah. In line with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2015), the Indonesian Government's assistance to Palestine will be further enhanced through the provision of development assistance to the Palestinian Authority, building on existing capacity. The Jokowi administration's

endeavours are exemplified by its hosting of the 60th anniversary of the 1955 Asian-African Conference (KAA) and the 10th anniversary of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), with the meeting theme 'Reinvigorating South-South Cooperation for World Peace and Prosperity'. Indonesia is a magnet for strengthening South-South cooperation. Indonesia will also pursue trilateral cooperation in the South-South context, including assistance to Palestine (Tabloid Diplomasi, 2015).

The construction of the Indonesian hospital in Gaza, initiated by the Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C), represents a further enhancement of multi-track diplomacy. The hospital specialises in traumatology and surgical services for the Palestinian people, with the objective of supporting the independence of the State of Palestine through Indonesian assistance. Despite the imposition of strict licensing requirements, this hospital was established. In fact, support was forthcoming from the government, non-governmental organizations, and even the wider international community (national.kompas.com, 2015) in the establishment of this hospital. Furthermore, Indonesia has served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council on four occasions: in the 1973-1974, 1995-1996, 2007-2008, and 2019-2020 periods. At the time of the

election, 144 out of 190 countries were present to vote and expressed confidence in Indonesia's ability to promote world peace through diplomacy and to build bridges of peace (Suratiningsih, IP, et al., 2020).

The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, welcomes and wholeheartedly supports the participation and contribution of non-state actors in Indonesia. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement, which has gained significant traction among the public, is also utilised by non-state actors in conducting campaigns or mobilizing international pressure to advance the Palestinian cause. A report from CNBC Media indicates that the boycott movement against products from and supporters of the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories has intensified globally. This is in line with Israel's increasingly relentless attacks on Palestinian land. The boycott movement has caused Israel to suffer annual losses of up to US\$11.5 billion, or approximately Rp180.48 trillion (based on an exchange rate of Rp15,694/US\$). Israel is acutely aware of the potential consequences of this boycott movement. Recently, the main diplomatic objective of the Israeli government has been to address the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In fact, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has taken steps to ban groups that support the boycott

movement. This is because there is a risk of thousands of Israeli workers potentially losing their jobs if the country is completely boycotted by the global community (CNBC Indonesia, 2023).

In the presence of numerous social organisations that provide assistance to the Palestinian people, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to provide support in accordance with its authority. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs believes that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Indonesia, through their activities, have become an important part of the multi-track diplomacy process. In particular, they operate as non-state actors who actively work to build a positive image of Indonesia. They achieve this by fundraising and channelling donations to the humanitarian sector. As per several pertinent international forums, including the OIC Summit, the Indonesian government has called on like-minded communities to support the Palestinian independence struggle (Solihin et al., 2023).

At the Taufan Al Aqsa incident between the Palestinians and Israelis in October 2023, Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, emphasised Indonesia's full support for Palestine to gain the same rights as other nations in the world, namely independence. This includes the granting of Palestine full membership in UN organisations. Up to this point, Indonesia has maintained its position of

not opening diplomatic relations with Israel. The relationship between Indonesia and Palestine is founded upon several shared characteristics, including their status as Muslim countries and Indonesia's historical experience of colonialism. This historical context has shaped Indonesia's constitutional mandate to oppose all forms of colonialism, which serves as a unifying factor in the bilateral relationship.

CONCLUSION

With the goal of advancing global peace, Indonesia has adopted a multi-track diplomatic approach with Palestine. The protracted conflict that occurred when Israel occupied Palestinian territory highlighted the need for a more nuanced approach to diplomacy, not only at the state or government level but also among non-governmental organisations and individuals. Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy serves as a model for other countries. However, the challenges of multi-track diplomacy must be addressed by all relevant parties. The challenges faced by Indonesia in implementing its multi-track diplomacy strategy vary according to the political regime in power. At the state and non-state levels, there are always differing views on the best way forward. This presents a significant challenge for Indonesia, which must ensure that its multi-track diplomacy

strategy remains on track and does not encounter any obstacles.

The Soeharto era to the Jokowi era represented contrasting roles and conditions. The Palestinian territory and society, due to the Israeli occupation, have consistently demanded the attention of Indonesia, the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world. As the conflict intensified, the role of certain elements also reached a peak. Nevertheless, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has consistently been a significant concern for any country until Palestine has gained independence for its own homeland.

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