

# “A Million Friends, Zero Enemy” in the Middle East?

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**Y**UDHOYONO'S FOREIGN POLICY DOCTRINE, which was presented in a variety of forums—both at home and abroad—is known as ‘a million friends, zero enemies’. This doctrine served as the guiding principle in formulating policies pursued by the Yudhoyono administration over the last ten years. In regards to the Middle East, along with promoting peace and reconciliation between conflicting political factions, Yudhoyono also encouraged the process of democratization, human rights protection, and military reform. This middle-of-the-road policy was largely influenced by Yudhoyono's leadership style and his personal background, which emphasizes compromise, negotiation, and lobbying in order to resolve problems.

This paper reviews Indonesian foreign policy in the Middle East during the ten years of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's leadership. This paper also addresses the following questions: How does the Yudhoyono doctrine apply to the Middle East? Is there any domestic factor that shaped Yudhoyono's policy toward the Middle East? Is there any electoral

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or national interest objective behind the conception Yudhoyono's policy? This paper focuses on Yudhoyono's policy toward Middle Eastern countries before and after the Arab Spring and it will also include a thorough analysis on Yudhoyono administration's stance in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Million Friends, Zero Enemy

The middle-of-the-road policy pursued by Yudhoyono is reflected in the ways Indonesia handled the conflict in Syria through political and diplomatic means. Indonesia urged the cessation of violence and pushed for the commencement of an inclusive political process which would reflect the aspirations of the Syrian people.<sup>1</sup> In regards to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Indonesia utilized a similar strategy by encouraging conflict resolution through diplomacy and pushing parties back to the negotiating table.

The Middle East was not a priority in Yudhoyono's foreign policy agenda, as the country's focus in regional politics was directed at the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, in Southeast Asia, Yudhoyono pushed for the strengthening of ASEAN through the establishment of ASEAN Community by 2015. Nonetheless, even though the Middle East was not a priority for his foreign policy agenda, Yudhoyono paid serious attention to the situation in the Middle East, especially before and after the "Arab Spring" swept the Middle East. This posture was important to Indonesia in order to maintain its reputation as the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. Moreover, the Middle East was important for Yudhoyono to maintain his international reputation as a leading figure in the areas of democracy and peace. At the domestic level, peace in the Middle East, especially in Palestine, was essential in order to maintain a positive image of Yudhoyono among Muslim voters.

After Yudhoyono was elected president in 2004, many experts in international relations looked forward to his foreign policy. However, in his first speech as Indonesian President delivered on October 20, 2004, Yudhoyono paid significantly more attention to domestic issues, e.g.: economic growth, employment, poverty alleviation, corruption eradication, conflict resolution in Aceh and Papua, education, and health. In this

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1 Statement of Foreign Minister Marty M. Natalegawa at the General Debate of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, September 27, 2013.

speech, Yudhoyono only mentioned Indonesia's firm commitment to the *bebas aktif*, which is the country's traditional principles of independent and active foreign policy that supports peace, prosperity, and justice in the international arena.<sup>2</sup>

Later during his presidency, Yudhoyono's focus on domestic policies became clearly noticeable. In his speech before the plenary session of the House of Representatives in commemoration of the 64th anniversary of Indonesian independence for example, President Yudhoyono reflected on ten years of development after *reformasi*, future challenges facing the democratic system, as well as ways to improve people's welfare. Likewise, in his last speech to the parliament before he finished his second term in office, Yudhoyono emphasized the success of democratization in Indonesia illustrated by the elections in 2004, 2009, and 2014.

In regards to external affairs, Yudhoyono often highlighted his foreign policy doctrines, i.e. 'all directions of foreign policy' and 'a million friends, zero enemies', in his speeches<sup>3</sup>. In his last presidential address at the plenary session of the Indonesian Parliament, Yudhoyono also expressed his concerns about the security and political uncertainty in the Middle East, as well as about the humanitarian tragedy in the Gaza Strip.

There are three characters of Yudhoyono's doctrine in regards to the Middle East. *First*, Yudhoyono's consistent campaign for democracy. Yudhoyono's background as a military general who pushed for military reform and professionalization influenced his policy toward the Middle East. In some of his speeches addressing the situation in the Middle East, Yudhoyono often encouraged democratic process and military professionalization to take place. Yudhoyono also took pride in Indonesia's successful democratic transition as well as military reform through the elimination of the dual function of the Armed Forces.

*Second*, Yudhoyono was consistent in promoting peace and reconciliation between opposing political factions in the Middle East. In a press release responding to developments in Libya, released on 23 August 2011, the President called for a peaceful solution in Libya through a political settlement – not violence or war. Indonesia also hoped that the people of Libya would resolve the conflict and determine their own future. In regards to the conflict in Libya, Indonesia was concerned that this conflict

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2 State of the Union Address by President of the Republic of Indonesia, 20 October 2004.

3 State of the Union Address by President of the Republic of Indonesia in Commemoration of the 69th Anniversary of Indonesian Proclamation of Independence, 15 August 2014.

could affect the oil prices in the global market.<sup>4</sup> According to Yudhoyono, Libya produced 1.6 million barrels of oil per day before the conflict, but the production plummeted to 100,000 barrels per day after the conflict broke out. Libya was one of the twelve largest oil producing countries in the world.

*Third*, Yudhoyono was consistent in promoting the importance of human rights enforcement. In the case of Egypt for example, Yudhoyono encouraged conflicting factions to respect efforts to protect human rights in order to prevent casualties. Yudhoyono also discouraged the use of military forces in dealing with protesters and conflict because such approach stood in opposition to the principles of democracy and human rights<sup>5</sup>.

## Domestic Factor: Electoral Interests

According to Risse-Kappen<sup>6</sup>, domestic structure is one of the variables affecting the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. However, generally, the effect of the domestic factor on Yudhoyono's policy in the Middle East was minimal. Foreign policy is very elitist in nature, and in Indonesia's case was influenced by the personal characteristic and the leadership style of Yudhoyono. Low domestic influence on foreign policy could be attributed to the low public attention the issues surrounding the Middle East. This is understandable due to the absence of direct influence of Middle Eastern countries on Indonesian national interests. In addition, at the legislative level, the parliament (DPR) did not include Palestine as one of its main foreign policy focus areas.

By examining Indonesia's foreign policy over the last ten years, it could be maintained that there are two main domestic factors influencing Yudhoyono's agenda. *First*, it was in Yudhoyono's pragmatic interest to maintain good relations with two Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations – Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. *Second*, it was in Yudhoyono's electoral interest to gain support for presidential elections in 2004 and 2009. In both elections, Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* or PKS) filed a political contract demanding Yudhoyono to support Palestinian independence as a condition of coalition.

<sup>4</sup> State of the Union Address by President of the Republic of Indonesia in Commemoration of the 69th Anniversary of Indonesian Proclamation of Independence, 15 August 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Indonesian Presidential Press Release on Recent Situation in Egypt, August 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies," *World Politics* Vol. 43 (1991), pp. 479–512.

During campaign seasons prior to these elections, foreign policy was largely absent from the promises and platforms of different political parties. This pragmatic attitude of political parties is reasonable because the public attention to foreign policy was also very low. PKS was the only party that paid considerable attention to the issues of the Middle East. Relatively speaking, the commitment of PKS to peace in Palestine had benefited the party electorally because it strengthened its support among Muslim voters.

Lack of attention among political parties to foreign policy is reasonable. In general, international issues are not among the factors that shape voting patterns in Indonesian elections. Liddle and Mujani<sup>7</sup> maintain that the party choice among voters is strongly influenced by political figures who possess the capability of increasing the share of votes. Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia, voters choose for a particular presidential candidate in the 2014 election based on the personal characters of a candidate, including: honesty (46.5%); attention to the people (29.5%); ability to lead (11.6%); firmness (7.7%); charisma (2.5%); intelligence (1%); and the rest do not know or do not respond.<sup>8</sup>

Important events in the Middle East were still largely ignored by the majority of Indonesian voters. Thus, Indonesian political parties tended not to put forward issues regarding the Middle East during their campaigns. PKS was perhaps the only party that actively pays attention to these issues, in particular those related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The decision that PKS made to consistently fight for Palestinian independence had been translated to an electoral success – the party expanded its voting base by capturing the support of *santri* – orthodox Muslims – as well as urban Muslims.

The seriousness of PKS in disseminating the issue of Palestine is epitomized by the inclusion of this issue in the training process of new cadres. The issue of Palestine is presented as one of the topics during *proses kaderisasi* – internal regeneration process – and *liqa* – regular meetings among cadres<sup>9</sup>. According to PKS Communication and Information Officer, Mardani Ali, the party considers the issue of Palestine as a problem

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7 R. Willian Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Leadership, Party, and Religion: Explaining Voting Behavior in Indonesia," *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 40(7), pp. 832-857.

8 See Indikator Politik Indonesia, "Laporan Efek Kampanye versus Efek Jokowi: Elektabilitas Partai Jelang Pemilu Legislatif 2014," [http://indikator.co.id/data\\_analisa/details/1/23/Laporan-Efek-Kampanye-Versus-Efek-Jokowi-Elektabilitas-Partai-Partai-Jelang-Pemilu-Legislatif-2014](http://indikator.co.id/data_analisa/details/1/23/Laporan-Efek-Kampanye-Versus-Efek-Jokowi-Elektabilitas-Partai-Partai-Jelang-Pemilu-Legislatif-2014)

9 Interview with PKS Communication and Information Officer, Mardani Ali, 25 November 2014.

concerning the Muslim *ummah* and as a humanitarian issue<sup>10</sup>. According to Mardani, all levels of party management – both executive and legislative; from the central board to the village level – run a variety of programs to support Palestinian people. At the end of 2008, PKS managed to raise one billion rupiahs in donation through a program called ‘One Man, One Dollar to Save Palestine’<sup>11</sup>.

Since its establishment, PKS has been the only party that regularly conducts peaceful protests in support of Palestine. PKS has also made the issue of Palestine as one of ten main agendas of the party<sup>12</sup>. When the party officials signed a memorandum of understanding supporting SBY-Jusuf Kalla in the 2004 presidential election, the party requested Yudhoyono to provide support for Palestinian independence and not to establish diplomatic relations with Israel<sup>13</sup>. PKS kept this stance when the party threw its official support behind SBY-Boediono in the 2009 election – support for Palestinian independence remained as one of the conditions of coalition<sup>14</sup>. In addition to humanitarian reasons, the party’s support for Palestine is also shaped by several other factors, including theological and ideological reasons<sup>15</sup>. Jerusalem is the third holiest city in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is located in this city, is the first *qibla* – direction – that earliest Muslims faced for prayer before it was relocated to the Kaaba in Mecca. There is an ideological similarity between that of PKS and that of Hamas and the ideologies of both groups are largely inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. However, in recent years, PKS has become more moderate and more open.

As for Yudhoyono, the commitment for peace in Palestine had been translated to electoral success, especially in gaining the support of Muslim voters who were concerned about the issue of Palestine and in gaining the support of PKS. Once elected, Yudhoyono benefited from good and harmonious relations with Islamic organization as well as from the commitment of PKS to support his Yudhoyono’s leadership. Consequently, his administration and his foreign policy didn’t see much opposition from Islamic organizations.

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10 Ibid.

11 “PKS Kumpulkan Rp 1 Miliar untuk Palestina,” *Viva News*, 31 December 2008, [http://nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/18725pks\\_kumpulkan\\_rp\\_1\\_miliar\\_untuk\\_palestina](http://nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/18725pks_kumpulkan_rp_1_miliar_untuk_palestina).

12 Interview with PKS Communication and Information Officer, Mardani Ali, 25 November 2014.

13 “PKS Dukung SBY-Kalla dengan Syarat, Jangan Kerjasama dengan Israel,” *Pelita*, 26 August 2004, <http://www.pelita.or.id/baca.php?id=26156>.

14 “PKS Mau Kontrak SBY Soal Palestina,” *inilah.com*, 23 March 2009.

15 See Arya Fernandes, “Partai Keadilan Sejahtera dan Masa Depan Palestina,” *Koran Tempo*, 20 July 2006.

## Some Examples of Indonesia's Official Statement

The wave of democratization swept the Middle East and altered the political constellation of the region. Currently, some countries in the Middle East are facing a democratic transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes. This wave of political change, according to Olivier Roy<sup>16</sup>, is marked by the entry of a new generation of politicians who are younger than thirty. 'The new Islamists', as Roy refers to them, are generally well-educated, fluent in foreign languages, and better connected to the outside world compared to the previous generation<sup>17</sup>. The emergence of this new generation could be tied to the victory of Islamist Ennahda Party in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the Justice and Development Party in Morocco. Despite these major victories, the Islamist parties have been unable to gain the majority of votes. For example, Ennahda in Tunisia only won 89 (41%) out of 217 seats in the elections in October 2011; the Justice and Development Party of Morocco only won 107 (27%) out of 395 seats; and the Muslim Brotherhood only secured 36.6% of the popular votes in Egypt<sup>18</sup>. This has affected the domestic political constellations in such countries and forced some parties to build a coalition with other political groups. In Palestine, this dynamic resulted in a political deadlock.

The Arab Spring left behind serious problems in several Middle Eastern countries. In Egypt for example, the military retook control of the government after a coup that overthrew Morsi<sup>19</sup>. The fall of Morsi triggered a conflict and violence between supporters of Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood and those opposing him, backed by the military under the leadership of General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. After this successful military intervention, Al-Sisi won the election by securing 96.1% of the votes, even though the participation rate was only 47.5%<sup>20</sup>. The election which was held in early June was boycotted by the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>21</sup>.

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16 Olivier Roy, "The New Islamists," in Marc Lynch (ed.), *Islamists in a Changing Middle East* (Washington: The FP Group, 2012).

17 Ibid, p. 11.

18 See Khalil al-Anani, "The Illusive Rise of Islamists," in Lynch (ed.), *Islamists in a Changing Middle East*, p. 13.

19 "Egypt's army ousts Morsi, who calls it a 'coup'," *CBS News*, 3 July 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/egypts-army-ousts-morsi-who-calls-it-a-coup/>

20 "Abdel Fatah al-Sisi won 96.1% of vote in Egypt presidential election, say officials," *The Guardian*, 3 July 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/abdel-fatah-al-sisi-presidential-election-vote-egypt>.

21 "Muslim Brotherhood official: We will boycott the elections of pirates usurping power," *The Middle East Monitor*, 15 May 2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/africa/11498-muslim-brotherhood-official-we-will-boycott-the-elections-of-pirates-usurping-power>.

In response to the Arab Spring, Indonesia under Yudhoyono's leadership chose to remain neutral and passive in its relations with several countries in the Middle East. Facing the escalation of violence in Egypt for example, Yudhoyono opted to only urge Egyptian leaders to solve the problems in their countries wisely and appropriately by preventing unnecessary casualties and avoiding violence<sup>22</sup>.

Upon reading Yudhoyono's speeches and observing Yudhoyono's foreign policy in the Middle East, one can conclude that the president's main attention is given to the peace process in Palestine. In international forums – such as the UN, OIC, or NAM – Yudhoyono's priority of safeguarding peace in Palestine was fairly consistent. Meanwhile, Indonesia's attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian peace process hadn't changed since the Asian-African Conference of 1955 until the end of ten year-long Yudhoyono administration. Indonesia consistently supported the independence and the full sovereignty of Palestine, and backed the two-state solution. Indonesia also played a role in the campaign for the full admission of Palestine as a member state of the United Nations. In realizing this agenda, Yudhoyono, along with leaders of countries in Asia and Africa, pushed the issue of Palestine to become one of the main agendas of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership<sup>23</sup>. Together with nineteen other countries, Indonesia conducted five major capacity building programs in the fields of social development, governance, economy, infrastructure, and finance<sup>24</sup>.

In the press conference during the visit of US President, Barack Obama, to Indonesia, Yudhoyono reiterated Indonesia's position supporting the permanent resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the concept of two-state solution<sup>25</sup>. In addition to encouraging a peaceful solution between the two countries, Indonesia also supported the processes of institutional strengthening and quality improvement of Palestinian diplomats. Indonesian government pursued this goal through a program called 'Diplomatic Training for Palestinian Diplomats' organized by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In international forums,

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22 Indonesian Presidential Press Release on the Perspective of Indonesian Government regarding the Egyptian Political Crisis, 7 February 2011.

23 Foreword by the President of the Republic of Indonesia at Opening Ceremony of the NAASP Ministerial Meeting on Capacity Building for Palestine, 14 July 2008.

24 Statement of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia at the 37th OIC Ministerial Meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 20 May 2010.

25 Indonesian Presidential Press Release at the State Visit of the President of the United States on 9 November 2010 at Istana Merdeka, Jakarta.



Indonesia's attitude remained unchanged. Indonesia was quite outspoken against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In a speech delivered at the 13th Meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission, the Indonesian delegation, Dian Triansyah Djani, condemned the Israeli policy which included a plan to build new settlements in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and highlighted the deteriorating human rights situation in the Gaza Strip<sup>26</sup>.

The complexity of the issue of Palestine required Indonesia to come up with a peacemaking scheme that was both clear and measurable. Domestically, the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah emerged after the victory of the former in the legislative election<sup>27</sup>. In the January 2006 legislative election, Hamas managed to win 76 (57%) of the 132 seats in the parliament. Fatah only won 43 seats, while the rest were taken up by the nationalists, the leftists, and the independents<sup>28</sup>. The diverging views of Hamas and Fatah regarding the method of peace negotiations with Israel had led to a prolonged period of hostility between the two factions. Before they agreed to form a coalition government, Hamas and Fatah agreed to end armed conflicts between themselves. Mediated by the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz, the two factions reached a peace accord in Mecca. However, this did not last long. The differences in political ideology between the two are another factor that sustained the conflict between Hamas and Fatah<sup>29</sup>.

After more than eight years of enmity, Hamas and Fatah finally agreed to reconcile and formed a cabinet together. This cabinet was sworn on June 2, 2014, and for the first time since 2007, the two parties would govern the Gaza Strip (formerly controlled by Hamas) and the West Bank (formerly controlled by Fatah) together<sup>30</sup>. Based on this negotiation, the coalition government between Hamas and Fatah would be led by Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, a moderate and a Ph.D graduate from the University of Lancaster. Some of the ministers in the new cabinet have technocratic

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26 "RI condemns Israel's 'provocative' plan for more settlements," *The Jakarta Post*, 24 March 2010.

27 The establishment of Hamas was made possible by the Intifada movement, which was aimed to protect the Gaza Strip and the West Bank from Israeli military aggression in 1987. Ideologically, Hamas is similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Islamism is part of Hamas' ideology and Hamas has been known to launch limited military attacks against Israel. In contrast, Fatah is a nationalist party which is more accommodating to Israel and known to prioritize the use of diplomacy in resolving the conflict. The rivalry between the two emerged because of the dominance of Fatah within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

28 "Hamas Sweeps Palestinian Elections, Complicating Peace Efforts in Mideast," *Washington Post*, 27 January 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/26/AR2006012600372.html>

29 See Arya Fernandes, "Era baru politik Palestina pascadeklarasi Mekkah," *Bisnis Indonesia*, 13 February 2007.

30 "Palestinian unity government of Fatah and Hamas sworn in," *The Guardian*, 2 June 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/02/palestinian-unity-government-sworn-in-fatah-hamas>.

backgrounds<sup>31</sup>. The rivalry between Hamas and Fatah, however, remains as a challenge for Indonesia to forge an Israeli-Palestinian peace.

## International Reputation

Yudhoyono's diplomacy in the Middle East provided political incentives for both Indonesia and the president himself. On the international stage, Indonesia benefited from its strategic position within the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and from its role as a bridge between the West and the Muslim world. For example, Indonesia deemed discussions on the inequality of representation between regions and between the developed and the developing worlds as some necessary topics to be addressed in order to reform the UN Security Council. Indonesia also considered the concept of major world constituencies as essential. Therefore, Indonesia recommended the use of an intermediate approach with a review mechanism to increase the membership of the UNSC. Indonesia also encouraged a review of the veto system, because it no longer reflected the reality of changes within the international system – both in terms of representativeness and also substantiality<sup>32</sup>. Among the issues that are getting serious international attention is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Indonesia's active involvement in this issue could provide the country some bargaining power on the world stage.

Indonesia's commitment to a peaceful solution in the Middle East, especially in Palestine, would also create a positive image of Indonesia in the eyes of the international community, especially within the Arab/Muslim world. This decision could also be considered strategic given the relatively weak support among Arab countries for Palestinians. The 'silent attitude' of these Arab countries in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict provided Indonesia an opportunity to play a more active role in promoting the two-state solution – Palestine and Israel as two separate independent states coexisting with each other. The ambiguous attitude of the Arab world toward Palestine could be explained by two factors: the dilemma facing Arab countries in their relations with the United States and the prospect of Palestinian intellectualism emerging as a new force in

31 "Palestinians form new unity government that includes Hamas," *Washington Post*, 2 June 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/palestinians-form-new-unity-government-including-hamas/2014/06/02/c681d5c6-ea46-11e3-9f5c-9075d5508f0a\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/palestinians-form-new-unity-government-including-hamas/2014/06/02/c681d5c6-ea46-11e3-9f5c-9075d5508f0a_story.html)

32 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Indonesia dan Reformasi Dewan Keamanan PBB," 4 Februari 2014, <http://www.kemlu.go.id/Pages/IIssueDisplay.aspx?IDP=13&l=id>.

the Middle East if Palestine were to become independent<sup>33</sup>.

In order to be taken seriously by the world, Indonesia should act as a peace mediator between Israel and Palestine. If Indonesia is serious, it's possible that two parties will welcome and accept Indonesia's role. For Palestine, Indonesia's position could be seen as a continuation of the moral support Indonesia conveyed in the 1955 Asian-African Conference and as an extension of Indonesia's role as the largest Muslim-majority nation in the world. For Israel, the prospect of trade with Indonesia could be seen as promising. However, based on the reality thus far, Indonesia hasn't been confident enough to take the initiative in leading the peace process in the Middle East, especially in Palestine. Instead, Indonesia, under the leadership of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirajuda, rendered Egypt as the key player in the peace process, as exemplified by results of the Ministerial Meeting at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in 2009<sup>34</sup>.

Indonesia's initiative to mediate peace is also important because for a long time the peace negotiations initiated by the U.S have not shown considerable progress. The U.S. initiated the Annapolis Conference which was held in Annapolis, Maryland on November 27, 2007. This conference was attended by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel, President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine, members of the Arab League, members of the G8, members of the UN Security Council, the Quartet on the Middle East, representatives of the European Commission, the international community, and some Asian countries including Indonesia, India, Malaysia, among others<sup>35</sup>. President Bush of the U.S. hoped that this conference would facilitate a negotiation to end the forty years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following the Annapolis Conference, there was no significant change in regards to the peace process. In fact, Israel recently built new settlements in Bethlehem and the truce only lasted for a few days.

Indonesia's moderate Islam and its successful democratic transition are diplomatic assets that are not possessed by most Arab-Islamic nations. These assets will solidify Indonesia's strategic position in the eyes of Middle Eastern countries that are going through a democratic transition and facing the rise of Islamic conservatism. Indonesia's experience in

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33 See Riza Sihbudi, *Menyandera Timur Tengah: Kebijakan AS dan Israel atas Negara-negara Muslim* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007)

34 Statement by H.E. Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, Minister for Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia At the Preparatory Ministerial Meeting of The 15th Summit of Heads of State and Government of The Non-aligned Movement, Egypt, 13-14 July 2009

35 Press Statement, U.S Department of State, Announcement of Annapolis Conference, 20 November 2007.

promoting interfaith dialogue can also be utilized as a diplomatic tool for Indonesia when dealing with tensions in the Middle East. Interfaith dialogue has been long initiated by Indonesia. In early 2004, Indonesia established cooperation with Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines to establish the Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation. In the first meeting in Yogyakarta on 6-7 December, 2004, participants of this dialogue came to an agreement to promote dialogue and harmony between people from different religious backgrounds<sup>36</sup>. Indonesia also managed to encourage civil society groups to conduct interfaith dialogues, such as the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS) and the World Peace Forum, which were initiated by the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah respectively.

## Conclusion

In general, the position of Indonesia within the roadmap for peace in the Middle East has not been highly regarded internationally. Traditionally, the U.S. still acts as the main mediator of the peace process in the region. However, as a Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia's international appeal derives from its success in managing transition to democracy, the friendly and tolerant form of moderate Islam practiced by the majority of Indonesian Muslims, and the active participation of civil society in the efforts of democratic consolidation.

Throughout the ten years of his presidency, Yudhoyono's feat in building up a positive image in the international arena deserves to be celebrated. Yudhoyono's success in escorting democratic consolidation at home, his rhetorical skills, as well as his political visions are the sources of his international appeal. In formulating policy in the Middle East, Yudhoyono tended to be normative and often avoided statements that could potentially disrupt diplomatic relations with countries in the Middle East. Compared to many Middle Eastern leaders, Yudhoyono was more audacious in expressing unequivocal statements underpinning the peace process between Palestine and Israel. Even though Yudhoyono's support for Palestinian independence was resounding and unwavering, Indonesia under his leadership had not been able to play the role of mediator. Moreover, Indonesian diplomacy had not yet managed to engage various key actors in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

36 Statement from the Dialog on Interfaith Cooperation, Yogyakarta, 6-7 December 2004.

In order to carve a key role for itself as an Israeli-Palestinian peace mediator, Indonesia should immediately formulate a blueprint for Palestinian conflict resolution, which includes details to be operationalized inside and outside of Palestine. In regards to Palestinian internal affairs, Indonesia will need to formulate how a power sharing solution between Hamas and Fatah is expected to work, support institutional strengthening in Palestine, help design a fair and transparent election, and assist the transitional government. In regards to external relations with Israel for instance, Indonesia will need to help address the issues of national boundaries and new Israeli settlement construction in Jerusalem. Determining national boundaries between Palestine and Israel will be a challenging task – Indonesia's preference to set national boundaries based on the 1967 borders and to make East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine is likely to face some opposition from Israel.

In this blueprint for peace, Indonesia needs to identify key actors who influence Israeli-Palestinian peace process. So far, Indonesia has not been able to engage key actors in forging peace, especially Israel. Throughout the presidency of Yudhoyono, Indonesia was very cautious not to take a stand against Israel. Indonesia did not even dare establish communication with Israel out of the fear that it would draw considerable domestic opposition. Moving forward, Indonesia should reconsider communicating with Israel in order to forge peace in Palestine. To prevent polemics at home, the government must be able to explain that this posture is an attempt to resolve the Palestinian problem by engaging Israel as a main actor in this conflict.

*\* Translated from the Indonesian language by Haekal Eki Ramadhan and Alex Brouse.*