

**THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY:  
A CASE STUDY ON ROHINGYA CONFLICT**

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**Abstrak**

Tulisan ini mencoba membuktikan bahwa Islam, dalam bentuk politik praktis, memberikan warna dan bentuk dalam kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia, terutama di masa kepemimpinan Yudhoyono. Guna mendukung argumen tersebut, artikel ini memfokuskan pembahasan pada respon Pemerintah Indonesia terkait konflik Rohingya di Myanmar. Dengan menggunakan analisa domestik untuk memahami konteks politik luar negeri, artikel ini berkesimpulan bahwa tekanan dalam negeri, terutama dari kalangan masyarakat dan organisasi Muslim, berkontribusi terhadap respon kebijakan luar negeri RI yang semula terlihat abstain menjadi aktif.

**Kata Kunci:** *Kebijakan luar negeri; Islam; Rohingya; Analisis domestik*

**Abstract**

This article attempts to argue that Islam, in its political activism, has arguably informed the shape of Indonesian foreign policy, especially during President Yudhoyono administration. In order to build the case, this research focuses on the Indonesia's responses towards the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar. Using state level analysis, which stresses on the supremacy of domestic analysis in understanding foreign policy, this article comes to the conclusion that domestic pressure, mainly from Muslim organizations, has directed Indonesia's response from "abstention" to "activism" in dealing with the Rohingya conflict.

**Keywords:** *Foreign policy; Islam; Rohingya; Domestic analysis*

**. مستخلص**

تحاول هذه المقالة القول بأن الإسلام، في نشاطها السياسي، قد يؤثر على تشكيل السياسة الخارجية الإندونيسية، ولا سيما خلال إدارة الرئيس يودهويونو. من أجل بناء القضية، يركز هذا البحث على ردود اندونيسيا تجاه الصراع الروهينجا فيماتمار. وباستخدام التحليل على مستوى الدولة، الذي يؤكد على تفوق التحليل المحلي في فهم السياسة الخارجية، فإن هذه المقالة توصل إلى استنتاج مفاده أن الضغوط المحلية، وخاصة من المنظمات الإسلامية، وجهت استجابة إندونيسيا من "الامتناع" عن التعامل مع القضية إلى "النشاط".

**الكلمات الرئيسية:** *السياسة الخارجية; الإسلام; الروهينجا; التحليل المحلي*

# THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

## A. Introduction

The main theme posed in this article is the influence of Islam on the Indonesia's conduct of external relations during Yudhoyono administration. For that purpose, it analyses a single case of Indonesia's response towards the communal conflict of Rohingya taking place between 2012 and 2013, resulting in the plight of Rohingyas people to the neighboring countries, including Indonesia. This paper further attempts to show that dynamic interaction between political Islam and state provides specific context in which Yudhoyono administration's reactions to the issue of Rohingya have been accommodative towards Muslim's aspirations.

In specific, it is argued that the demands from Muslim community had become one political impulse for the Yudhoyono administration to adopt more real and active diplomatic concerted measures for dealing with the matters by, inter alia, bilaterally proposing political reconciliation, providing humanitarian assistances, and allowing Rohingya refugees to enter Indonesia's territory. It is also argued that domestic need to deescalate the tension among Muslim community provided a reasonable argument for Yudhoyono administration to take comprehensive actions on the Rohingya issue. In order to prove that concerns for domestic stability and security are somewhat pivotal consideration, this paper will map out the dialectical interaction between Muslim society and the state on the conflict within foreign policy making process through three consecutive stages; first, elaboration on the background of the issue and its implications for the Muslim world; second, the reactions and responses of Indonesian Muslim community (organization and political parties) towards the conflict; finally, the examination on foreign policy making process.

## B. Discussion

### 1. Background of Conflict

The conflict in Rakhine state, Myanmar, between Buddhists Rakhine and Muslim Rohingyas is a long simmering ethnic and religious tension between the state's majority Buddhist population and minority Muslim in the western part of Rakhine State. Some linked the conflict to the Muslim Rohingya's political struggle

in the late 1940s to separate from Burma (now Myanmar), and their willingness to join East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), but some others??<sup>1</sup>

The Rakhine state has been home to repeated outbreaks of violence between the two groups. It has been recorded that the major act of atrocities in the region has taken place at least four times (1960, 1978, 1982, and 1991).<sup>2</sup> In 2012, the conflict reemerged. It was sparked by two main clashes. On May 28, 2012, a Rakhine woman was reportedly raped, robbed, and killed by three young Rohingya Muslims in Yanbye Township. As the news circulated among Buddhist Rakhine, a retaliation plan was crafted. A week after, a public bus carrying Rohingya Muslims was attacked, claiming 10 death tolls of Rohingya Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

These two consecutive attacks turned out to be the prelude to the series of riots spreading in other regions such as Sittway, Maungdaw, and Buttdaung Township. 77 people were reported death, 109 people injured, 4822 houses, 17 mosques, 15 temples were burnt. The second riot happened in the next October of the same year in Mrauk-Oo and Minbya townships. The number of casualties were counted more than the first riot, in which 2950 houses and 14 mosques were burnt, 84 people were death while 129 other injured.<sup>4</sup>

President Thein Sein, on June 10, 2012, declared a state of emergency in the western part of Rakhine State. Despite such protective measures, the tension heated up once again, leading to the next round of violence on October of the same year, displacing another 35.000 people, mostly Rohingya Muslims. Looking at the calamity of conflict, the Government of Myanmar decided to put the Rakhine State under the curfew. As the conflict touted to international headlines, in early August,

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<sup>1</sup>Bilver Singh, *Tantangan Orang Rohingya Myanmar: Menghadapi Satu Minoritas Teraniaya Dan Implikasi Untuk Keamanan Nasional Dan Regional* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2014), pp 25-38.

<sup>2</sup>David Mathieson, *Perilous Plight: Burma's Rohingya Take to the Seas*, May 26, 2009. Human Rights Watch, May 18, 2017 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/05/26/perilous-plight/burmas-rohingya-take-seas>>.

<sup>3</sup>Matthew Smith, *All You Can Do Is Pray: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan State*, April 22, 2013, Human Rights Watch, May 18, 2017 <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>>.

<sup>4</sup>"Latar Belakang Informasi Isu Konflik Komunal Di Rakhine State" (Jakarta: Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, January 2013), p 3.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Myanmar Ministry of Border Affairs invited relevant parties of international community to conduct short tour to the site of conflict.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Indonesia's Domestic Reaction

The prolonged conflict in Rakhine State, of which Rohingya Muslims were the primary victims, aroused solidarity across the Muslim countries, including Indonesia. Reactions varied from public statements at various occasions and public meetings to peaceful and angry demonstrations. Some Muslim organizations had even sent solidarity missions to the site of conflict. All of which are mainly to show their sympathy and solidarity with the victims of conflict.

Responding to the conflict, Indonesian Muslim organizations comprising of DDII (*Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia*), FUI (*Forum Umat Islam*), *Jamaah Muslim Hizbullah*, FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*), JAT (*Jamaah Anshar Tauhid*), *Hilal Ahmar Society*, MMI (*Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*), and MER-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Committee) gathered on July 2, 2012, and officially issued a joint statement condemning the Government of Myanmar and expressed their belief that what happened in the neighboring region was a systematic ethnic cleansing.<sup>6</sup>

MUI Chairman, KH Maruf Amin, described the conflict as “*pembantaianmasal*” (genocide) and clearly categorized the issue within the list of religious conflicts. The Chairman was disappointed with the inadequate response from the international community to address the conflict, and therefore asked the government of Indonesia to avail itself of diplomatic clout to bring up the burning issue to the Security Council and further send peacekeeping missions to the ground of conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Almost similar to that, Secretary General of PPP, Romahurmuzy condemned the Myanmar Government for taking insufficient measures to put the conflict to an end, and further described it as *pembantaianetnis* (ethnic genocide). The party, as he said, had observed that the humanitarian crisis in the region had been in alarming

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 5.

<sup>6</sup> “Ormas Islam Nyatakan Telah Terjadi Pembersihan Etnis Muslim di Myanmar,” July 3, 2012, Arrahmah, May 18, 2017 <<http://www.arahmah.com/read/2012/07/03/21381-ormas-islam-nyatakan-telah-terjadi-pembersihan-etnis-muslim-di-myanmar.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> “MUI: Tragedi Muslim Rohingya Berlatar Belakang Agama, Stop Genocide” July 26, 2012, VOA Islam, January 9, 2017 <<http://www.voa-islam.com/read/indonesiana/2012/07/26/20007/muitragedi-muslim-rohingya-berlatar-belakang-agama-stop-genocide/#sthash.XdtJUvwN.dpbs>>.

situation.<sup>8</sup> Wartiah, regional head of PPP, also stressed her dissatisfaction with the silent position taken by international community towards Rohingya people, and sensed Indonesia's ambiguous decision to be involved in the matter at the first place.<sup>9</sup>

A sharp different perspective of critique voiced by the Head of *Muhammadiyah*, Din Syamsuddin, who focused on Indonesia's irresolute position on the issue, describing Yudhoyono administration as "*lembek*" (timid). Conveying the same message but with more moderate statement, Head of Executive of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, Slamet Effendy, urged the government of Indonesia, as the biggest Muslim country in ASEAN, to show its solidarity by taking a clear and firm stance on the graving situation in Myanmar.<sup>10</sup>

The hard tone of message was delivered by some Muslim organizations namely FPI, MMI, and HTI. They called on *Jihad* for all Muslims in Indonesia. It was argued that the atrocities happening in Rakhine state were considered a valid reasons to proclaim *jihad* to help Muslim brothers in Myanmar. The head of FPI, Habib Riziq, promised to send militia to Myanmar if the Government of Indonesia was not capable and showed no sign of assertiveness in intervening the issue. Those organizations even further demanded Yudhoyono administration to send military officers to the site of conflict and to cut diplomatic relations with Myanmar.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, amid the increasing demands for Indonesia's active involvement in the Rohingya issue, JIL (Liberal Islam Network) activist and member of ruling Democratic Party, UlilAbsharAbdalla, on July 28, 2012, put forward a different view that "if we as Indonesian Muslim are silent towards the prosecution of Ahmadiyah followers in Indonesia, we are not eligible to submit protests when

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<sup>8</sup> "Indonesia Didesak Selesaikan Masalah Rohingya," July 29, 2012, *Tempo*, January 10, 2017 <<http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2012/07/29/118419936/Indonesia-Didesak-Selesaikan-Masalah-Rohingya>>.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with DR. Hj. Wartiah, Regional Head of PPP, March 15, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "Din Syamsuddin: Soal Rohingya, Saya Tak Mau Diadu-Adu," May 14, 2014, VOA Islam, January 11, 2017 <<http://www.voa-islam.com/read/indonesiana/2014/05/14/30357/din-syamsuddin-soal-rohingya-saya-tak-mau-diaduadu/>>.

<sup>11</sup> "Habib RizieqSyihab: Solusi Kaum Muslimin Rohingya adalah Jihad!" May 1, 2013, *Arrahmah*, February 3, 2017, <<http://www.arrahmah.com/news/2013/05/01/habib-rizieq-syihab-solusi-kaum-muslimin-rohingya-adalah-jihad.html#sthash.4sbAE28W.dpuf>>.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Rohingya people are prosecuted in Myanmar.”<sup>12</sup> In building his argument, he made a comparison to the violence against Ahmadiyah in Indonesia, saying that both cases, prosecution of Rohingya and Ahmadiyah, were similar in nature. He questioned the ambiguous behavior of Muslim community towards the cases. He argued that if we as a Muslim let such atrocities to the members of Ahmadiyah happened in Indonesia, so that we as Muslim do not have right to register protest to what happened in Myanmar.

The statement invited criticism from Muslim community, including Musthofa B. Nahrawardaya, Muhammadiyah young cadre who said that both cases could not be put on the same table. He said that Ahmadiyah was a sect in Islam and its pure theological linking towards Islam was debatable. He added that if we categorize the two cases into humanitarian issues, as the number of Rohingya casualties were more than the other, it was logical for Muslim to prioritize the issue of Rohingya.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the public statements, it has been noted also, that beginning from early July of 2012, more than 20 massive demonstrations were being organized across the country by mostly Islamic organizations such as *Muhammadiyah*, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, HMI, KAMMI, HTI, FPI, and FUI. Islamic political parties such as PKS, PPP, PKB, and PAN also took part in mobilizing their constituents to show solidarity and sympathy towards their brother Muslims in Myanmar.

Those protests were attended by hundreds of participants. Mostly, the demonstrations were held in the vicinity of Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta. Similar demonstrations in other big cities such as Aceh, Surabaya, Medan, and Yogyakarta were also attended by many participants who mostly are registered students at different universities (see table 7.1). The table showed that while demonstration concentrated in Jakarta, it was widespread as well in other big cities. It indicated that the issue has attracted attention at the national level.

The wave of demonstration intensified during July – August of 2012 –soon after the outbreak of violence - and continued to take place in the early of 2013. Some of these demonstrations, especially that staged by FPI, caused traffic jam and

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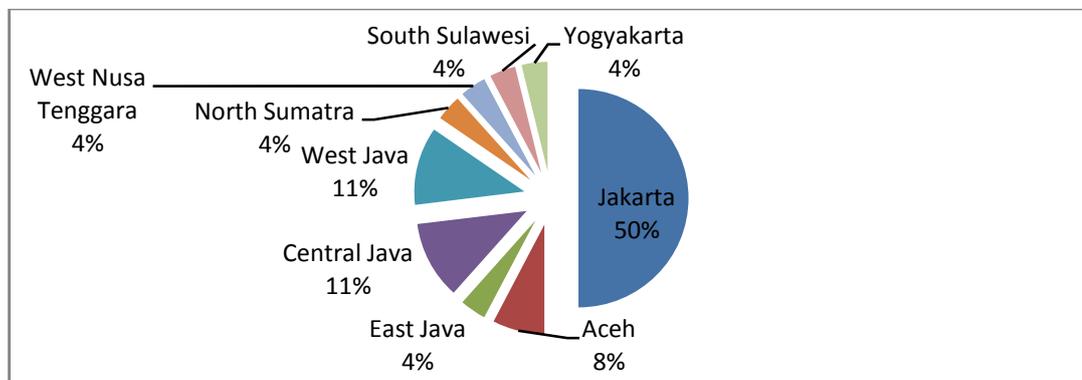
<sup>12</sup> “Ulil Abshar: Rohingya dan Ahmadiyah di Indonesia, Sama!” August 1, 2012, Itoday, January 9, 2017<<https://www.itoday.co.id/politik/ulil-abshar-rohingya-dan-ahmadiyah-di-indonesia-sama>>.

<sup>13</sup> “Tokoh Muda Muhammadiyah Tanggapi Kicauan Ulil Soal Muslim Rohingya,” July 31, 2012, Salam-Online, January 9, 2017<<http://www.salam-online.com/2012/07/tokoh-muda-muhammadiyah-tanggapi-kicauan-ulil-soal-muslim-rohingya.html>>.

some turned into riot that left police officers and protesters injured and several public properties damaged.

**Table 1**

Distribution of places of demonstrations attended and or organized by Muslim organizations (July 2012 – April 2013).



Source: Author from various newspapers

Massive news reports on the issue that highlight the despairing image of Muslims Rohingya also contributed in building up public sentiments. Metro TV and TV One, the two biggest national media, used terminology like “tragedy” and “killing” of Rohingya Muslims to capture what happened in the region. Online media such as Arrahmah.com, continuously uploaded articles and news on the suffering of Muslims in Myanmar. The media also focused on the idle position of SBY administration to handle the issue.<sup>14</sup> Online media *Arrahmah* for instance, between July 4 and August 4 has uploaded 35 Rohingya news on the website, almost one in each day.

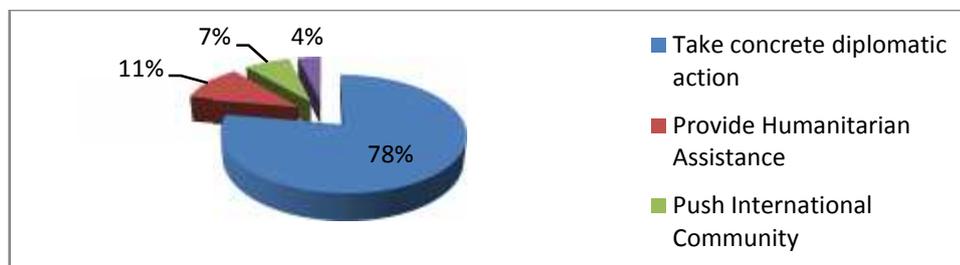
What can be drawn from those protests is that the tone of message delivered during the rally has been almost identical in two ways. *First*, the Government of Indonesia should condemn the human tragedy that claimed mostly the lives of Rohingya. *Second*, the Government of Indonesia were demanded to take real action to put pressure on Myanmar beyond merely diplomatic statement. Most of protesters based their demands on the ground of *Ummah* solidarity, that as the biggest Muslim

<sup>14</sup>In the last two years of SBY presidency, the media constantly criticized his policies. The media has been using burning public issues to question government’s indecisive decisions on public matters and portray him as incapable. Despite being awarded as “Friends of Media”, in front of Indonesian Journalist Association on September 2014, SBY told that during his presidency, the press tends to be cynical and shows no sign of friendship to him.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

country in the world, Indonesia has human responsibility to be involved in solving the conflict. (see table 2)

**Table 2**  
Demands on Rohingya Issue voiced by some Muslim Organizations  
(July 2012 – April 2013)



Source: Author from various newspapers

At the political level, PKS was considered one of the most active political parties that voiced concern over *Rohingya* people. The party organized cadres, sympathizers, and supporters to attend public demonstration on August 12, 2012, in Bundaran HI, Jakarta.<sup>15</sup> It was attended by hundreds of participants and went smoothly with no anarchy reported. Besides, PKS also gathered support from DPR to intervene the issue. On July 28, 2012, Head of BKSAP and parliament member of PKS, Surahman Hidayat, issued a recommendation to the Head of Parliament, urging the government of Myanmar to stop the atrocities in Rakhine state.<sup>16</sup> BKSAP also send formal letter to Aung San SuuKyi, asking her personally to influence politically the Myanmar's approach to solve the conflict.<sup>17</sup> On October 10, 2012, DPR through First Commission headed by PKS member MahfudzSidiq officially summoned Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marty Natalegawa for working meeting. The priority agenda was to hear Government of Indonesia's diplomatic measures in addressing the international matter, regional conflict, including Myanmar.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "Sore ini, PKS Unjuk Rasa PeduliRohingya," Auguts 12, 2012, Hidayatullah, March 3, 2017 <<http://www.hidayatullah.com/berita/nasional/read/2012/08/12/61681/sore-ini-pks-unjuk-rasa-peduli-rohingya.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> "SoalRohingya, Ketua DPR SuratiParlemen Myanmar," July 30, 2012, Detik, January 19, 2017 <<http://news.detik.com/berita/1978342/soal-rohingya-ketua-dpr-surati-parlemen-myanmar>>.

<sup>17</sup> "DPR MintaPengaruhAung San SuuKyiAkhiriKekerasanEtnisRohingya," August 7, 2012, DPR, January 9, 2017 <<http://www.dpr.go.id/berita/detail/id/4283>>.

<sup>18</sup> Marzuki Alie, "Kegiatan DPR RI Minggu Ketiga Oktober 2012," *Buletin Parliamentaria*, 2012, p. 13.

### 3. Security Impact

The Rohingya issue has wider and direct consequences for Indonesia. *First* of all, the ASEAN credibility is at stake. The regional grouping has been seen by International community as a fast growing regional organization that gradually embraces the idea of democracy and human rights as indicated in the early adoption of ASEAN Charter in 2008. Therefore, the conflict should be seen as the “litmus test” for the organization to treat the issue fairly. The inability of ASEAN to deal with the issue would create negative precedence for the future of organization.

*Second*, stability of region is indirectly challenged. The issue of *Rohingya* led to other pertinent issues such as asylum seekers and human trafficking. Some of the *Rohingya* people fled to other immediate neighboring countries, creating illegal diaspora around the globe, including Indonesia. Usually, they enter the Indonesian territory by small boats consisting of tens of people and more. Therefore, they are usually referred to as *ManusiaPerahu* (Boat People). However, many of them are caught within Indonesian waters without proper documents and identification, putting the government of Indonesia in the dilemmatic situation. Neither sending them back to the country of origin, nor detaining them in Indonesian refugee center are the appropriate arrangements. Report from PIARA (Center for Information and Advocacy for Rohingya Community) stated that most of immigrants from Rohingya community preferred to enter Indonesia, besides Malaysia, for its majority Muslim population.<sup>19</sup>

*Last*, which is equally significant, is that the riot has been identified by most Muslim community in Indonesia as a religious conflict, in which Muslim minority of *Rohingya* were badly treated by the government of Myanmar, and that their basic rights were denied. The recurring religious element within the public debate among Indonesian Muslim should be considered seriously by the government of Indonesia. Any reference to “mistreatment to Muslim society” will offer a motive and rationale for calling on Islamic *jihad* within Indonesia and across the borders.

The nature of transnational concept of *jihad* will create security turbulence not only to Indonesia, but also to the region. Singh cogently argued that the unjust situation in Rohingya has been one of the factors of growing radicalization of

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<sup>19</sup>Heri Aryanto, “Kondisi Faktual Rohingya Di Indonesia (Laporan Hasil Pencarian Fakta Di Aceh, Medan, Dan Tanjung Pinang),” 2013, <<https://indonesia4rohingyadotorg.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/kondisi-faktual-muslim-rohingya-di-indonesia.pdf>>.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

elements within Rohingya people. He said that the Myanmar's unjust treatment towards Rohingya has been used by radical groups in Southeast Asia to legitimize their planned network expansion within the region. The issue has serious regional security implication.<sup>20</sup>

The Strait Times reported that cleric Abu Arif and militant commander Abu Shafiyah, two leaders linked to Rohingya Solidarity Union (RSO) established in 1982, had travelled to Indonesia for seeking support and assistance. International Crisis Group senior figure, Sidney Jones, reported the long history of network between RSO and *JamaahIslamiyah* (JI), a group that is enlisted by the UN as terrorist organization operating in Southeast Asia. Rohan Gunaratna, a terrorism analyst told that the current conflict had been used by RSO for reviving regional links, since they have never had much support at home.<sup>21</sup>

The prediction that the conflict could spill beyond its borders found the truth in Indonesia. Soon after the conflict, for instance, the leader of JAT, Abu BakarBaashir, while he was in prison delivered an open letter dated July 22, 2012, containing threat of *Jihad* to the Government of Myanmar. The letter was submitted to the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta by the JAT Spokesperson, Son Hadi. Three verses of Holy Quran was cited as the legitimating action of Jihad towards the Government of Myanmar due to their irresponsible act of neglecting the proper protection for the Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

Three central demands submitted by Abu BakarBaashir in the letter. *First*, to stop the injustice of the expulsion and massacre of Muslims in Myanmar. *Second*, to provide Muslims the freedom to embrace Islam and worship Allah. *Last*, to end the act of discrimination against Muslims. In this letter, it is very clear that rather than perceived as communal clash, the ongoing conflict in the Rakhine State was perceived as a conflict based on religious hatred.

Not more than a week later, on June 28, 2012, the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta responded the latter by explaining the steps that have been taken by the government of Myanmar, and claiming the conflict was not a religious in nature. It

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<sup>20</sup>Singh, *Tantangan Orang Rohingya Myanmar*, 2014, p 135.

<sup>21</sup>Zakir Hussain, "2 Rohingya Leaders Go Shopping for Terror in Indonesia," *The Jakarta Post*, July 11, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Surah Mumtahanah verse 8, Surah Attaubah verse 36, and verse 52.

can be understood from the quick response is that the Myanmar Government felt seriously the urgency to counter the *jihad* message delivered by Abu BakarBaashir.

In addition to that, Habib Riziq, the leader of FPI, in front of hundreds of people on regular sermon segregation demanded the Government of Indonesia to take immediate real action on the matter. He threatened to send a *Jihad* delegation to the region when he saw no serious effort made by the Indonesian government. In his speech, he ensured that more than thousands of Jihadist have submitted their names as volunteer to be sent to the field of *Jihad*, and many have contributed financially to supply the necessary weapons.

The threat is not only verbal, but also physical. The protests in the capital city of South Sulawesi on August 2012 ended in chaos. Two Buddhist temples, Kwang Kong and Xian Ma, were attacked.<sup>23</sup> The recurring theme of *Jihad* and anti – Buddha increases afterwards. Upon the planned rally staged by Forum Umat Islam on May 2013, being aware of the heated situation, Jakarta Police Headquarter deployed 1.654 personnel to secure the location, especially Myanmar Embassy.

On May 2013, seven people allegedly involved in planning to bomb Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta were shot dead by *Datasemen 88* (Anti-Terror Police Force) while 13 others were arrested. Few days before, the police arrested two people with low explosives in a backpack as part of an alleged plot to bomb Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta. On August 4, 2013, two low-powered explosive detonated at Ekalaya Buddhist temple in Mangga Street II, West Jakarta. Three people were reported injured, and some parts of the temple were damaged. Among the ruins, the police found a paper stating “*Kami Menjawab Jeritan Rohingya*” (We are responding to the screams of the Rohingyas). Many speculations on the culprit behind the attack emerge as no one or organizations claimed the responsibility.<sup>24</sup>

In mid of August 2013, police detained Muhammad SyaifulSabaniaka Ipul, who allegedly funded the failed planned attack on Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta, and believed to have link with the Ekalaya temple bombing. The Chief of National

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<sup>23</sup> “MUI Kecam Aksi Anarkis FPI di Klenteng,” August 10, 2012, *Tribun News*, March 12, 2017 <<http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2012/08/10/mui-kecam-aksi-anarkis-fpi-di-klenteng>>

<sup>24</sup>Nadya Natahadibrata and Margareth S. Aritonang, “Bomb Threatens Pluralism,” *The Jakarta Post*, August 6, 2013, p 1.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Police, Sutarman, warned that the terrorists may have shifted the targets from Christian churches to Buddhist temples.<sup>25</sup>

Two points are merit particular attention. *First*, the conflict has been understood by some Muslim organizations as religious conflict. Furthermore, Rohingya Muslims are considered minority while Buddha is the most embraced religion in the country. Muslims in Myanmar accounted for only 4% of total population.<sup>26</sup> The explicit call from political leaders and Buddhist Monks in Myanmar to urge the economic and social isolation for Rohingya Muslims could also serve as pushing factor. This particular last point has become the trigger for some members of Muslim organizations to consider the issue as religious in nature. *Second*, the verbal threat has turned into physical attack. It could be understood that some of public aspirations are not yet met properly by the government. Some elements of society felt unsatisfied with the government's policy on the issue.

Looking at the above context, it is urging for Yudhoyono administration to act in a way that could prevent the conflict from being manipulated and used to provoke Muslims and Buddhists in Indonesia into religious conflict. The social harmony among different faith that has been long preserved became at stake. As a country beset with different races, ethnic groups, culture, and religions, Indonesia is vulnerable to social conflict. Therefore, any triggering event to the conflict is best avoided.

However, there is a relevant question that needs to be raised, which relates to the extent the Government of Indonesia should be involved in this matter: What kind of foreign policy that properly address the conflict; what measures need to be taken to defuse heated political situation. Yudhoyonoadministration faced dilemmatic situation since the demands from Muslim community to take significant and real action on the issue increased. Idle position could possibly transmit negative perception among Muslim community, while aggressive position would harm Indonesia's bilateral ties with Myanmar.

Indonesian Ambassador to Myanmar, Ito Sumardi, explained that provided the issue of Rohingya is not properly targeted, it could have unintended

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<sup>25</sup>Yulliasri Perdani, "Terror Suspect Could Be Linked to Buddhist Temple Bombing: Police," *The Jakarta Post*, August 12, 2013, p 4.

<sup>26</sup> CIA World Fact Book, "Burma," CIA, February 3, 2015 <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>>

consequences for bilateral relations of two countries.<sup>27</sup> The statement is well grounded. For instance, the massive protests against Myanmar that escalated in Indonesia, especially in the vicinity of Myanmar Embassy premises had compelled Myanmar to ask the Indonesian police for increased vigilance against any sign of terrorism. Moreover, when Head of Parliament and ex-member of Indonesian Muslim Association, Mr. Marzuki Ali, issued a strong statement, describing what happened in Myanmar as “genocide” and “inhumane behavior of the state” and circulated on Indonesian media, made the public sentiment even worse towards the Thein Sin Administration. In response, the Speaker of PyidaungsuHlutaw (Myanmar People’s Assembly) and AmyothaHluttaw (Myanmar Parliament), Mr. KhinAungMyint, protested against the statement by sending formal letter to Mr. Marzuki Ali on 1<sup>st</sup> August, and sent diplomatic note to the government of Indonesia.

#### **4. Policy Process**

The pressure of Muslim community towards the Yudhoyono administration was felt from the decision making process that was reflected in three areas: information process within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, consultation with Muslim community, and continuous communication of high-rank officials within the Yudhoyono administration.

*First*, the daily briefing and media report, provided for Minister Natalegawa, indicated that substantial part of report was allocated for Rohingya issue. In an interview with GilangGumilarEka, diplomatic staff at the Secretariat for the Minister, he told that during July – December 2012, the issue of Rohingya became the main “headline” for the unit’s report to the Minister Marty. Eka further said that he was demanded to map the demands voiced in every public demonstrations by mostly Muslim organizations. He said that:

Rohingya issue is one of the burning issues that exhausted all of us in the secretariat. Any updates from pertinent offices such as Myanmar embassy in Jakarta or Indonesian Embassy in Myanmar should be informed to the Minister immediately at any time. The Minister wanted to be informed directly. It was so because it had become national headline and captured public attention.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>“Ini yang Akan Dilakukan Dubes Myanmar yang Baru untuk Muslim Rohingya,” September 19, 2013, Detik, January 19, 2017<<http://news.detik.com/read/2013/09/19/205935/2364049/10/ini-yang-akan-dilakukan-dubes-myanmar-yang-baru-untuk-muslim-rohingya?nd771104bcj>>

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Gilang Gumilar Eka, Diplomatic Staff at Secretariat for the Minister, January 15, 2015.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Adding to that, the policy memo briefing provided by Directorate of East Asia and Pacific indicated that the increasing amount of public demonstration especially from Muslim community needed to be handled carefully and in consultation with pertinent stakeholders. The heated situation at Myanmar had made its impact on domestic environment.<sup>29</sup> The intensity of pressure was also voiced by Darius Erlangga, diplomatic staff at Directorate for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. He explained that the increasing media coverage on Rohingya had made intense communication within Ministry key holders in addressing the issue properly.<sup>30</sup>

*Second*, the ministry conducted informal consultation with some Islamic organizations to capture the public aspiration. On August 3, 2012, MUI Delegation met Minister Natalegawa in Pejambon. During the meeting, Minister Marty admitted that Indonesia has been in dilemmatic situation. Indonesia's diplomatic steps at international level, especially in the Human Rights Commission of United Nations and Third Committee of UN met the challenge since Indonesia's rank in human rights record has been disappointing. International community has noted some clashes and human right abuses in Indonesia.<sup>31</sup> For example, religious conflict between Sunni – Shia that took place in Madura and Ahmadiyah had displaced many people and made them living in temporary shelters. International community took note on issues and urged Indonesia to take reconciliatory approach.

During the consultation, MUI Chairman urged the government to take real action by suggesting the government to provide humanitarian assistance for Rohingya people. MUI viewed that the action taken by government had been only issuing statements and garnering support from international community. While at the same time, the people of Rohingya were desperately in need of real help. The meeting resulted in commitment to pass the initiative of humanitarian assistance to the pertinent ministries. Minister Marty also informed MUI that the Government of

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<sup>29</sup>“Latar Belakang Informasi Isu Konflik Komunal Di Rakhine State,” January 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Darius Erlangga, Diplomatic Staff at Directorate for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, January 15, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> “Marty Natalegawa: Bantuan untuk Rohingya Tidak Cukup Hanya Pernyataan Mengutuk,” August 3, 2012, RMol, January 19, 2017 <[http://www.rmol.co/read/2012/08/03/73455/Marty-Natalegawa:-Bantuan-untuk-Rohingya-Tidak-Cukup-Hanya-Pernyataan-Mengutuk->](http://www.rmol.co/read/2012/08/03/73455/Marty-Natalegawa:-Bantuan-untuk-Rohingya-Tidak-Cukup-Hanya-Pernyataan-Mengutuk-)

Indonesia stood ready to provide facilities for any organizations to help Rohingya people.<sup>32</sup>

The next day, on August 4, 2012, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in coordination with International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), held interactive dialogue with pertinent stakeholders within the Government (e.g. Human Rights Commission and ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission for Human Rights), representatives from Muslim organizations, Muslim Media, and NGOs. The meeting resulted in urging the Government of Indonesia to take humanitarian actions, in addition to political initiatives, in responding towards the conflict.<sup>33</sup>

*Third*, heated tension in the public sentiments has been responded by intense communication at the highest political level. The President had been continuously apprised of political protests by Minister of Foreign Affairs through direct report or formal letter. It has been noted that at least five reports submitted to the President. Those reports were, among others, intended to provide the President with the brief information on the current situation in Rohingya, International responses toward the issue, intensive domestic reaction, and possible approach to address the issue.<sup>34</sup>

In Mid-August of 2012, several ministers attended *Rapat Terbatas* (Limited Meeting)<sup>35</sup> in Cikeas led by President to specifically discuss the issue of Rohingya and its direct challenge to the national security. One of the main agendas in the meeting was the preparation for the Press Conference by President aimed at responding the massive demonstration nationwide. Later, on October, during *Rapat Koordinasi Terbatas Bidang Polhukam* (Coordinated Limited Meeting on Politic and Security), the issue of Rohingya and its implication on national security was also discussed.<sup>36</sup> On December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, President SBY called all pertinent ministers in

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<sup>32</sup> “MUI datangi Menlu minta penjelasan kontribusi pemerintah untuk Rohingya,” August 3, 2012, *Arrahmah*, January 9, 2017 <<http://www.arahmah.com/read/2012/08/03/22148-mui-datangi-menlu-minta-penjelasan-kontribusi-pemerintah-untuk-rohingya.html>>

<sup>33</sup>“ICIS Galang Solidaritas Rohingya,” *Tabloid Diplomasi*, August 29, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Gilang Gumilar Eka.

<sup>35</sup>*Rapat Terbatas* is usually held to discuss burning issue that has direct influence on the society. On August, 2012, for example, *Rapat Terbatas* was held to discuss the issue of conflict between Sunni and Shia Community in Omben, Sampang, Madura.

<sup>36</sup>*Rapat Terbatas Polhukam* is usually attended by Ministries under coordination of *Menkopolhukam* (Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law, and Security) such as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defense, Intelligence Agency, and Chief of Police.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

his palace to discuss possible humanitarian assistance for Myanmar as part of commitment to address Rohingya conflict.<sup>37</sup>

After weeks of demonstration and heightened recurring debate in the media, in his first official statement, Minister Natalegawa spoke to the press, ensuring that the government has taken several diplomatic measures to address the conflict appropriately. He said, “We have always brought the issue into multilateral and bilateral discussions with Myanmar. So it’s not true that we don’t care. Our silence doesn’t mean we don’t care.”<sup>38</sup>

With similar tone, President Yudhoyono held a press statement on the situation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. This was conducted before he held an annual *Iftar* with his *Majlis Zikir* of 500 people. He took the opportunity to share his views on the Rohingya.<sup>39</sup> He said:

This late afternoon, I wish to give an explanation for the Indonesian people nationwide on an issue that has lately become a great interest to the public. Although it does not relate directly to us nor occur in Indonesia, the matter of Rohingya ethnics in Myanmar, I still wish to provide a more comprehensive and wholesome explanation so that Indonesian will better know. Two things are mistaken: The government does not stay silent, and we continue to work....<sup>40</sup>

It is clear from the statements issued by President and Minister Marty that the increasing public demand for the government has made the administration to publicly speak about the issue and clarify the diplomatic steps taken in the issue. As Satria and Jamaan argued, the widespread public opinion on the matter has put enough pressure for the President to speak publicly and deliver his statement clarifying steps taken and would be taken by the administration. The statement was considered an official answer to the wider public.<sup>41</sup> It was also clear from President’s statement before his three-country tour (Singapore, Myanmar, and Brunei Darussalam) on late April 2013. He said, “I will raise the ethnic Rohingya issue which has drawn wide

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Darius Erlangga.

<sup>38</sup> “RI Ready to Fight for Rohingya,” *The Jakarta Post*, November 11, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> The *Majelis Zikir* had been established by President SBY in 2004 and now had representatives nationwide, with an expected two million members.

<sup>40</sup> “Korespondensi Kepala Negara: Bahan Pendukung” (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, January 2013), p 6.

<sup>41</sup> Novandre Satria and Ahmad Jamaan, “Islam dan Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia: Peran Indonesia Dalam Konflik Di Rakhine, Myanmar,” *Jurnal Transnasional* 5, no. 1 (2013), p 958.

public attention in Indonesia although we know it is a communal conflict in that country."<sup>42</sup>

The main feature of government's account in speaking to the public on the issue was the creation of alternative account to apprehend the issue by creating counter opinion that the issue is not related to the *Islamophobia*, and nothing to do with the religious conflict or hatred. From the statements delivered by officials of Ministry, it has been asserted several times that the conflict is a communal conflict, involving different ethnics in the region. Such a counter-opinion statement is very pivotal for the government to shift the focus of opinion and further de-escalate the tension within the Indonesian community.

In the press statement, for example, President attempted to convince the audiences that the conflict is a communal conflict, similar to what happened in Poso and Ambon:

What is occurring is communal conflict, horizontal, between the Rohingya and the Rakhai (Rakhine) similar to what occurred in our country a few years ago in Poso and Ambon. Coincidentally, the Rohingya are Muslim, whereas their Rakhine are Buddhist.<sup>43</sup>

After meeting with the President SBY, Indonesia's special envoy to Muslim Rohingya, JusufKalla, insisted that the strife in the western part of Rakhine state is not religious in nature. He argued that other Muslim people in Myanmar, accounted for 2.5 million, can live harmoniously in the country. It is isolated only in the Rakhine state.<sup>44</sup>

Spreading information on the policies taken by Yudhoyono administration via mass media was another step of government to decrease the public tension. In response towards the wave of information on the media, Cabinet Secretary, following President's instruction, issued *suratedaran* (internal circular note) no. SE.552/Seskab/X/2012 on October 2012.<sup>45</sup> The note was meant for relevant Ministers in order to actively provide necessary information via mass media or social

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<sup>42</sup> "Yudhoyono urges Myanmar to continue reconciliation on Rohingya," April 24, 2013, Antara, March 20, 2017 <<http://www.antaraneews.com/en/news/88586/yudhoyono-urges-myanmar-to-continue-reconciliation-on-rohingya>>

<sup>43</sup>"Korespondensi Kepala Negara: Bahan Pendukung" (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, January 2013).

<sup>44</sup>"Kalla: Konflik Rohingya Bukan Konflik Agama," August 16, 2012, Tempo, January 16, 2017<<http://nasional.tempo.co/read/news/2012/08/16/078424065/kalla-konflik-rohingya-bukan-konflik-agama>>

<sup>45</sup>"Laporan Kinerja Sekretariat Kabinet Tahun 2014" (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2014), 257.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

media to the public regarding the policies taken by the government, especially those relating the sensitive issues that become national headline including on Rohingya conflict.

Almost all diplomatic gesture of SBY administration towards the issue of Rohingya made available to public and media afterwards. For instance, on the Halim PerdanaKusuma airport, President Yudhoyono made a press conference, informing specifically that he will raise the issue during bilateral talk with President TheinSein on April 2013. Ministry of Foreign Affairs also continuously distributed Press Statement before conducting any talk that discussed Rohingya issue.

### 5. Government's Shifting Position

As the only regional organization in Southeast Asia, ASEAN was deemed irresolute in addressing Rohingya issue. It was obvious when the conflict occurred in June 2012, ASEAN had not issued any statement clarifying its position on the issue at the first place. It was only after two months, on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2012, that ASEAN publicly issued its formal statement. The issuance of this statement, interestingly, was pushed by Minister Marty. The draft of statement was initiated by Indonesia, and took more than a month to be approved by all other ministers.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, as argued by Wakhidah, The ASEAN way, in which principle of non-intervention serves as its main ingredient, has created dilemmatic position for members of ASEAN to provide sustainable political solution for Myanmar. The government of Myanmar always claimed Rohingya conflict as internal matter, and that any other countries or political entities, including ASEAN, were not entitled to intervene.<sup>47</sup>

For instance, ASEAN Secretary General, Mr.SurinPitsuwan, attempted to promote a breakthrough in the pattern of problem-solving within ASEAN. He coined the idea of "tripartite talk", in which three core relevant parties (ASEAN, UN, and Myanmar) would meet on the same table to come up with the constructive ideas to address the problem. Mr. Pitsuwan's offer was based on the fear that the internal matter of Myanmar, if not handled carefully, would be regional matter and develop

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<sup>46</sup>Interview with Gilang Gumilar Eka.

<sup>47</sup>Nurul Wakhidah, "Prinsip Non-Intervensi ASEAN Dalam Upaya Penyelesaian Konflik Rohingya Di Myanmar" (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University, 2014), 64.

into wider the security concern. However, this proposal was turned down by the Myanmar government, insisting that it was their internal problem.<sup>48</sup>

Minister Natalegawa also met with Cambodian Minister for Foreign Affairs (Chair of ASEAN) and Mr. Pitsuwan in Phnom Penh in 2012, and proposed a special meeting to discuss the Rohingya issue under the agenda of humanitarian issues. The meeting was intended to make ASEAN focusing on providing humanitarian aids and reducing the unintended consequences of the conflict. The meeting was facilitated by the AICHR (ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights). However, the offer was once again turned down by Myanmar.<sup>49</sup>

Considering above explanations, added with the mounted domestic pressure, it was reasonable that Indonesia preferred to seek bilateral avenue in addressing the conflict rather than ASEAN level. At bilateral level, President Yudhoyono used his good offices by promoting constructive engagement to encourage Myanmar to peacefully settle the ongoing conflict. The measures reflected in series of intensive bilateral talks at highest and ministerial level.

On August 4, 2012, President SBY sent a formal letter to President U TheinSein. Three points were stressed in the letter; encouraging Myanmar to take concrete steps to ensure harmony among groups of different background; suggesting Nay Pyi Taw to invite delegation from OIC to visit Myanmar, including Rakhine State; and expressing Indonesia's readiness to lend necessary assistance upon the request of Myanmar.

Interestingly, despite President Yudhoyono explained to the public that it was communal conflict rather than religious conflict, he encouraged Myanmar to open its border for OIC working group and to invite OIC Secretary General to the site. In this regards, President Yudhoyono also met with OIC Secretary General on December 4, 2012, stressing the importance of OIC to have humanitarian mission deployed to the site of conflict. In the meeting, President Yudhoyono also asked for OIC to appoint JusufKalla formally as OIC Special Envoy for Myanmar. It was approved after President Yudhoyono formally sent letter of request on December 9, 2012.

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<sup>48</sup> "Myanmar 'rejects talks' on ethnic violence," October 31, 2012, *Aljazeera*, January 16, 2017, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2012/10/2012103161130375846.html>>

<sup>49</sup>Novie Lucky Andriyani, "Pelanggaran HAM Di ASEAN (Studi Kasus Etnis Rohingya)" (Yogyakarta: GadjahMada University, 2015), 73.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

In order to intensify the talk, President Yudhoyono held *tete a tete* meeting with his Myanmar Counterpart President U Thein Sein at the sidelines of the 21<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh in November 2012. The talks centered on the possible cooperation to address the conflict, including financial support for reconstruction, rehabilitation, and immediate humanitarian assistance. The meeting resulted in Indonesia's commitment to support Myanmar in terms of capacity building, which will be guided by "Blue Book" agreed upon by two sides. The issue of Rohingya also featured the bilateral talk between President Yudhoyono and President Thein Sein during state visit trip to Myanmar on 24 April, 2013. Yudhoyono said that serious steps need to be taken by Myanmar government to handle the issue by politically settling the issue of citizenship, as Indonesia considered it as the core source of the conflict.<sup>50</sup>

Upon the request of Myanmar, and to follow up the commitment made by President Yudhoyono, Minister Marty visited firsthand the site of conflict on January 9, 2013, and held bilateral meeting with Minister of Border Affairs and Chief Minister of Rakhine State.<sup>51</sup> The visit was also could be understood as political gesture of Indonesian government to show its real action. The visit was also considered important since one of its agendas was political settlement, in which Minister Marty encourages Myanmar to continue taking concrete steps in addressing contentious political dimensions, ranging from resettlement of displaced populations to granting of citizenship, as well as to look at issues of birth registration, work permits and permits for movement across the country for all, in line with a uniform national practice across the country ensuring that they are in keeping with accepted international norms.

Another agenda was to inform Myanmar that Indonesia would organize four capacity building partnership programs in 2013 in the fields of socio-economic development, democracy, SME development and land transportation management. In the spirit of friendship and solidarity, Indonesia also pledged to extend a US\$ 1 million humanitarian aid to Myanmar to build community center, schools, youth and sport center that promote reconciliation between the conflicting ethnics. The visit

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<sup>50</sup> "Presiden SBY Desak Penyelesaian Isu Rohingya," April 24, 2013, State Secretariat, January 9, 2017 <[http://www.setneg.go.id/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6973](http://www.setneg.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6973)>

<sup>51</sup> "Catatan Untuk Menteri Luar Negeri: Bahan Utama" (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2013).

was also intended to explore the possibility of Indonesia's participation in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process.<sup>52</sup>

The financial commitment has been realized in late 2014, when Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, A.M. Fachir, visited Myanmar and met Chief Minister of Rakhine State, U MaungMaungOhn, 8 December 2014. Vice Minister Fachir officially opened public schools in four different areas of Mawrawaddy, Maungdaw Township, Buthidaung village, and Thapyaygone Township. In his opening speech, Vice Minister stated that his was part of Indonesia's serious concern on settling the conflict in the regions by promoting constructive engagement and sharing best practices from Indonesia's experiences through humanitarian assistance. Indonesia targeted the humanitarian assistance for the children, one of the most vulnerable groups within the ongoing conflict.<sup>53</sup> The vocational education for the children is also provided by the government for the refugees within Indonesia territory while waiting their status provided by UNHCR.<sup>54</sup>

Responding to the enthusiasm of Indonesian community to help Rohingya people, government of Indonesia, through its Embassy in Yangon also coordinated all humanitarian assistances provided for Rohingya (See Table 7.1). These humanitarian assistances were supplied by different social organizations, mostly Muslim organizations, and channeled by the government as part of its commitment to implement multi-track diplomacy.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>“Bahan Masukan Kunjungan Menlu January 2013” (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, January 2013).

<sup>53</sup>“RI Dorong Rekonsiliasi Konflik Di Wilayah Rakhine Melalui Pendekatan Kemanusiaan,” February 27, 2015, *Tabloid Diplomasi*, January 9, 2017 <<http://www.tabloiddiplomasi.org/current-issue/207-diplomasi-januari-2015/1824-ri-dorong-rekonsiliasi-konflik-di-wilayah-rakhine-melalui-pendekatan-kemanusiaan.html>>

<sup>54</sup>Bagus Subekti Nuswantoro, “Sikap Negara ASEAN Terhadap Pengungsi Rohingya Studi Komparatif Kebijakan Indonesia dan Thailand 2015” (Yogyakarta: University of GadjahMada, 2015), p 61.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Gilang Gumilar Eka.

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

**Table 3**

List of Humanitarian Aids coordinated through Government of Indonesia  
as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013

No	Organizations	Assistance		
		Cash	Non-Cash	
1	Indonesian Embassy	US\$ 5000		
2	Indonesian Red Cross		7.210 kg Emergency Aids (3000 blankets, 10000 sarongs, and 500 hygiene kits)	First Phase (25 August 2012)
			50000 sarongs, 2000 mosquito nets, 2000 water bottle (20 liter) and 100 kg standard medicines	Second Phase (3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2012)
			40 hand water pumps, 20 public toilets, 12 water tanks, and a water carrier vehicle	
		US\$ 44000	100 ton of rices	
		US\$ 25000	Ambulance Car	
3	PKPU (National Humanitarian NGO), <i>DompêtDuafa</i> (The Poor's Wallet), and <i>Rumah Zakat</i> (The House of Alms and Charity)	US\$ 200000	21 shelters, 33 public toilets, 23 units of water pump, and 90000 of burning woods	
		US\$ 100000	Foods	
4	<i>AksiCepatTanggap</i> (ACT) / Quick Response Action	US\$ 35000	Food	
		US\$ 50000	10 units of shelters	
5	BadanAmil Zakat (Alms and Charity Distribution Body)	US\$ 20000		
6	MER-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Committee)	US\$ 3500	Medical supplies	

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Another issue raised by Muslim organizations, besides Indonesia's active involvement, was the lives of Rohingya refugees who fled to Indonesia. It was noted that until July 2012, approximately 400 Rohingya people were in Indonesia. In most cases, the Rohingya migrants were found floating in boats on seas within Indonesian water territory. They were housed in several regions in Indonesia such as Aceh, Medan, Tanjung Pinang, Batam (Riau Islands), Kupang- East Nusa Tenggara.

In light of that, Indonesia until now is not among the countries that ratified the 1951 Vienna Convention on the Status of Refugees and its Protocol in 1967. Therefore, Indonesia has not had a clear national regulation with regard to the status of refugees, and does not have legal obligation and authority to deal with Rohingya

migrants entering Indonesia. However, as said by Minister Marty, as country with majority Muslim population, Indonesia would not send back the refugees the country of origin. But rather, Indonesia would provide safe place for them and coordinated with UNHCR for further process until they are granted the refugee status.<sup>56</sup>

### **C. Conclusion**

The Rohingya issue provides relevant case to understand the extent of political Islam's influence on the Indonesian foreign policy. Political Islam gives context within which the Government of Indonesia reacted to the issue. In brief, Indonesia has been involved in the matter through several means: (1) actively urged ASEAN to take real action to the matter, (2) proposed political settlement through bilateral meeting with Myanmar, (3) provided humanitarian assistance through establishment of schools in the site of conflict, and (4) accepted the *Rohingya* refugee who denied access to the countries of destination and provided safe places for them who landed in Indonesia, despite not being party of 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.

There are some things need to be noted. *First*, there was some reluctances to provide political advice on the conflict in Myanmar. Indonesia, unfortunately, was at the same time also beset with intra-conflict scuh as Ahmadiyah and *Shia* prosecution in some regions in Indonesia (West Jawa and Madura). It was not timely for Indonesia to "meddle" in the matter. It was indicated also by controversial statement of UlilAbsharAbdalla, member of ruling party, who compared Rohingya with Ahmadiyah case in Indonesia. However, as stated by President Yudhoyono, despite the fact that the Rohingya was a communal conflict, which need to be solved domestically, Indonesia found it urgent to show significant level of concern toward the matter. In policy brief provided by General Directorate of Asia-Pacific and Africa Affairs, it has been noted that the social pressure from Indonesian community, especially from Muslim community have been one of the major factors behind the intensifying measures taken by Indonesia. Rallying demonstrations, verbal threat, and physical attack have been alarming to the extent that the Yudhoyono administration was in need to show some degrees of responsibility and concern

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<sup>56</sup> "WargaRohingyaHadapiKetidakpastian di Indonesia," June 5, 2013, VOA Indonesia, December 9, 2016 <<http://www.voaindonesia.com/content/warga-rohingya-hadapi-ketidakpastian-di-indonesia/1695594.html>>

## THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY

towards the issue. In this case, domestic security and Indonesia's bilateral relations with Myanmar were at stake. *Second*, the information process happened within Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the high ranking meeting conducted to discuss the issue indicated to certain extent the level of pressure made by Muslim community for Yudhoyono administration to act in appropriate manner to "meddle" in the conflict. *Third*, despite consistently denying religious element of the conflict through press briefing and conference, Yudhoyono administration was aware that the issue has been understood widely as religious conflict by the public. For that, it is understandable that the point made in SBY letter to Thein Sein was suggesting Myanmar to invite OIC representative, rather than representatives of UN or other "neutral" Agencies.

*Last*, there was development of approach taken by the Government of Indonesia in addressing the matter. It was commenced with the standard condemnation, and urging the parties to solve amicably through peaceful means to the real humanitarian assistance. Late 2012, as the pressure from Muslim community increased, the Yudhoyono administration took real action by proposing political settlement through bilateral meeting. Despite the fact that Indonesia was not Chair of ASEAN, Indonesia therefore launched swift diplomatic action by inviting all ASEAN foreign ministers to at least issue the statement, urging Myanmar to deescalate the conflict. With the inability of ASEAN to take real action to address the conflict, due to mainly the ASEAN way of non-intervention and sovereignty, Indonesia decided to pursue political talk to Myanmar through annual bilateral meeting, send Minister Marty to the site of conflict, and take humanitarian assistances towards the people of Rohingya. The meeting with the chairman of MUI particularly resulted in the government's commitment to provide financial aid for the refugees.

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