

# **Indonesian progressive Muslims and the discourse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace: Soekarno's, Abdurrahman Wahid's and Ahmad Syafii Maarif's thoughts**

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## **Abstract**

Indonesia, as one of the largest majority Muslim countries, has had a consistent stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict since its inception. Despite the general pro-Palestinian stance, this article explores the discourse of three significant leaders of the Indonesian people - Soekarno, Abdurrahman Wahid and Ahmad Syafii Maarif. As presidents of Indonesia of different time periods of Indonesia, Soekarno and Wahid tended to be pragmatic in their articulation of their political stances, though it is articulated in different ways. Maarif, as the leader of Muhammadiyah, a popular non-governmental organisation on the ground, was more idealistic and concerned with anti-Zionism. This article highlights that the different nuances of the three leaders is due to their different capacities

as leaders, their social and political contexts, and the intellectual leanings and experiences.

**Keywords:** *Israel-Palestine conflict, Soekarno, Abdurrahman Wahid, Ahmad Syafii Maarif.*

## **Introduction**

The crisis in Israel-Palestine has proven to be one of the great moral challenges of our time. The foundations to establish the state of Israel, which occurred in 1948, has been occurring for over a hundred years. In November 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, announcing its intention to facilitate the “establishment in Palestine of a national home of the Jewish people.” (Shlaim, 2010). Till today, there has not been a single agreement that will be able to guarantee permanent peace on both sides, in spite of the number of reconciliation efforts that have been undertaken with various international support (Maoz, Ward, Katz & Ross, 2002). The clash of ideologies and political stances primarily count for the escalations of the conflict (Frisch & Sandler, 2004), although some analysts argue that there are many factors that lead to it (Falah, 2005). In other words, conservative parties from both sides persistently insist to struggle for their own “ideological” ambitions.

However, there are always efforts towards resolution. Where worse conflicts have emerged, they have been always followed by efforts of rebuilding, reconciliation and repatriation. It is exactly what Erich Fromm mentions in his deep critical reflection, “The more insane and dehumanized this world of ours seems to become, the more may an individual feel the need of being together and of working together with men and women who share one’s human concerns.” (Fromm, 2009). Despite the absence of perfect peace between Israel and Palestine, reverberations of peoples of both nations have been sounded loudly beyond the elites’ ideological decrees of either the Likud Party or Hamas (Rabinovich, 2004).

Their aspirations have moved many intellectuals across the world, including prominent Indonesian Muslim intellectuals such as Soekarno (1901-1970), Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) and Ahmad Syafii Maarif (1935-). While Soekarno is well-known as the first President of Indonesia, he is also a Muslim intellectual and an activist of Muhammadiyah. Both Wahid and Maarif are former chairmen of Nahdlatul ‘Ulama and Muhammadiyah respectively.

Sociologically, the views of these Muslim thinkers do not represent the general views of the two largest Muslim organisations in Indonesia, but the intellectual articulations of these personages are significant as they are recognised publicly as the supporters of tolerance, pluralism, democracy and peace.

This article examines Soekarno's, Wahid's and Maarif's intellectual stances on the discourse of Israeli-Palestinian peace. This article argues that amongst the three leaders, there has been a consistent position of supporting Palestine, however, with different nuances. Soekarno's stance was entirely pro-Palestinian and this position is held by majority of the people till today. However, in the early Reformation period in 1999, it strategically turned to attempt to recognise Israel as a sovereign state. Their stances have to be analysed in light of the realities of their ideologies, social and political contexts, and their intellectual background and experience. This article will cover the Pro-Palestinian expression in Soekarno's era, Wahid's realist political project and Maarif's utopian thought, and also the discussion on the rationales of their different thoughts.

### **Pro-Palestinian Expression in Soekarno's Era**

Soekarno's pro-Palestinian expression frames the general position of Indonesian Muslims with regards to the discourse of Israeli-Palestinian peace. His pro-Palestinian expression also lays the foundation of Wahid's and Maarif's thoughts. Soekarno's discourse is defined by his condemnation of any kind of imperialism, colonialism and dehumanising oppression that was imposed by Israel on Palestinians. This position is consistent with the consequent Indonesian administrations and strongly influenced Indonesia foreign policy towards Israel and Palestine. The differences between Soekarno's and other Indonesian administrations' attitudes were due to different ideologies and contexts and these differences resulted in different political behaviour. Thus, this primary position of being pro-Palestinian had constituted public opinions and in turn, have become an inseparable part of Indonesian perspective (Lukens-Bull & Woodward, 2011).

There were two main aspects to Soekarno's position: the first was his ideological emphasis on nationalism alongside anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism and secondly, he stressed the call for pan-Islamic solidarity to save the third holiest place of Islam (Sihbudi, 1997).

With regards to the first point on ideological emphasis on anti-colonialism, Soekarno opined that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land was an example

of colonialism and imperialism. Israel was seen as an extension of the Western imperialism particularly in the Middle East (Barton & Rubenstein, 2005). This argument had been influenced by his leftist-inclinations that detested the Western exploitative socio-politico-cultural system of oppression that often affected other Third World countries (Dowty, 2005).

During his presidency, Soekarno refused to develop formal diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Israel due to Israel's treatment of Palestinians and Soekarno's opposition to occupation and colonialism. In 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia had a photo exhibition on Palestine in partnership with the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), Jakarta. Soekarno was quoted to have said "As long as the independence of the Palestinian Nation has not been handed over to the people of Palestine, Indonesia will always stand against Israeli colonisation/occupation (*penjajahan*)." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2014).<sup>1</sup> Such a stance is consistent with the country's founding constitution, *Undang-Undang 1945* (UUD'45). Its preamble states "whereas independence is the inalienable right of all nations, therefore all colonialism/occupation (*penjajahan*) must be abolished in this world as it is not in conformity with humanity and justice." (Republic of Indonesia, 1945).<sup>2</sup>

During his reign, Palestinian issues were also raised at the Asian-African Conference (KAA), which was held in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. During this event, which was conducted under the umbrella of anti-colonial spirit, Palestine was invited and Israeli participation was left out (Grovogu, 2011). This conference also resulted in the resolution proclaiming the support of the Palestinian rights of self-determination and sovereignty, which triggered protests from Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharred (Oded, 2010). The Bandung conference inspired the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, which echoed Indonesian support for Palestine at the first 1961 summit. In 1962, Indonesian continued to reject Israel in the Fourth Asian Games in Jakarta, due to its support for Palestine and Arabs, as well as a response of internal dynamics that were escalated by Muslims (Yegar, 2006).

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1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. *President Soekarno, 1962*, Jakarta, Indonesia, November 2014. Translated from: "Selama kemerdekaan bangsa Palestina belum diserahkan kepada orang-orang Palestina, maka selama itulah bangsa Indonesia berdiri menantang *penjajahan* Israel."

2 *Indonesia Constitution*. Amend. IV, preamble. Direct quote: "Bahwa sesungguhnya kemerdekaan itu ialah hak segala bangsa dan oleh sebab itu, maka *penjajahan* diatas dunia harus dihapuskan karena tidak sesuai dengan perikemanusiaan dan perikeadilan"

Secondly, Soekarno stressed the call for pan-Islamic solidarity to save the third holiest place of Islam (Sihbudi, 1997). While Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria, utilised the rhetoric Pan-Arabism in supporting Palestine, countries like Indonesia leveraged on the Muslim identity to further build solidarity.

Soekarno, as the most important key figure of Indonesia, was supported entirely by two dominant parties, namely the Nationalist Party of Indonesia and Islamist Party (Masyumi). Both political parties had different but complementary discourses on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While the former expressed its devoutness to support the principles of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism of the Indonesian constitution, the latter called for Muslim solidarity in support of the creation, protection and fulfilment of peace and humanity (Weinstein, 1971).

These arguments have to be understood in light of Soekarno's context, which was during the independence of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, after three and half centuries of living under the iron grip of the Dutch colonisation. At that time, Indonesia wanted its freedom and independence to be recognised globally. In 1947, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon recognised Indonesia's sovereignty and was soon followed by Yemen in 1949. The Dutch eventually recognised Indonesian independence too (Hassan, 1980). In another case in the 60s, Arab countries also supported Indonesia to secure the West Papua from the Dutch (Muttaqien, 2013). As Arab countries supported the struggles for Indonesian liberation, based on a mutual reciprocal relationship, Indonesia reinforced its position to support them, especially for the Palestinian independence.

Shortly after Dutch recognition of the Indonesian sovereignty, the Israel President Chaim Weizmann and the Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion congratulated President Soekarno and the Vice President Mohammad Hatta. As a new independent state, it welcomed the recognition, however, it did not return the sentiment to recognise Israel as an independent state. The political situation worsened as Indonesia overtly rejected Israeli proposal to develop a diplomatic relationship in 1953 (Muttaqien, 2013).

In general, Soekarno's political behaviour was neither to urge for conflict resolution nor build peace between Israelis and Palestinians. He unilaterally supported Palestine in the name of humanity, anti-imperialism and Islamic solidarity.

## Wahid's Realist Political Project

Abdurrahman Wahid was the former leader of Nahdatul 'Ulama, the largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia and also, the former President of the Republic of Indonesia in the Reformation era. He was not only a supporter for the Palestinian right to self-determination, but he also acted as a vanguard for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Similar to Soekarno, he empathised with the Palestinian cause but there were significant differences in his discourse. His stance on the issue was based on rhetoric of peace, humanity, religious-tolerance and pluralism. His realist political project was developed by his intellectual background, which resulted in his support for Israeli-Palestinian peace, where both independent-sovereign states should be recognised. In support for the two-state solution, he proposed to build Indonesia-Israel's bilateral relationship, although this was protested and rejected by many Indonesian Muslims.

There were three factors that explain Wahid's differences in rhetoric from Soekarno. Firstly, he made several visits to both Palestine and Israel and this strengthened his intention to support peace of both countries. Secondly, he believed that ideological condemnations to Israel *per se* would not amount to a solution. The third, in dealing with his project, however, he should also consider political dynamics in Indonesia that were quite difficult to convince Muslims those who were blinded by their conservative Islamic lens.

The turning point in Wahid's rhetoric was the 1993 Oslo Agreement, which Wahid ardently supported. As a Muslim leader, Wahid argued that the recognition of the Israeli state will lead to more permanent peace in the region as opposed to continuing the condemnation of the brutality of Israel. Yet, this shift was protested by Muhammadiyah, the Indonesian Committee for the Liberation of Palestine (ICLP) and other right-wing Muslims (Perwita, 2007).

In October 1994, Wahid, together with Bondan Gunawan (Democracy Forum-Fordem), Djohan Effendi (Department of Religious Affairs), and Habib Chirzin (Muhammadiyah) visited Jerusalem to attend the Seminar on Islam and Judaism, that was organised by the Truman Institute. At that time, they were also invited by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to attend in the Israel-Jordan Peace Accord (Yegar, 2006). After Wahid returned to Indonesia, he lobbied for diplomatic relations with Israel. He also believed that it would benefit Indonesia, enhancing its international image. He stated that "it is the right time for us to open diplomatic relations with Israel. Then, we would be able to play more important roles in supporting Palestinians." (Sihbudi, 2007). Shortly after

this statement, Indonesian Ulama' Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) and the leader of Muhammadiyah, Amien Rais protested his statement and his visit to Israel (Yegar, 2006). In addition, there were protests by Ulama' circles of NU and the NU legislative council (Rois Am). KH Moch Ilyas Ruhiyat stated that Wahid's visit does not represent NU but his personal views (Perwita, 2007).

Nevertheless, Wahid persisted in his stance. In 1995, he stated, once again, his view that Indonesia needed to have diplomatic relations with Israel in an academic conference in Bali (Yegar, 2006). According to Barton, he visited Israel three times with the mission of peace (2002). When he became the Indonesian President in 1999, he emphasis diplomatic relations with Israel as an important part of Indonesian foreign policy (Barton & Rubenstein, 2005). When he realised that establishing diplomatic relations with Israel led to significant internal resistances, he stated that Indonesia would only open economic relations with Israel. In an international business meeting that was held in Bali in October 1999, Alwi Shihab, the Foreign Minister during Wahid's reign, said that it is important for Indonesia to build trade relations with Israel as it would help to restore Indonesian economy after the monetary crisis of 1997-1998 as well as build Indonesia's influence in the Middle East peace process. He adds that Indonesia would not open diplomatic relations with Israel until there is a solution with Palestine (Jakarta Post, 1999a). Shihab was also aware of the need to retain good relations with the United States. He argued that the Jewish lobby in the United States Congress is very powerful (Gee, 2000a). Indeed, this led to protests, mainly from Muslims, that accused Wahid as pro-Zionist rather than pro-Palestinian (The Jakarta Post, 1999b). A leader of Muslim Brotherhood branch in Indonesia (The Justice Party/PK), Hidayat Nur Wahid complained that "We hope the minister will not open economic ties with Israel. Israel is colonising the Palestinian state. Indonesia must take a firm and serious stand. If he cannot resist the pressure from the Zionists and their ally, the United States, he would better resign." (Antara, 1999). Even MUI condemned Wahid and said that he "sold out his brothers in Palestine." (Solomon, 1999). However, in legitimating his project, Wahid argued that "in their [China and former Soviet Union] constitutions, both of them clearly oppose God. Meanwhile, Israel has never opposed God, so why should we make such a fuss about them? We must be more mature." (Sukma, 2003). It is worth noting that Wahid responded to opposition to his foreign policy with rhetoric of theology as opposed to using the language of occupation and freedom. Wahid's vision was postponed due to the government properly considering the aspiration of the people (Gee, 2000:

29).

Overall, what was Wahid's actual vision? In December 2003, he published his writing "The Meaning of a Visit" (*Arti Sebuah Kunjungan*) in a national newspaper, *Duta Masyarakat*. This writing represents one of the most important pieces on his thought, as compared to other of his writings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This piece was his experience and reflections after visiting Gaza, Palestine. During his trip, he met both Palestinians and Israelis. He advised Palestinian leaders in Gaza to not let go of an opportunity to reach a health compromise. There should be a feeling of mutual trust between Israeli and Palestinian leaders which has never been seen before. When in Gaza, Wahid stated that the local populations had to fight two things at once: the first, the independence for the establishment of a Palestinian State and justice for all its people. He added that Gaza should not only resist physically but resist occupying forces culturally. He hoped for Palestinians to have a strong and united leadership front that possess the capability to negotiate with Israel as well as fight for justice and independence. At the same time, he stated that the Israelis must also be willing to negotiate and let go of the idea of "Greater Israel" (*Eretz Yisrael*). The Israelis should want to achieve peace with the Palestinians, not only safeguarding their state but achieving a higher level of prosperity for all. In summary, Wahid wanted a comprehensive peace agreement on both parties (Wahid, 2003).

Indeed, "peace" was not only difficult but also almost impossible. He properly considered that it could never happen unless Israeli and Palestinian leaders had committed to trust each other. It proved to be difficult as Ariel Sharon became increasingly hard-line in responding to "Palestinian terror" and Yasser Arafat was too weak to take risks of political negotiations (Wahid, 2007). On top of the internal dynamic, the Israel-Palestinian peace faced challenges due to regional and international factors, such as the political interests of American and European powers and the political dynamics of Arab regions (Hudson, 2016). Thus, with all these considerations in mind, Wahid believed that the act of ideological condemnation that was demonstrated by Indonesian Muslims to Israel was never productive. Not only did it not amount to anything, it would estrange more possible efforts of building peace (Pappé, 2010). In addition, it prevented Indonesia from benefitting economically and politically from Israel and America.

Therefore, Wahid's realist political stance was that he sought to open up diplomatic relations with Israel as he saw it best to recognise both the Palestinian



and Israeli state. However, it led to protests from Muslim groups in Indonesia. While he modified his stance to only open up economic relations with Israel, his accommodating stance invoked protests by many Muslim groups. Due to this, he postponed his political project.

## **Maarif's Utopian Thought**

Ahmad Syafii Maarif is the former leader of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia. He is also a professor of the history of Islam and civilisation. He was one of the brightest students of the Muslim reformer, Fazlur Rahman, when he had been studying in the University of Chicago. In dealing with the discourse of peace between Israeli and Palestinian, his thought tends to be utopian. He offers a utopian solution while underestimating realist perspectives that emphasises current political calculations and any possibility to deal with them. Just like Soekarno and Abdurrahman Wahid, Maarif also claims to be pro-Palestinian. However, how he differs from Wahid is that he believes that it is impossible to achieve permanent peace in Israel and Palestine with the two-state solution. He examines the efforts in history to work towards the two-state solution but he concludes that efforts towards peace are always betrayed by both sides due to many factors (Maarif, 2012). He offers a thesis that the only way to ensure the real peace is through a one-state solution, reinstating a united Palestine as a state (Maarif, 2012).

There are several arguments that constituted Maarif's thesis: the first, ideologically he condemns Zionism and its racist-imperialistic attitudes and behaviour; the second, the conflict has led to a serious human crisis, mainly in the side of Palestinian. The injustices against Palestinians are not only the responsibility of Arabs, Muslims, Islam and Palestinians, but also Jews. The third, demographically, the growth of Palestinian population cannot be repressed and accordingly, it will grow naturally alongside the Israeli population. The fourth, international great powers and other Middle Eastern countries use this conflict for their own interests and gains and are therefore, always interfering. Maarif believes that foreign intervention or influence should stop or it will lead to other conflicts.

The first aspect of Maarif's discourse is his resistance to Zionism, which he derived from the radical thought of a Jewish intellectual, political activist, musician, Gilad Atzmon (1963-). Atzmon believed that Zionism as an ideology was inhuman, imperialist and racist. As a former Israeli soldier,

he directly witnessed the injustice and daily oppression of the Israelis towards the Palestinians. Although his grandfather was a commander of Irgun, who ideologically supported the revisionist idea of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Atzmon's critical consciousness brought him to realise that Zionists will never be the owners of *Eretz Yisrael* if they continue to steal Palestinian land from Palestinians (Maarif, 2012). In a conversation with Atzmon, Maarif asked, "Is there any possibility for Zionism to be an ideology that is humanist and respects values of universal humanism?" Atzmon answered, "Never". (Maarif, 2012).

Secondly, Maarif argues that the Israel-Palestine conflict should not be considered political per se. Obviously, this conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis. There are victims from both sides, but mainly Palestinians. While Israelis are worrying about "Palestinian terror", Palestinians are suffering from "Israeli oppression". With this, Maarif believes that this conflict should be the responsibility of all human beings, all religions and all nations. Maarif emphasised that "this conflict is not only a concern for the two different ethnicities, the Arabs or Muslims. Its solution is a responsibility for not only Palestinians, Arabs or Muslims, but also Jews." (Muhammad, 2012). Such sentiments are consistent and always expressed in his works. Shortly after President Trump announcement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, he published an article in *Republika* (2017), a well-known newspaper in Indonesia, entitled "Palestine, Your Fate!" (*Palestina, Nasibmu!*). He states that "[...] Palestinians have always been suffering [...] Donald Trump, the President of America, with the recent declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has disrupted any hopes of peace between Palestine and Israel. [...] But, people cannot lose hope as in the midst of the darkness of men's greed for power, there are others who still care, for the world to seek and ask." (Maarif, 2017).

Thirdly, Maarif argues that peace between Israel and Palestine is possible but it needs two requirements: (i) Israel should give back lands that were seized in the 1967 war and (ii) neighbouring Arab countries should guarantee Israeli sovereignty and security. However, recently, he shifted his position slightly. Perhaps due to Atzmon's influence, he came to believe that Zionists will never recognise Palestinian autonomy. Zionists, in both Atzmon's and Maarif's eyes, will never recognise Palestinian rights and therefore, they should leave from the land that they stole. His reason is that, demographically, the population of Palestinian is growing rapidly, which means that if unhindered, Palestinians can reclaim their land step by step (Maarif, 2014). He believes that this demographic factor will add to the physical and cultural reclamation of Palestine, although

more revolutionary ways are needed to dismantle settler-colonialism. As a historian, he stands by the theory of cyclical evolution of civilisations, where one great power will fall and be replaced by another through longer-term socio-cultural processes (Maarif, 1996).

Lastly, Maarif argues that international great powers and Middle Eastern countries are constantly using the Israel-Palestinian conflict to legitimise their own domestic power. Their interference and influence is often not about peace between the two peoples but of pragmatic concerns such as alliances, resources and security. Maarif states that Arab countries, and even Iran and Turkey, have never been really serious about standing up for the oppressed Palestinians (Maarif, 2017). These countries have made deals with the US, Israel or other pro-Israeli great powers, usually in the name of political stability and economic development. However, in other instances such as at the Islamic Organisation Cooperation (IOC), these countries like to stress that they hold pro-Palestinian positions. Furthermore, Maarif adds that “IOC is not determiner of the Palestinian future due to its members are not quite solid in supporting the liberation of Palestinian... They are competing each other... Look, Saudi Arabia says that, find another place for the capital of Palestine.” (Maarif, 2017). It cannot be doubted that the Middle East today is fraught with conflict: Saudi Arabia *vis-à-vis* Iran; Qatar *vis-à-vis* Saudi Arabia and other Gulf regimes; Iraq, Syria and Yemen *vis-à-vis* Saudi Arabia and others. In this case, in spite of the fact that their (among parties) main concern is not about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to they have been allying with the countries that will help them defeat their enemies, the conflict has been instrumentalised in order to achieve their own political interest.

These arguments of anti-Zionism, humanitarian empathy, demographic reason and Middle Eastern solidarity (to reduce their tensions), therefore, explain both Maarif's pro-Palestinian sentiment and his utopian thought of the one state solution: for Palestinian.

## **The Rationales of Their Different Thoughts**

Soekarno, Abdurrahman Wahid and Ahmad Syafii Maarif have all claimed to be pro-Palestinian, although their political rhetoric have been articulated in different ways. These different nuances in political opinions have to be understood in light of their individual contextual complexities. They all claimed to be pro-Palestinian, however the differences were in that Soekarno

did not want to engage with Israel due to his anti-colonial stance, Wahid was keen in opening diplomatic relations with Israel and Maarif was unwilling to compromise with a clear anti-Zionist stance. Here, the article seeks to unfold these nuances based on their ideological leanings, the contexts whereby their thoughts were constituted, their intellectual background and professional experience.

Soekarno's, Wahid's and Maarif's thoughts are constructed by quite similar ideological foundations. The three leaders are all prominent leaders of Muslim organisations and the Indonesian people, who are majority Muslim. As Muslims of one of the largest Muslim-majority countries, they often refer to the connection of the larger Muslim *ummah*.<sup>3</sup> Their discourses often refer to the Palestinians as their Muslim brothers and sisters. In addition to that, as Muslim leaders, they would be cognisant that their Indonesian Muslim audiences would respond well to articulation of causes that Muslims are concerned with. With regards to their Indonesian identity, there is a strong understanding and influence of the national value of freedom and anti-colonisation. As stated previously, the Indonesian constitution states that colonialism is not in conformity with humanity and justice, which the three leaders often stressed that they supported.

Another more important factor to consider is the socio-political contexts they were in and this determines the different nuances of their expressions. In the formation period of Indonesian independence, Soekarno needed the support of other countries to ensure Indonesian autonomy and sovereignty. Indonesia was also a key founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). NAM was built on the force of Third World established during the 1966 Bandung Conference. The movement emphasised the Third World solidarity and warned superpowers to leave their power politics of Cold War outside of the Third World. Soekarno was the leader who introduced the idea of a 'Third World' during the NAM meeting. Being at the forefront of such conferences and movements, Indonesia saw itself leading the world's progressive forces to confront variants of colonialism and imperialism (Ho Ying Chan, 2018). At the height of global movements towards decolonisation as well as a concern for civil rights, Soekarno acted as a president of a newly independent state would. He was firm in his anti-colonialism stance and in order to gain the recognition of

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3 The larger trans-national Muslim community. There is a hadith (saying) from the Prophet Muhammad that "The example of the believer is like the body, if part of it hurts, the rest of it is summoned." (Ahmed)

other countries, Soekarno spoke ardently for the support of Palestine and he constantly emphasises the point of freedom from occupation. Shifting the focus from the period of decolonisation to the early Reformation era of Indonesia, Wahid faced a monumental challenge in dealing with the aftermath of the 1997-1998 monetary crisis. In order to stabilise Indonesia's economy, Wahid tried to open diplomatic and economic relations with Israel in order to strengthen the economic development of Indonesia, although he had failed to do so due to the strong resistance that came from the Indonesian Muslim masses. In a position of the President of Indonesia, Wahid took the more pragmatic approach in trying to remain seen as pro-Palestinian and yet, ensuring that Indonesia as a country benefitted from such a stance. In the post-Reformation period, Maarif then faced complicated realities of calls for self-determination and revolution in the Muslim world (such as the Arab Uprising). This refreshed the calls for self-determination of the Palestinian peoples. In addition, with the instatement of Trump as the President, there has been more hawkish political moves by the US and Israel, such as the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017. Israel's long-time Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was also recently re-elected, which effectively means the end of the two-state solution (Amr, 2019). At this critical juncture and with the hopes of a two state solution collapsing, Maarif has tried to confront it with emphasising pro-Palestinian sentiments and anti-Zionist arguments.

The third, their intellectual background and professional experience also determine the different colourings of their political stances. Soekarno, Wahid and Maarif are public intellectuals, who are pro-interreligious tolerance, pluralism and peace. However, Soekarno and Wahid were both presidents of Indonesia, thus, their rhetoric would be to serve national interests and take into account what was best for Indonesia as a state. On the other hand, Maarif was recognised as a Muslim activist who had intense intellectual interactions with anti-Zionist activist, Gilad Atzmon. This meant that Maarif had more independence in his political stances as he would not have any direct responsibility in producing the official state policy. Accordingly, while Soekarno and Wahid were able to control the state and its policies directly, Maarif acted as a non-state player. Within their positions, Soekarno and Wahid had the opportunities to meet the elites of the Arab countries, as well as Israel and Palestine. Wahid even visited Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank and Israelis in Tel Aviv several times, whereas Maarif did not. It resulted in a more idealistic utopian hope on the part of Maarif, compared to the more pragmatic stance by Wahid.

Therefore, it should be emphasised here that their commitment to stand for Palestinian in the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict is significantly influenced by complexities of their ideological views, socio-political contexts, and their intellectual background and experience.

## **Conclusion**

Soekarno, Wahid and Maarif are all Indonesian Muslim leaders and intellectuals and in general, their positions can be categorised as pro-Palestinians, pro-peace and anti-imperialism. However, the different socio-political contexts formed different nuances in their rhetoric. Soekarno and Wahid as Indonesian Presidents in different periods tended to be pragmatic, though it is articulated through different ways. While Soekarno's condemnation of Israeli occupation in the Palestinian land is motivated by his political interest to be recognised by other nations as well as a staunch anti-colonial stance, Wahid's efforts of opening diplomatic and economic relations with Israel were driven by the strategy of economic restorations after the financial crisis. Wahid believed that with these relations, Indonesia will have larger opportunities to encourage peace between Israelis and Palestinians. On the other hand, Maarif's discourse is influenced by his humanitarian empathy rather than a political role. Despite all of them being leaders of one of the largest Muslim country, their rhetoric on Palestine differed due to their position in the community and whether they were pushed into the realism of foreign policy or remain as representatives of the Indonesian peoples.

Moving forward, with the claims of the end of the two-state solution, formulating a political plan on reuniting partitioned Palestine and the Jewish state of Israel, is no easy undertaking, no matter who initiates it. What countries that claim to be pro-Palestinian should seek to do is to lend their support to civil society movements and initiatives that seek to promote the humanity and human rights of Palestinians as well as not marginalise the newly settled Israelis. One such initiative, with a formulation of a political project, is the One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC), with members who are both Palestinians and Jewish Israeli. Among the members are Awad Abdelfattah, a founder of the Balad Party; Ilan Pappé, the well-known Israeli historian; Daphan Baram, a lawyer and the Director of ICAHD UK; As'ad Ghanem, a professor of Political Science at Haifa University and many others (Halper, 2018). Their political project have highlighted key elements of just peace that both "sides" can agree on, or at least live with. Movements such as ODSC seek to consolidate a one-

state solution, where both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis can get behind. They seek a truly inclusive democratic state, one that is thoroughly colonised and free of Zionist ideology, hoping to provide a future of peace, justice and equality in all of historic Palestine.

## Acknowledgment

This article is a revised version of unpublished research draft that we have conducted at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS), The Australian National University (ANU), Australia. We owe thanks to Professor James Piscatori for his supervision and critical commentaries on the first draft of this article.

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