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Research Article

Islamic Foreign Policy: Principles and Practices

Hasbi Aswar[1]*, Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat[2]

[1]*Department of International Relations, Faculty of Psychology and Social Cultural Sciences, University of Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*
[2]*Digital IR Project Associate, IDEAS, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom*

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***Correspondence**
hasbiaswar@uii.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Islam is a religion and an ideology encompassing all aspects of human life. However, many Muslims currently misunderstand and misinterpret the holistic concept of Islam. This can be attributed to the intellectual limitations within the Muslim community and the influence of secularism and liberalism in the Islamic world. This article aims to clarify Islam's perspective on domestic and foreign politics, including its principles, objectives, and practices. The method used in this article is a qualitative method through collecting data from Islamic sources and other relevant sources on foreign policy concepts. This paper argues that Islam forms the foundation of Islamic foreign policy to spread its message (da'wah), and it can be pursued through either forceful means (warfare) or peaceful approaches (diplomacy). Reliable expert analyses can be consulted for practical considerations on optimizing foreign policy interests. As this is an elaboration on Islamic foreign policy in general, this article suggests that more detail and practical Islamic foreign policy issues should be conducted for future research agenda.

1. Introduction

The domination of Western politics and the hegemony of Western thought have imprisoned Islamic intellectuals and political scholars within the limitations of Western methodologies in producing knowledge. However, considering the negative impact of Western civilization on humanity, these intellectuals should recognize and begin discussing alternative solutions to Western failures based on Islamic teachings, both in concept and implementation (Aswar, 2021).

Within the context of international politics, western thinkers have been concerned about the impact of Western ideology on the world. However, the dominant framework they have established is a reflective approach that encourages not being coopted by any existing ideologies. Unfortunately, the offered value standards are abstract and still within the framework of western ideological thinking (Fox & Sandlers, 2004; Hurd, 2008).

Among Muslim scholars, concerns about the impact of Western knowledge have long existed. They strive to form communities that counter various Western ideas, criticize their philosophies, and offer Islamic methodologies to address these issues(Ali, 2007; Sulayman, 1993). In terms of critics toward the current International relations theory, Arnakim (2016) wrote about the limit of international relations theory that only is able to understand the world through various theories but fail to give solution for the world problems. As a result, these western theories can not be a solution, rather the part of the problem itself (Arnakim, 2016). On the one hand, Alikhani (2016) introduced the Islamic values in international politics, such a s justice, freedom, equality, peace, and commit to agreement (Alikhani, 2016). Aswar (2017), on another perspective, discussed how the secular perspective on political Islam can influence the foreign policy strategy of a state, both in the Muslim or western countries (Aswar, 2017)

This article will discuss one aspect of Islam related to the principles and practices of foreign policy in Islam, based on primary sources in Islam, namely the Quran, Sunnah, and the traditions of the companions, as well as the best practices during the era of the Islamic caliphate. The article argues that the methodology of political thinking in Islam

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should not only be limited to theoretical discussions but also produce problem-solving concepts for various global issues.

2. Research Method

This article employs a qualitative approach both in the data collection process and data analysis method. This method is relevant because the article examines the concept of foreign policy in general and the Islamic perspective related to this issue. The data collection process in the research is carried out through literature review, both online and offline sources such as websites, journals, and books related to the study of foreign policy in general and the Islamic view, as well as the historical experiences of Islamic countries in foreign policy. All the collected data will be classified based on the data requirements for analysis. This writing will be divided into several sections. The first section is a study of the Islamic perspective in analyzing human issues. The second section provides an overview of the concept of foreign policy in general. The third section delves into the Islamic conception of foreign policy, including best practices during the time of the Prophet and the four caliphs, as well as the contributions of Islamic diplomacy to the world.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Islamic Ideas and Methods

The teachings of Islam encompass two main aspects: principles for governing life and strategies for implementing these principles. Every problem in Islam has its unique answer and practical steps. From a doctrinal perspective, Islamic teachings can be divided into several dimensions. The first dimension is the relationship between the Creator and His servants. This concept is manifested in the vertical relationship with the Creator, encompassing faith and worship. The second dimension is the relationship between a human being or servant and oneself, involving personal rules and regulations that do not include other parties, such as behavioral norms, dietary restrictions, clothing, and drinks. The final dimension relates to Islamic rules governing human interactions with others. This dimension encompasses all aspects of human interaction, including social, political, economic, educational, and legal aspects (An-Nabahani, 2002, p. 87).

In understanding human problems, Islam teaches the maximization of intellectual potential to comprehend the reality of the issues at hand, identify their root causes, and give a solution from Islamic sources (Ali, 2016). Problems should not be seen or limited within their context alone. For example, economic issues should not be approached solely from an economic perspective, and political issues should not be addressed merely as political problems. Islam views problems as human problems that must be solved by considering their various dimensions comprehensively. Therefore, an economic issue may not be resolved solely through the economic approach; it may also have political, social, educational, legal, and even ideological dimensions. The same applies to other human issues. After understanding the problem, scholars strive to comprehend the teachings of Islam related to the problem to find answers and practical steps to resolve it. These answers and actions are derived from the Quran, the Sunnah of the Prophet, the consensus of the companions (ijma), and analogical reasoning (qiyas) (Khan, 2008).

An example is understanding the issue of Israel's occupation of Palestine. Various groups debate the problem and how to handle it. Some argue that the Palestinian issue is a humanitarian problem, and thus, continuous support should be provided to them. Others claim that the issue is religious, pitting Islam against Zionism. They argue that Muslims should always stand with Palestine and fight for their rights against Israel. Another perspective suggests that the issue is not religious but political, with Israel occupying Palestine and causing harm to both Muslims and Christians. Therefore, the solution lies in ending Israel's occupation by bringing them to international courts or advocating for Palestinian independence. However, this political approach becomes complex when faced with the choice between a one-state or two-state solution (Indiraphasa, 2023; Robinson, 2023). Ultimately, the debates often end without a comprehensive understanding of the complete picture of the Palestinian issue, its root causes, and its solutions.

The method Islam teaches in addressing the Palestinian issue is to examine it within the context of Islam and find solutions accordingly. The issue of Israel's occupation is an international political issue, with Israel being supported by major powers to sustain and perpetuate its occupation of Palestinian land. Providing humanitarian aid or calling for Muslim commitment to defend Palestine is insufficient. So, the reality of Palestine`s problem is systematic oppression involving significant states and their ideologies. Hence, the solution for Palestine lies in its liberation by another major state that can weaken the Western coalition, the United States, and its allies. This major state must be founded on Islamic principles, not communist or other ideologies. Only Islam can provide a vision and evidence of

creating a just and prosperous state without discrimination. The solution for Palestine is not a one-state policy because, even if it were achieved, there would be no guarantee that Palestine would truly thrive after its independence. A two-state approach is even less feasible as it would allow the occupier to divide Palestinian land that should rightfully belong to the Muslim community and the Palestinian people. The solution is for Palestine to become part of the Muslim community and be governed by Islamic teachings. The practical steps to liberate Palestine involve *futuhat,* or liberation jihad, led by Muslims and guided by a state that implements Islamic law (Al-Shaykh Ibn Baaz, 2002). Historical facts have shown many practices like this.

Muslims must understand the Islamic method of thinking established by Allah and His Messenger and preserved by scholars. Only with this method can Muslims protect themselves from the challenges of the times and the potential infiltration of foreign ideologies. In the modern era, from the 19th century until now, many Muslim intellectuals have been influenced by Western secular ideologies and have adopted a Western perspective to evaluate various dynamics within the Islamic world. This perspective fails to provide solutions and becomes part of new problems in the Islamic world. Furthermore, the Western agenda intentionally creates phobias towards Islamic teachings through labels such as backward, conservative, radical, fundamentalist, traditionalist, and extremist. Failing to adopt Islam as the perspective will prevent Muslims from effectively solving problems, resulting in wasted energy (Sulayman, 1993).

3.2. The Concept of Foreign Policy

The concept of foreign policy is the various strategies pursued by a country to achieve its national interests. A state's national interests can vary and be measured by their level of urgency. For example, territorial sovereignty and national integrity are top priorities, followed by economic interests, educational interests, social interests, cultural interests, and so on. Strategies to achieve these interests can be pursued through peaceful or hard means. Peaceful approaches include forming bilateral or multilateral cooperation, while the hard approaches can be war, propaganda, and the use of law.

In shaping its foreign policy, a country is influenced by several variables, including individual leader factors, domestic political factors, and the international political environment. Regarding individual leader factors, foreign policy decisions are often influenced by the leader's beliefs, values, personal experiences, and characteristics. Leadership style, political vision, and personal preferences can impact a country's foreign policy. Pragmatic, ideological, nationalist, or leaders with specific personal interests can significantly shape foreign policy direction.

Domestic politics in a country also influence its foreign policy. The government must consider domestic interests, public opinion, political support, and pressure from interest groups when making foreign policy decisions. Foreign policy can strengthen government legitimacy, build domestic consensus, or divert attention from domestic issues.

The international political context also plays a crucial role in shaping a country's foreign policy. These factors include relations with other countries, the international political system, international agreements and organizations, global issues, conflicts, and regional security factors. Changes in the international political environment, such as regime changes, security crises, shifts in global power, or developments in the global economy, can affect the priorities and strategies of a country's foreign policy (Kegley & Blanton, 2010).

From a technical and operational perspective, the foreign policies of all countries are essentially the same, and the three elements, as mentioned earlier, also determine the factors influencing those policies. What sets one country apart from another is the power it possesses and the ideology it embraces. A country can have various potential sources of power, such as military, economic, cultural, ideological, governance, industrial, technological, and others, but the most determining factor is military power (Mearsheimer, 2013). Dominant powers throughout history, including the present, inevitably possess superior military capabilities, regardless of whether they have an ideology.

Ideology is another differentiating factor between countries. Ideology is a framework of thought based on a philosophy of life that shapes perspectives on various aspects of life, including the construction of societal and state institutions. Ideologies typically have an idealized vision of how humans and societies should be organized to achieve desired goals (Abdullah, 2010). A country with a particular ideology will use distinct terminology in its political language and incorporate those ideas into its political activities (Levi, 1970). For example, the United States always emphasizes freedom, human rights, democracy, and free markets, while past communist regimes emphasized resistance against imperialism, capitalism, and advocacy for poor or marginalized nations. An ideologically driven country with a strong military will be capable of taking effective steps to dominate a political environment, both regionally and internationally, and its ideology will gradually influence the public in other countries. Such a powerful country may choose either a soft or hard approach to subdue other parties (Mearsheimer, 2019).

3.3. Islamic Foreign Policy: Principles and Practices

As a divine teaching from the Creator, Islam teaches that all humans have a spiritual aspect, meaning Allah SWT creates all humans. However, not all humans have spiritual consciousness, which is the condition where the laws of the Creator bind a person. Those who possess spiritual consciousness are constantly mindful of Allah SWT's regulations. Only Muslims fall into this criterion. Even though some people or institutions perform objectively good and beneficial actions but are not Muslim or not based on Islam, they cannot be considered having spiritual value as their spirit is not Islamic.

In the political aspect, Islam teaches that politics is a strategy to manage the community's domestic and international affairs. The spirit behind this management is to prevent all forms of evil and ensure the creation of goodness amidst society domestically and internationally (Az-Zuhaili, 2011).

Suppose Islamic teachings are applied to a society. In that case, the object of application is not just limited to the Islamic community but also includes non-Muslims within the territory of Islamic rule. Nevertheless, Islam teaches that the Sharia applied to non-Muslims is limited to aspects related to public interests. At the same time, matters concerning beliefs, worship, clothing, drinks, food, and family affairs are left to the teachings of their respective religions(Yaseen & Ali, 2015).

A state built on Islamic principles is founded on Islamic law. Its system of governance is the Islamic system of government, with a leader who adheres to Sharia, known as the Khilafah system, whereby the leader is referred to as the Khalifah (Setiawan & Risnandar, 2019)

In the international arena, Islamic countries function to spread the message of Islam throughout the world, both through soft and hard approaches. Soft approaches can be achieved through peaceful agreements, economic cooperation, education, and cultural exchanges. Hard approaches can include conquests or jihad to unite a region under Islamic rule. All these foreign policy activities aim to globalize the message of Islam, increase understanding of Islam and the number of Muslims, and address various global evils (al-Zuhili, 2017).

The mission of Islamizing the world as a foreign policy objective of Islamic countries has been a fixed strategy since the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he was sent and established the state of Madinah. This approach continued through the eras of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Umayyad Caliphate, the Abbasid Caliphate, and the Ottoman Caliphate. The principles taught and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) dictate that Islam must serve as the foundation, purpose, and method for conducting foreign policy in Islam. We can witness how the Prophet spread Islam and united the surrounding regions peacefully. This attitude has been carried on by muslim rulers for 14 centuries (Watt, 2020).

Guided by revelation through the Quran, the Prophet's Sunnah, and companions, the various foreign policy practices exemplified during the era of Islamic rule in the past have contributed significantly to the advancement of human civilization. Freedom, security, and justice replaced the previous oppressive and exploitative regime wherever Islam was propagated (Arnold, 2019). A conducive political and economic environment created potential space for the growth of knowledge and beneficial technology for humanity. Its economic system did not create a wide gap between a few capitalists and the majority of the people (Fiorina, 2001). Despite its strength surpassing various nations, there were no legacies of racism and ethnic cleansing as taught by Islam. Instead, assimilation and adoption of Islamic culture occurred among the conquered populations, leading to increasing conversions to Islam. Political conquests that ended in the submission and surrender of the conquered population seem unmatched compared to the era of modern colonialism (An-Nabahani, 2002).

As an ideology, Islam bases its foreign political mission on Islamic norms, intending to establish the world under the umbrella of Islam. In practical terms, Islam presents a two-pole ideological mapping of the world*: Dar al-Islam* (the house of Islam) and *Dar al-Kufr* (the house of disbelief). *Dar al-Kufr* is further divided into several categories: the belligerent non-Muslim states (*Kafir Harbi fi'lan*) that conflict with *Dar al-Islam*, and the non-belligerent non-Muslim states (*Kafir Harbi hukman)* that are not at war with the Islamic state (Hilal, 2002).

Islam prescribes that there should be no relations with the actively belligerent non-Muslim states except during war. If any relationship is to be established, it must begin with a ceasefire, after which further negotiations can occur. As for the non-belligerent non-Muslim states, Dar al-Islam can freely cooperate with them(al-Jawi, 2019).

This is the guidance that Islam teaches. However, in practical matters such as how to win a war, Islam determines that it should follow scientific laws, specifically the principles of causality or effectiveness. Therefore, it is permissible for an Islamic government to seek the advice of reliable experts, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in the fields of strategy and military affairs. This was demonstrated when the Prophet Muhammad accepted advice from Abu Dzar Al-Ghifari regarding building trenches (a Persian adopted strategy) in Medina to defend against the attacking Quraysh alliance

in the Battle of the Trench (Al-Usairy., 2004). Similarly, Sultan Muhammad II, also known as Al-Fatih, employed the services of non-Muslim experts from Hungary to build large cannons to destroy the fortifications of Constantinople in 1453 CE (Emecen, 2015). The same method can be applied to maximize the foreign policy of Islamic states in areas other than war, such as economic cooperation, education, public diplomacy, and so on. States can seek expert input to obtain accurate analyses to achieve their foreign interests.

From the aforementioned above, it can be concluded that politics in Islam encompasses three aspects: the principle aspect, the methodological aspect, and the practical aspect. The principle aspect involves the philosophy and goals of Islamic foreign politics. The methodological aspect provides a framework for conducting foreign politics using either jihad (war) or peaceful means (negotiation, persuasion). In practical terms, the state follows considerations of effectiveness.

Some argue that dividing the world into Islamic and non-Islamic states is no longer relevant in the current world, which tends to be peaceful (Hassan, 2007). They believe using such terminology could create conflicts between ideologically oriented nations, similar to the ideological tensions during the Cold War era (Tibi, 2012). These people seem to have been deceived by globalization propaganda and the hegemony of liberalism, as they fail to recognize that ideological struggles continue to exist. Liberalism-oriented states also use ideological mappings to assess other nations. Pro-liberal states are seen as democratic, progressive, and modern, while anti-liberal/non-Western states are labelled authoritarian, backward, or part of the "axis of evil." The global dominance of liberalism has made many people, including academics, feel comfortable, safe, and stable. However, with its materialistic paradigm, this system has resulted in many problems, including social inequality, ecological damage, military interventions, protection of tyrants, and reluctance to actively address global humanitarian issues.

Superpowers with ideological status will always use their ideology as a perspective for interacting with other nations. This reality makes the Islamic viewpoint, through the concept of *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*, always relevant. Similarly, in social interactions within communities, the status of being a Muslim or non-Muslim helps Muslims identify the appropriate steps to take when interacting with non-Muslims. In simple terms, every concept has legal implications for Muslims.

For post-structuralists, the dominance of a single idea or subjectivity in the world leads to a nation's imperialism over others. The same applies to Western efforts to establish their ideology in other countries based on believing in the truth of liberal dogma. This attitude has led the West to use various means to ensure the global dominance of liberalism, including persuasion, economic power, and military force. However, critical scholars have found that the campaign for liberalism is merely a facade to solidify Western imperialism in other countries, enriching the West while impoverishing and weakening other nations. Similarly, during the Cold War era, the spread of communist ideology resulted in numerous killings and destruction fuelled by the class warfare propaganda advocated by communist regimes (Morrow, 2018).

Post-structuralists are not wrong in assessing the history of liberalism and communism. However, when applied to Islam, Islam does not have the same historical background as the modern ideologies mentioned above. Normatively, Islam has succeeded in creating individuals with high levels of morality through its noble teachings. Islam does not view race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion as barriers to interaction among people. Various historical testimonies illustrate how conquests had positive outcomes for the conquered societies. Muslims and Islam were openly accepted, and the conquered societies quickly adapted and assimilated. This conducive environment fostered the emergence of various philosophical, scientific, and technological contributions that continue to impact the world today.

What sets Islam apart from liberalism and communism is that Islam, since its final revelation and practice by Prophet Muhammad, is in a perfect position regarding norms and methodologies. Therefore, Muslims only need to understand and consistently apply the commandments. If this occurs, the civilization of Muslims will progress. Conversely, if Muslims fail to understand the teachings of Islam and neglect their implementation, it will destroy Muslim civilization. The rise of Islam signifies mercy and goodness for other people under the protection of Islam. Conversely, the weakness and collapse of Islam will bring harm to all.

4. Conclusion

The refreshing of Islamic political thought is necessary in the face of the onslaught of secular ideas among the Muslim community. This situation has led some Muslims to adopt secularism as the basis for assessing various issues and to use Islam solely as a tool for legitimization. However, what should be done is to use Islam as a perspective for evaluating and resolving various political events. Regarding foreign policy, Islam has established that its basis is Islam, its goal is da'wah (propagation of Islam), and its methods are through jihad and diplomacy. The state responsible for

implementing foreign policy is the Islamic state or caliphate, as mentioned in various hadiths of the Prophet and discussed by Islamic scholars since ancient times.

Foreign policy influenced by Islam is important and urgent to spread da'wah and goodness to Muslims and non-Muslims. The wider the reach of Islamic da'wah to various regions, the more significant the impact of Islamic goodness on multicultural societies. This argument is not merely a dream, as it has been experienced during the heyday of Islam from the time of the Prophet until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Although it cannot be denied that there were flaws in the governance of Islamic regimes throughout history, these were due to deviating from the true teachings of Islam. However, when the teachings of Islam are correctly applied, the state's conditions will improve and positively impact the surrounding environment. In the current context, studying Islamic foreign policy ideas is important as education for Islamic scholars and as a counter-opinion to pessimistic and phobic groups towards Islamic political teachings.

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