

## Religion and Public Diplomacy: The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesia - Afghanistan Peace Agenda

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### **Abstract:**

*This research aims to analyze the role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in succeeding the Indonesian's public diplomacy through peace agenda for Afghanistan. Cooperation and partnership between Indonesia and Afghanistan entered a new phase with a focus on the conflict reconciliation and capacity building agendas. Indonesia becomes Afghanistan's top choice to become a peace broker between the Afghan government and the Taliban, since no assistance has been offered by other Muslim countries and the Indonesian's property of Islamic 'Wasathiyah' diplomacy has been attractive. Thus, this research will answer why is NU more favorable than its similar moderate organization, Muhammadiyah, and what are the main roles of NU in supporting the government's agenda. By using interview and collecting secondary data and implementing soft power theory framework, multitrack diplomacy, and public diplomacy, this study found that there are three important roles hold by NU in this case. First, NU as an actor who has credibility in the field of Islamic Wasathiyah discourse, second, NU acts as a strategic collaborative partner of the Indonesian government by engaging in several official state programs, and third, NU carries out its public diplomacy role by initiating independent programs for Afghanistan.*

**Key Words:** *Indonesia, Afghanistan, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Public Diplomacy, Soft Power*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tobias Debiel *et al.* (2009) point out two key factors for the state-building process in the 'fragile states', such as Afghanistan, namely identity and legitimacy. Identity is important as a determinant factor to reflect social cohesion of a community, while legitimacy is needed by a government to exercise its power with authority. After years of engaging with long-term violence conflict, Afghanistan recently began to rise and to rebuild its nation-state. A complicated conflict of interest among anti-government groups vis a vis with pro-government military forces brings Afghanistan to a very devastating condition, with a high number of displacements, injuries, deaths, and poverty. Annual report of

UNAMA (2020) shows that throughout 2019, there were 1,202 women casualties; 345 were killed and 857 injured. However, the negotiation between the Afghan government, the United States of America, and the Taliban have been going on for several times, but the issue of mistrust always shades the talks and ends with no significant results.

Under the leadership of the current Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, a peaceful negotiation has been pursued by offering the Taliban to become an independent political party in Afghanistan, while he calls on America that military forces in Afghanistan were not a good choice to solve the Afghan problem. Ashraf Ghani then aims to build Afghanistan supporting networks internationally from several countries, including Indonesia.

The absence of international assistance initiated by Muslim countries in the Middle East prompted Ashraf Ghani to approach Indonesia as a partner and also a role model for Afghanistan. Indonesia's President, Joko Widodo, welcomes Afghan's intention to build a stronger bilateral relationship by initiating some collaborative agendas, aiming for the peace of Afghanistan. As the largest Muslim based and third-largest democratic countries in the world, Joko Widodo believes that Indonesia is able to contribute much to Afghanistan through implementing moderate Islam models such as Indonesia. "*Islam Wasathiyah*" or "Islam in the middle of the way" is considered by Indonesia as the right diplomacy to solve the conflict in Afghanistan, since it emphasizes the aspect of peace, tolerance, and progressive.

The involvement of Islam in Indonesia's foreign policy is not a new phenomenon for Indonesia. Rizal Sukma (2004) explained that Islam has become an important factor in decision making, but Indonesia has always been trapped in a dualism between Islamic ideology and Pancasila. Therefore, the Indonesian government under the Joko Widodo regime tends to choose the middle way by involving non-governmental actors to become a safe-guard of Indonesian Muslim ideology in order to be always coherent with the basic principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are two important organizations in every government policy making, including in the peace agenda of Indonesia and Afghanistan. Both of them were actively involved as partners in several government programs, such as by hosting the visit of the Afghanistan Security Council in 2017, joining the Trilateral Ulama Conference in Bogor 2018, and sending the representation of women in the *Afghanistan Women's Solidarity Network-Indonesia* (AIWSN). However, along with the progress of the agenda, NU appeared to be more active in showing its commitment to the realization of peace in Afghanistan.

Without intending to discredit Muhammadiyah's contribution to this agenda, the assumption above is based on two facts which will be elaborated more in the next section of this article. *First*, in addition to being a collaborative partner for the government, NU is able to initiate its own independent program, outside the Indonesia's official programs, to strengthen public engagement between the two countries. *Second*, Afghan Ulama as important actors in conflict reconciliation showed greater sympathy for NU, through several visits to NU's head office in Jakarta and the initiation of the establishment of NU Afghanistan (NUA) independently outside the command line of NU Indonesia. These two reasons are the main basis for why NU is the main focus in this article, although it cannot be denied that Muhammadiyah as the main partner of the Indonesian government has a significant contribution to the success of this agenda.

Therefore, this paper will try to answer the question why NU is more favoured than other Muslim organizations and also to analyse the role of NU inherently in supporting the Indonesian government's agenda for Afghanistan. To answer these

questions, the data obtained comes from the first hand participant observation in several occasion related to the agenda, (namely joining the *Bali Democracy Student Conference* (BDSC) as part of the annual *Bali Democracy Forum* (BDF) in 2019) and engagement during working service at Amanatul Ummah Islamic Boarding School), an interview with an involved expert in this agenda, Mrs. Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, previous existing researches, and some online articles due to the limited number of available academic sources of this new issue.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Indonesia – Afghanistan Overview**

After the President's visit series between Ashraf Ghani and Joko Widodo, bilateral relations between Indonesia and Afghanistan entered a new phase. The focus of the collaboration is aimed at three main agendas, namely peacebuilding, capacity building, and trade. Because trade cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan is not a new bilateral agenda, the first two agendas are the main focus of this paper. During my involvement in Bali Democracy Forum 2019, Retno Marsudi, The Indonesia's current Foreign Minister, mentioned that the cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan would involve two important peace agents, namely ulama and women. Ulama involvement is intended as an effort to create peace, while women are a continuation of the capacity building agenda in Afghanistan. In its implementation, the Indonesian government not only relies on government to government relations but also engages the Indonesian Muslim community to support the agenda. Behind these two main focuses, Indonesia initiated its soft-power strategy capabilities in the form of Islamic diplomacy, specifically under the name 'Islam Wasathiyah'.

Islam Wasathiyah as the Indonesian diplomacy jargon for Afghanistan was first introduced at the Trilateral Ulama Conference on May 2018 in Bogor. The conference was also a starting point for the involvement of ulama in the conflict reconciliation effort in Afghanistan. The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) is the host of the conference organizing the theme of '*Islam Rahmatan lil'alamini: Peace and Stability in Afghanistan*'. Unfortunately, the three countries involved, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, failed to bring the Taliban as a key player in the conflict in Afghanistan. The conference produced the Bogor Declaration which in general has two important points, 1) the vital role of the Ulama as *warasatul anbiya* (heirs of the prophets) in promoting peaceful Islam, 2) the redefinition of Islam as being '*wasathiyah*' (mids, peace, tolerance and moderate) (Afghan Government, 2018).

Indonesia's neutrality in becoming a peace broker in Afghanistan finally attracted the attention of the Taliban to be involved in the peace agenda for Afghanistan. The Taliban came to Indonesia a few months after the Bogor Conference to welcome Indonesia's initiative. They visited the MUI headquarters, NU, and the Presidential Palace to discuss strategic steps for conflict reconciliation. In their visit to Indonesia, the Taliban learns much about Islam in Indonesia through discussion and direct engagement to those Muslim organizations.

On the other hand, in the capacity building agenda, the focus of women's empowerment has been implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the end of 2019, right after Indonesia successfully received the mandate for the extension of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) program until September 2020. The mandate consists of upholding the principles of human rights, women empowerment, child protection, and gender equality, and the mandate to maintain

democracy in Afghanistan ahead of the presidential election at the end of 2019 (MFA Indonesia, 2019a). The program began by holding a reciprocal agenda for Afghan women conducted in Indonesia first, then in Afghanistan. In my interview with Siti Ruhaini, as one of the facilitators in the program, she mentioned that the agenda focused on issues of education, economic empowerment, and health. The program led to the formation of the Afghanistan Indonesia Women Solidarity Network (AIWSN) which was inaugurated in Kabul in early 2020. In the inauguration, Siti Ruhaini said that along with her there were also representatives from NU and Muhammadiyah as partners of the Indonesian government.

In implementing peace agendas for Afghanistan, Indonesia implemented multitrack diplomacy by utilizing its Islamic soft power. Joseph Nye defines a country's soft power lies in three main sources, namely culture (the centre of attraction for others), political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2008). In exercising its soft power diplomacy, the Indonesian government involved several public organizations that were considered relevant to the diplomacy it was using, one of which was NU. NU became a solid government partner in carrying out soft power through its public diplomacy instruments. Jan Mellisen explained that public diplomacy is an effort to influence individuals and organizations in other countries in a positive way, so as to be able to change the stigma that other countries have towards our country (Melissen, 2007). In supporting the Indonesia-Afghanistan agenda, NU has at least two important roles: *first*, NU has a major contribution to the realization of the Indonesian Islamic style, which is later accommodated as *Islam Wasathiyah*; *second*, NU runs several independent programs as a form of public diplomacy.

### **NU as an Asset for Indonesian Islamic Diplomacy**

The involvement of faith-based organizations in foreign policy becomes the alert for global attention shifts towards the separation between religion and politics. The existence of religion in the public sphere gains more recognition since there have been many religious organizations held the program for supporting various sustainable development goals. Abdulaziz Sachedina (2001) describes that the negation of religion (Islam) in the public sphere violates its fundamental values because he considers that religion is revealed by God as the mission for creating a better human being (Sachedina, 2001: 3). Further, this modern global politics recently experience a threat of transnational terrorism organization which is closely linked to a particular religious teaching. Besides, there are many communal conflicts in some countries triggered by religious ideology contestation. There is an urgent need for religion to raise up its existence for shifting from its common negative image to be a better and more peaceful nuance. Marshall also comments that religion is often looked in a special way in the conflicting arena, because of its double standard; religion may contribute to conflict but also can bring a forgiveness and peace-making tradition (Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007: 280).

NU is one of the faith-based organization which has been aware of the issue and starting to promote a peaceful Islam to the international community. Considered as the most moderate and tolerance Muslim organization in Indonesia, NU officially formulated Islam Nusantara as its distinguished Islamic belief. Generally, Islam Nusantara is understood as the Indonesian Islam specialty which stresses the importance of local culture acculturation, religious pluralism, moderate, tolerance, and peace. There is at least two adequate definitions of Islam Nusantara, based on two dimensions, spatial and cultural. In the spatial dimension, Azyumardi Azra explained that Islam Nusantara refers to the Islamic

character in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Pattani, and Mindanao, so that Islam Nusantara is identified with the term Southeast Asian Islam (Luqman, 2016). Whereas in the cultural dimension, Islam Nusantara is understood as a characteristic of Islam that is able to adapt to the culture, values, and knowledge of the local community, so that it becomes very contextual. This definition is also addressed by Akhmad Sahal by saying that Islam Nusantara rejects the 'universalization' meaning of Islam and emphasizes on indigenization (adapting Islam with the local context) (Sahal & Aziz, 2015).

From the Muslim's legitimacy point of view in Indonesia, the term Islam Nusantara has, in fact, drawn pro and contra responses. Alexander Arifianto (2016) in his RSIS Commentary entitled '*Islam Nusantara: NU's Bid to Promote "Moderate Indonesian Islam"*' highlights the potential for disagreements among Muslims, both outside and within the NU organization. An example of opposition from outside NU was voiced by Irfan Awwas, Chairman of the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI) who stated that Islam Nusantara was a forbidden innovation (*Bid'ah*) that was not in accordance with the original Islam as in the Arab world. On the other hand, a counter response within NU emerged from Buya Yahya, a popular cleric among NU, who argued that Islam Nusantara was the driving force of Islamic schools towards liberal Islam. More importantly, regarding Islam Nusantara as a representation of moderate Islam in the realm of international politics, Arifianto resonates with Jeremi Menchik's opinion that sees its impossibility of being exported to other countries, as has been attempted by NU in various international ulama conferences (Arifianto, 2016).

Like answering the challenges posed by Alexander Arifianto, James Hoesterey (2018) actually sees that the possibility of moderate Indonesian Islam (including Islam Nusantara) which represents local nuances in producing the meaning of religious life is very prospectful to be adopted by the Western world. Hoesterey proposes that moderate Islam is perhaps best understood not in singular terms of what Islam is but as competing visions and projects about what Islam could be (Hoesterey, 2018: 407). In line with Hoesterey's idea, Andi Purwono (2017) sees that NU's diplomacy to promote Islam *Rahmatan Lil'alamin* within the framework of moderate Islam or Islam Nusantara is an attempt to counter the bad narrative and image of Islam in the Western world over the consequences of the terrorism threat under the flag of certain Islamic ideology.

Relating to the sixteenth objective of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Peace-Justice-Strong Institutions, NU internally considers that there are at least two major concerns which motivate NU to actively promote a peaceful Islam Nusantara to the international public, namely the excess of *Arab Spring* conflict and the wave of *takfiri* movement (PBNU, 2015: 317-320). NU believes that the Arab Spring is the first triggering case to the chaos condition in some Muslim middle-east countries. The rise of radicalism ideology causes a domino effect of security, such as poverty, gender inequality, instable political institution, etc. While the raise of *takfiri* movement which infiltrates Muslim countries are considered by NU as a serious threat to opposing *Ahlussunah wal Jamaah* (Islam based on the Quran and Hadith) principle of NU. The movement is used to be brought by transnational movements that have characteristics of *tathboruf* (hardcore extremism), *ghulum* (excessive), closed-minded, and intolerant. NU believes that Indonesia is one of the countries which has been facing this threat and NU becomes a pioneer to save Indonesia. Meanwhile, at international level, ketidaktertarikan dunia Barat terhadap karakter masyarakat Muslim di Timur Tengah menjadi gap penting yang berpotensi untuk diterimanya Islam moderate yang digagas oleh NU (Hoesterey, 2018: 407).

There are two important events to see the implementation of NU's commitment towards a global sustaining peace. In 2003, NU invited scholars from several countries to join the *International Conference of Islamic Scholars* (ICIS), in order to talk about issues of global conflict and equalize perceptions of moderate Islam (Muzadi, 2010). In addition, NU was also the initiator of the *International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders* (ISOMIL) in 2016, which 400 scholars from 30 countries attended to discuss the synergy of fellow Muslims to be able to implement moderate Islam like what NU has formulated earlier. (LibForAll Foundation, 2016). Additionally, NU's strength in international affairs is also supported by the existence of 21 NU Special Branches assigned to propagate moderate NU style of Islam in some foreign countries. Further, NU also provides a number of scholarships for foreign students from Pattani, Thailand, and Afghanistan to study and learn about Islam Nusantara in Indonesia (PBNU, 2015: 333).

The work of Andi Purwono (2020) has well recorded several implementations of NU's commitment to establish a global sustaining peace through its multilateral or conference diplomacy as a popular diplomacy style in the twentieth century. There were at least three important conferences initiated by NU in carrying out its public diplomacy. *First*, the *International Conference of Islamic Scholars* (ICIS) which was first initiated in 2004 in Jakarta and was attended by 67 scholars from 47 countries. In general, ICIS' vision is to transform moderate Islamic values in building civilization and social ethics, so as to be able to create a peaceful world order. While one of its missions is to implement Rahmatan Lil'alamin's Islamic values and build a transnational network of ulama who are able to become pioneers in resolving conflicts and building world peace. As a sustainability forum, ICIS was successfully held in the following years; in 2006, 2009, and 2014. *Second*, the *World Sufi Forum* (*Al-Multaqo as-Sufi al-Alamy*) which was initiated by *Jam'iyah Ablith Tariqah Al-Mu'tabarab An-Nahdiyab* (JATMAN) under NU's structural organization. Showing less different from ICIS, this forum seeks to build an epistemic community of International Sufist Ulama to realize international peace based on the exploration of the values of Sufism. The conference was recorded as being held in 2016 (twice a year), 2017, 2018, and 2019. *Third*, the *International Summit of the Moderate Islamic Leaders* (ISOMIL) which was directly organized by PBNU (NU's Head Office) in 2016 to invite a greater international attention, not only from Islamic-based countries but also from secular ones. Those representatives were from Middle Eastern countries, America, Europe, Australia, and Asia, which totally consisted of 400 scholars from 30 countries. The background for holding the forum was based on NU's concern for international conditions which increasingly showed a tendency for horizontal conflicts (civil wars) in various countries. The aim of ISOMIL is to discuss and promote Islam Nusantara which has been initiated by NU as an alternative solution to create peace based on Islamic values (LibForAll Foundation, 2016; Purwono, 2020).

### **Jokowi's Government Considerations: *From Islam Nusantara to Islam Wasathiyah***

Andi Purwono (2017) describes that the success of moderate Islamic ideas in Indonesia's international diplomacy discourse is not only determined by the existence of religious organizations that act as 'norm entrepreneurs' (Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah) but also by the availability of norm entrepreneurs from the formal political elite that determines the idea's level of acceptance to become a state's official agenda. This is in line with what James Hoesterey (2018) focuses on in viewing moderate Islamic discourse in Indonesia. Hoesterey stated that, in fact, moderate Islam in Indonesia

has been internalized to various levels of society; from diplomats to religious leaders, government institutions, civil society and religious organizations (Hoesterey, 2018: 406). Furthermore, Hoesterey also found that the emergence of Dr. Hasan Wirajuda, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia 2001 - 2009, has a vital role as an elite of norms entrepreneur in accommodating and intensifying Indonesia's public diplomacy by building the image of Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The combination of the government's interest to manufacture Islamic ideology and the needs of religious organizations to convey political interest, in the end, make moderate Islamic discourse always get a special attention in every episode of the Indonesian government, with no exception in the era of Joko Widodo.

In the two last periods of Joko Widodo's presidency, Indonesia intensifies more significantly the role of moderate Islam in international affairs through Islamic diplomacy, called *Islam wasathiyah*. There are domestic and international factors that encourage Joko Widodo to implement moderate Islam as the prominent agenda for Indonesia's diplomacy. From the domestic factor, Joko Widodo recently faces the threat of Indonesia *kebilafah* (Islamic state) propaganda, which is vocally demanded by various fundamentalist groups. This motivates Joko Widodo to approach two moderate Muslim organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah, to be the government's partner through various national and international agendas. Dewi Fortuna Anwar (2010) sees the relationship between the domestic conditions of a country influencing the government's choice of decisions in determining its foreign policy (Anwar, 2010). Hadza Min Fadhli Robby (2020), in his essay for UII annual reports, perceives that Joko Widodo's partiality towards moderate Islam is intended to be a *self-defense mechanism* against radical and extreme understandings of Islam (Robby, 2020).

On the other hand, from international circumstances, Joko Widodo faces the global threat of *the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* (ISIS) which begins to intersect into Indonesia's region. The urgency of promoting a more moderate Islam is needed by global politics, and Indonesia intends to take over that role. Since there have not been any country which actively promotes a moderate Islam comprehensively, while Indonesia realizes that there is a chance to be a new axis of Islam world, so that makes sense that Indonesia currently is strengthening the Islamic based diplomacy. NU with its Islam Nusantara and Muhammadiyah with its *Islam Berkemajuan* become the valuable power capital to increase the bargaining position of Indonesia. This can be proven by the Afghanistan case, which some Afghan politicians and ulama have previously offered the third party role for reconciling conflict to Arab Saudi and Egypt through Al-Azhar Ulama Council, but there was no positive feedback given to Afghanistan (Robby, 2020). And as a result, Indonesia's government has been taking this role through collaboration with NU and Muhammadiyah as the promotor of moderate Islam in Indonesia.

However, long before Islam Wasathiyah became the main label of Indonesian Islam, Islam Nusantara was already more familiar to President Joko Widodo. Siti Ruhaini confirmed it, during my interview with her, that Joko Widodo formerly was more familiar with the Islam Nusantara, until there was a massive protest from MUI West Sumatra (West Sumatra) that refused the generalization term of Islam Nusantara. Heyder Affan (2015) also notes that during *iftar* (breaking the fast) with NU ulamas, Joko Widodo publicly appreciated Islam Nusantara as the face of Indonesian Islam which is characterized as friendly, anti-radical, tolerant, and inclusive. Along with the pros and cons of the discourse on Islam Nusantara, as commented by Alexander Arifianto above, Joko Widodo considers the other jargon as the best acceptable replacement which sounds more universal for

Indonesian moderate Islam. Even the ideas do not show any difference with Islam Nusantara, Islam Wasathiyah which was proposed by the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) is then chosen by Indonesian government as the new term of Indonesian current diplomacy. As a result, Jokowi then launched and promoted it in the *High-Level Consultation of World Muslim Ulamas and Islamic Scholars* 2018 in Bogor.

### **The Role of NU's Public Diplomacy in Indonesia-Afghanistan Peace Agenda**

The Indonesian government has chosen the right decision in implementing a *multitrack diplomacy* strategy in establishing cooperation with Afghanistan. Diamond and McDonald define multitrack diplomacy as the holistic diplomacy conducted by government, non-governmental organization, and also individuals which require the active involvement of the state's public (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). This is based on two reasons, *first*, because the presence of the state in resolving domestic conflicts in other countries is identical to the political interests, which can worsen the condition of conflict, *secondly*, because of the commitment of Indonesian Muslim communities through public organizations to create world peace has been well established.

Based on the two reasons above, NU has a more dominant position on the basis of natural norms that are built to make commitments in seeking conflict resolution in various countries and building sustainable world peace (Purwono, 2020). From ideational perspective, comparing NU's Islam Nusantara and Muhammadiyah's *Islam Berkemajuan*, NU's becomes more prominently suitable because it has some related principles to the reconciliation and peace-making agenda, such as the principles of *attawassuf* (moderate), *al-'tidal* (justice), *al-tawazun* (balance), and *al-tasamu* (tolerance) in Islam Nusantara discourse (Burhani, 2012: 517). Andi Purwono, in his earlier study, showed that those principles explicitly are well implemented through NU's own initiative to conduct diplomacy for diverse range of conflict reconciliation; from intra-faith conflicts (Sunni-Shiah in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria), non-international conflict (among Muslim communities domestically in South of Thailand and Myanmar), to international conflict (like a high tension between the West and Islam towards religious freedom *vis-a-vis* religious blasphemy) (Purwono, 2013: 14-15). On the other hand, Muhammadiyah's *Islam Berkemajuan* tends to put more implementation focuses on the infrastructure development and society's welfare through its own philanthropy community. This dominance is increasingly seen in the Indonesia-Afghanistan cooperation which shows NU's more activeness than Muhammadiyah and other Islamic organizations to succeed the agenda. The claim is supported by the evidence that there is no independent program initiated by Muhammadiyah for Afghanistan like what NU has established for, instead Muhammadiyah merely plays as the government's partnership program such as providing some Muhammadiyah affiliated campuses for Afghanistan students who get scholarships from the Indonesian government.

In this case, the Indonesian government's decision to involve NU as the main partner in conflict reconciliation in Afghanistan is an effective strategy to accelerate the objectives of the agenda. There are two ways in which NU plays a role in assisting the Indonesian government's agenda for Afghanistan, namely 1) through a strategic collaborative agenda, namely NU and the Indonesian government merged into a joint program, and 2) through NU's own independent programs (people to people).

In the first type of role, the strategic collaboration agenda, NU acts as a government invitation partner for the Afghanistan agenda. The function of NU's presence in government programs is to represent civil society and also as an epistemic group that has



credibility on related issues. Jan Mellisen theorizes that the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the diplomacy can increase the credibility of state government and also strengthens the engagement between two countries' civil society (Melissen, 2007). In the case of cooperation between Indonesia and Afghanistan from 2017 to 2020, NU is involved in at least three important agendas, namely 1) NU's involvement in the Bogor Trilateral Ulama Conference, 2) hosted in welcoming the visit of the Taliban in 2019, and 3) sending female representatives in the Afghanistan Indonesia Women Solidarity Network program. The three programs are as explained in the previous section.

Indonesia's must be benefited from the activeness of NU in strengthening the peace agenda with Afghanistan. The presence of NU in the collaborative agenda makes the reconciliation process among Afghanistan's stakeholders becoming more flexible and genuine. The flexibility and genuine dialogue are important since Indonesia's government steps further to promote moderate Islamic diplomacy, which actually as the non-Islamic state, Indonesia's government experience a lack of credibility. This lacking condition can drive the foreign actors to be suspicious of Indonesia's political interest. NU's public diplomacy gives a significant contribution to tackling this issue. Shaun Riordan explains that the success of public diplomacy is not determined by asserting values but by engaging in a genuine dialogue through a good collaboration with the broader civil societies (Riordan, 2007). It has proved that NU's Islam Nusantara is more attractive for the Taliban and Afghans Ulama.

Whereas the second type of role, independent program of public diplomacy, there are two programs of public diplomacy which belong to NU. *First*, the establishment of NU Afghanistan as the request of Ulama in Afghanistan and *second*, the scholarship program funded by NU.

NU Afghanistan (NUA) was established in 2014 as the request of Afghans Ulama after their visit to NU Indonesia's office. The establishment of NUA is the signal of acceptance from the international community towards the idea of Indonesian Islam, specifically Islam Nusantara promoted by NU Indonesia. Based on the report issued by NU Online, 'In 2016, it was noted that the NU of Afghanistan has spread in 22 provinces involving more than 6000 native Muslim scholars from various groups and factions. Now NUA is working to develop NU in 34 provinces in Afghanistan' (Fathoni, 2019). The Islamic diplomacy of NU also holds the legitimation from the Indonesian embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. In 2019, the Indonesian embassy and NUA collaborated to hold the annual of NUA congress. Dr. Arief Rachman MD, as the ambassador Indonesia for Afghanistan stated that the congress is useful to discuss the solution of Afghanistan conflict, as well as increasing the engagement of the Indonesian government, Indonesian Ulama, and Afghans Ulama (MFA Indonesia, 2019b).

Second NU's public diplomacy is exercised through its scholarship programs for Afghanistan youths. Scholarship becomes the prominent tool of public diplomacy because it involves directly the engagement between the civil society of other countries and the host county. As the soft power dimension, Joseph Nye considers the scholarship program is the effort to develop the lasting relationship over many years with the individuals as the key to objectives (Nye, 2008: 102). This scholarship must be distinguished from the official Indonesian government's scholarship program which is in collaboration with MUI providing 135 seats for Afghan students. NU prefers to run its own scholarship programs through a partnership with two NU's affiliated universities, Institut KH Achmad Chalim (IKHAC) Amanatul Ummah Pacet Mojokerto and Wahid Hasyim University, Semarang.

As the explanation of KH Asep Saifuddin Chalim as the director of IKHAC, during my voluntary service in his Amanatul Ummah Boarding School, that the selection of scholarship program uses the network of NU Teacher Association / *Persatuan Guru NU* (PERGUNU) for domestic students and NU's international networking for the international students. One of the students, namely Faril Q. Kukar, explains that he is the representative of NU Afghanistan whose father becomes the director (Pitono, 2016). While in Wahid Hasyim University Semarang, there are 23 students from Afghanistan who study for the undergraduate programs.

If we are looking at the collaboration between the Indonesian government and its public organization in promoting a new national-branding of moderate Islam, it is not impossible that Indonesia will be succeed to achieve the goal of the agenda. Furthermore, by consistently promoting a moderate Islam to the international public, it is very possible for Indonesia to be a leader or good role model for the Muslim world. As Joseph Nye argues that 'countries that tend to be more appealing in postmodern international relations are those that assist to frame the problem, whose culture and ideas are closely relevant to international norms, and whose credibility abroad is strengthened by their values and policies' (Melissen, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

It has been argued that the involvement of non-state actors in international politics gains its popularity in the last twenty-first century. In the discourse of diplomacy, public diplomacy goes further for the contestation of idea and value, as well as the involvement of religion in peacebuilding agenda becomes more relevant nowadays. Fortunately, Indonesia's government has been aware that Indonesian Islam can give an impactful soft-power to the international community. However, the government's capability in the field of Islam has vulnerably lacked credibility, since Indonesia is not considered as an Islamic state and closely linked to the secular-democratic nation-state. Therefore, the involvement of faith-based organizations through public diplomacy is prominent for convincing other countries.

In the case of the Indonesia and Afghanistan peace agenda, NU becomes the non-governmental actor which has a significant influence on achieving the goal. NU's participation deserves to be distinguished by the other Indonesian Muslim organization since NU has been consistently showing a strong commitment to creating a sustained global peace. Meanwhile, for the Afghanistan peacebuilding agenda, NU holds three main roles contributing for the Indonesian government. *First*, NU has given a strong fundamental principle of Indonesian Islam through its Islam Nusantara, until it turns into a new Islam Wasathiyah slogan and *second*, NU helps the government through collaborative strategic agenda in several state-official agendas, and *third*, NU creates its own independent program to strengthen the government's agenda; through NU Afghanistan network and NU scholarship program for Afghanistan. It is always possible for some to reject the significant contribution of NU in this agenda, but we fairly should not neglect the whole effort given by NU to reinforce the Indonesian government.

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