

The Role of Islamic Movements in Indonesia and Malaysia in Rejecting the Abraham Accords

Mohamad Ridhuan Mohd Zawawi, Anwar Fakhri Omar, Md
Yazid Ahmad

Pusat Kajian Syariah, Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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Abstract

The collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate left Muslim nations without a guardian to preserve their sovereignty and territorial integrity. This downfall also triggered the rise of various Islamic movements worldwide, including in Indonesia and Malaysia, aiming to restore the glory of Islam. The Abraham Accords, signed by several Arab countries with Israel, had a significant impact on Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly due to speculations that both nations might follow suit. These unfounded reports caused a public outcry, with Islamic movements in Indonesia and Malaysia voicing strong opposition. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of Islamic movements in these two countries in rejecting the Abraham Accords. This qualitative research utilizes document and content analysis as methods of data collection. The findings reveal several key roles played by these Islamic movements, including urging the governments to reject the accords, condemning those involved, supporting the governments' firm stance, clarifying the true nature of the Abraham Accords, and deeming the accords as unlawful.

Keywords: Islamic Movements, Indonesia, Malaysia, Abraham Accords

Introduction

The fall of the Ottoman Caliphate on March 3, 1924, marked the end of Islamic governance and left Muslim nations without a guardian to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Muslim territories. According to Riduan (2023), the fall of Sultan Abdul Hamid II was driven by four factors: the colonialism of the Pax Britannica and the French Empire over Islamic territories, the malicious plans of the Jewish Dunnama in Turkey to overthrow the caliphate, the rise of Arab nationalism that viewed Turkey as a colonizer, and the personal shortcomings of the caliphate, which was mired in worldly pleasures. The fall of the caliphate not only caused Muslims to lose their direction but also made them vulnerable to control by enemies, as they no longer had a leader. Furthermore, most Muslim countries had been colonized culturally, socially, politically, and intellectually by the West.

The aftermath of the collapse of the caliphate led to the emergence of Islamic movements striving to restore the glory of Islam. This struggle prompted many prominent Islamic thinkers

to introduce their own *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) for the reform and improvement of Islamic civilisation, considering contemporary challenges. Abdullah Zaik (2023) states that the rise of Islamic movements was a reaction to the comprehensive fall of the caliphate, which had previously unified the Muslim *ummah* (community), and the efforts of Western empires to colonize Islamic thought and culture. Consequently, scholars began to establish Islamic movements to reform the Muslim community that had been deviated by Western ideologies.

Research Problem

The Nusantara archipelago was one of the primary targets of Christianisation efforts. The first Islamic territory to fall to a Western empire was Malacca, which was captured by the Portuguese in 1511. In 1695, the Dutch conquered Sunda Kelapa (Jakarta), followed by the British in Penang in 1786, and then Singapore in 1819, leading to the complete colonisation of the archipelago. The gradual fall of Islamic kingdoms in this region prompted the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) to rise in defence. By the late 19th century, the *ulama* of Nusantara shifted their focus toward the establishment of Islamic movements aimed at restoring Islamic governance. This movement began with the establishment of *Jam'iyatul Fathaniyah* in 1873, followed by *Jam'iyatul Rusyidiyah* in 1880, and *Jam'iyatul Khairiyah* in 1884. *Jam'iyatul Khairiyah's* influence in Betawi eventually led to the formation of *Jami'at Kheir* (Djamiat Choir) in 1901 and the subsequent establishment of *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (SDI) in 1905. Initially, SDI aimed to unify Islamic economic movements but later evolved into a political movement, changing its name to *Sarekat Islam* (SI) in 1906. Officially recognized by the Dutch in 1912, SI became the first Islamic political movement in the world, predating the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan Muslimin*) in Egypt in 1928 and other Islamic movements (Fadli 2018).

Islamic movements in Nusantara were significantly influenced by the Middle East, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*). Reform movements and independence struggles spearheaded by Middle Eastern leaders such as Imam Hassan al-Banna, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and others greatly impacted the religious scholars of Nusantara. Consequently, numerous Islamic movements emerged in this region, encompassing various currents and groups such as traditionalists, Salafis, modernists, reformists, and extremists (Ahmad Nabil & Tasnim 2023). Islamic movements are organized collective efforts aimed at restoring and implementing Islam in all aspects of society (al-Qaraḍāwī 1990). In Malaysia, Islamic movements include PAS, ABIM, ISMA, IKRAM, GAMIS, the National Association of Islamic Students Malaysia, and others. In Indonesia, Islamic movements include SI, Muhammadiyah, Aisyiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), PERSIS, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Qur'an Tafsir Assembly (MTA), Ahmadiyah, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), and others (Zuhroh et al. 2020).

The Abraham Accords, introduced during Donald Trump's administration, are peace agreements between several Arab countries and Israel. These accords establish diplomatic relations between the two entities, effectively recognizing the existence of Israel. Although the accords were only signed by the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, their influence has extended to the Islamic countries of Nusantara, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia. According to Lahav & Tovah (2020), a news report suggested that Indonesia would be the next country to establish diplomatic ties with Israel through the Abraham Accords. Furthermore, an Israeli minister also claimed that Malaysia might join the accords (Bernama 2021).

This baseless report sparked a debate among the public and Islamic movements, who rose to voice their opposition to the governments potentially accepting the Abraham Accords. Subsequently, Indonesia and Malaysia, through their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, issued official statements rejecting the claims. The firm stance of both nations likely reflects the views of their populations, as both countries are democracies where the people are the primary source of power. Moniruzzaman (2024) emphasized that Indonesia and Malaysia will remain opposed to formal relations with Israel for an indefinite period due to strong public opposition and the resistance from Islamic movements. Therefore, this article seeks to explore the role of Islamic movements in Indonesia and Malaysia in rejecting the Abraham Accords.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing document and content analysis as the primary data collection tools. Data were gathered from primary sources, such as official documents and publications by ministries, associations, and organisations. Additionally, secondary sources were analysed, including journal articles, books, newspaper clippings, websites, and more.

Findings and Discussion

The issue of Israel's oppression and mistreatment of Palestinians is one of the most sensitive topics among Muslims today. The excessive cruelty of the Zionist regime and its occupation of Islamic holy sites has led to widespread resistance from Muslims. The normalisation of relations with Israel by some Arab countries through the Abraham Accords is seen as adding insult to the injury already suffered by the Muslim world. Consequently, Islamic movements across the globe, including in Indonesia and Malaysia, have risen to oppose the agreement. The roles played by these Islamic movements in rejecting the Abraham Accords include:

Urging the Governments to Reject the Abraham Accords

Indonesia's strong desire to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) became a stepping stone towards its consideration of the Abraham Accords. However, Indonesia cannot become a member of the OECD unless it obtains approval from all members, including Israel. Israel currently refuses to accept Indonesia due to the country's hostile attitude towards Israel, particularly Indonesia's criticism of the Gaza war and its legal action against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). According to Stephen (2024), the Secretary-General of the OECD mentioned that diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Israel must be established to secure Indonesia's membership in the organisation. However, this is not an easy task for Indonesia due to opposition from its citizens and Islamic movements, particularly the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI).

In its Taushiyah (Annual Message) for 2020, the MUI urged the Indonesian government to adhere to the mandate of the 1945 Constitution, which opposes any form of colonisation. Therefore, MUI called on the government to reject all diplomatic relations with Israel in line with the country's vision and to resist external pressure to establish such relations, even from within its own ministries. The MUI clarified that some ministries have lobbied for relations with Israel for economic reasons. However, MUI maintained that economic interests cannot justify the establishment of political ties with Israel. Additionally, the MUI called on the government to assert Indonesia's stance at the international level, which opposes Israel's

apartheid policy and supports the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2020). MUI emphasized that this stance must be highlighted internationally so that Western powers and Israel do not act contrary to the aspirations of the Indonesian people.

Muhammadiyah and Aisiyah, two prominent Islamic movements, also urged the Indonesian government not to normalise relations with Israel. At a solidarity gathering held at Plaza UMJ in 2024, these movements strongly insisted that the government should never consider establishing relations with Israel, nor pursue any political steps toward normalising relations with the perpetrator of genocide (Dinar, 2024). The declaration of opposition was read by Prof. Dr. Ma'mun Murod, Secretary-General of the Muhammadiyah Aisiyah Higher Education Forum. Their demand was also supported by students from Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia.

Similarly, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) voiced its opposition through its representative in the Indonesian Parliament, Sukamta, who stressed that the Indonesian government must remain consistent in upholding the country's mandate to reject Israel's occupation of Palestine. Sukamta urged President Jokowi's administration to reject any offers for the normalisation of relations with Israel, reminding the government that previous presidents had always firmly opposed such measures. Sukamta argued that President Jokowi must not betray the nation's mandate left by past leaders and should safeguard the call to reject any diplomatic ties with Israel (Fraksi PKS, 2020).

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), on the other hand, maintained that if Israel does not recognise Palestine's independence, Indonesia should refrain from establishing diplomatic ties with the country. This was stated by NU's Chairman, H. Robikin Emhas. NU has historically had an open stance toward Israel, as evidenced by former leaders such as Abdul Rahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and Kiyai Yahya Cholil Staquf, who had visited and engaged in dialogue with Israel (Ila Rosyada, 2019). However, H. Robikin Emhas asserted that NU's fundamental struggle for freedom remains intact and expressed appreciation for Indonesia's continued support for Palestine (Fathoni, 2020). While NU did not explicitly call for the government to reject the Abraham Accords, its clear stance on avoiding ties with Israel until Palestine's independence is recognized reflects its opposition to the accords.

A similar situation arose in Malaysia. Islamic movements, particularly the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), called on the Malaysian government to reject the Abraham Accords and any form of normalisation with Israel. The PAS Annual General Assembly in 2020 unanimously urged the Malaysian government and other Islamic governments to reject all forms of normalisation with Israel. PAS's Majlis Syura Ulama (Council of Scholars) also called on Muslims and Islamic governments to oppose any agreements that provide life support to the occupying regime, as they bring no benefit (Anon, 2023). PAS argued that recognition of Israel by the Islamic world would only open the door to further political expansion and occupation of Palestine. Moreover, PAS passed a resolution calling for a reassessment of Malaysia's stance on the Two-State Solution as an alternative to the Middle East conflict, deeming it unjust to the Palestinian people (Hasimi, 2020).

The Malaysian Ulema Association (PUM), a gathering of Islamic scholars, also urged Islamic countries, particularly Arab states, to reject the Abraham Accords or any agreements that normalise relations with Israel. This social Islamic movement further called on Islamic nations, including Malaysia, to strengthen their support for Palestine's struggle and demanded that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) take a more proactive role in resolving the conflict (Anon, 2023).

The Prime Minister of Malaysia's support for the Two-State Solution and Malaysia's foreign policy regarding the Palestinian conflict also elicited a response from the Islamic movement ISMA. ISMA's president demanded that the Prime Minister withdraw support for the Two-State Solution, as it appeared that Malaysia was seeking to reconcile with all parties, including Israel. ISMA argued that recognition of the Two-State Solution indirectly legitimises Israel's occupation of Muslim lands. Therefore, ISMA urged the Malaysian government to continue its no-relations policy with Israel and adopt a firmer stance in rejecting all forms of normalisation. Furthermore, ISMA called on the Malaysian government to use its influence to lobby regional countries, particularly Indonesia, to also reject the Abraham Accords (Muhammad, 2021).

In an official statement, ABIM urged all nations, particularly the Malaysian government, to act based on humanitarian principles and awareness by refraining from establishing diplomatic relations with oppressors and criminals, prioritising human rights over economic and political interests (Huda, 2020). According to ABIM, the Islamic countries that have accepted the Abraham Accords are more concerned with material and personal gains, turning a blind eye to Israel's violations of human rights.

Several other Islamic movements, such as IKRAM, MAPIM, the Secretariat of Ulama of the Asia Region, the National Association of Malaysian Islamic Students (PKPIM), the Association of Former Educational Institutions of Malaysia (HALUAN), Rumah Ngaji Negeri Sembilan (RNNS), and the Southeast Asian Islamic Student Association (PEPIAT), called for the rejection of any normalisation efforts with the apartheid state of Israel, particularly by the Malaysian government, as the country's policy is to reject apartheid. Establishing relations with a colonial state is tantamount to supporting colonisation. Hence, the government was urged to reject such efforts, just as Malaysia had previously opposed the apartheid regime in South Africa (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 2022).

Condemning Parties Involved in Supporting the Abraham Accords

Another action taken by Islamic movements in Indonesia and Malaysia is the condemnation of the Muslim countries that have signed the Abraham Accords, particularly the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. PAS, as an Islamic movement, places great emphasis on the Palestinian struggle within its ranks. PAS, which has strong ties with international Islamic movements, was at the forefront in condemning the decision of these countries to normalise relations with Israel. The PAS Central Ulama Council, representing the party's position during the 66th PAS Annual General Assembly, vehemently condemned the Arab League, UAE, and Bahrain for recognising normalisation with Israel. This, they argued, was not only a violation of Palestinian sovereignty but also an act of hostility towards the Muslim world, the majority of whom oppose the Abraham Accords (Hasimi, 2020).

ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia) and WADAH (Wadah Pencerdasan Umat Malaysia) similarly condemned the UAE-Israel normalisation move. The president of ABIM described the step as a betrayal of the Muslim world and the international community. He argued that the UAE's actions contradicted the global aspiration for Palestinian independence from Israeli occupation. The president also criticised the UAE for prioritising materialistic and worldly gains over human rights and justice (Nurul Huda, 2020). Despite claims that the UAE's actions were part of a strategic political move for Palestinian independence, ABIM highlighted the reality that Israel has not ceased its occupation despite peace agreements made with Egypt and Jordan. Therefore, WADAH stated that the UAE was being used as a pawn by Israel and the United States to strengthen their geopolitical positions in the Middle East (Ahmad Azam, 2020).

In Indonesia, PKS and the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly (MPR RI) issued a statement condemning certain factions within Indonesia that supported Israel's occupation of Palestine and the normalisation of relations. PKS labelled these individuals, who are referred to as Zionists in Nusantara, as being opposed to the national vision of rejecting all forms of colonisation. PKS also pointed out that these ideologies were not aligned with the mainstream views of major Islamic organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. These two groups, despite their differences in certain issues, were united in opposing Israel's occupation of Palestine and the normalisation of relations. According to PKS, the views of the Zionist group in Indonesia were not only contrary to the national vision but also out of sync with the values of the wider Indonesian community (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 2021).

Supporting Governments' Firm Stance Against the Abraham Accords

Spokespersons for Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated that the normalisation of ties between Gulf nations and Israel would not change Indonesia's stance on the Palestinian cause, nor would the country establish diplomatic relations with Israel (Dian, 2020). Similarly, Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the same position (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, 2021). The firm positions taken by both countries were welcomed by Islamic movements and the public at large.

The chairman of the PAS International Affairs and External Relations Bureau expressed full support for Malaysia's firm stance on the matter. He urged the government to continue strengthening its support for Palestine's fight for independence. PAS also stressed the importance of Malaysia's official statement rejecting the Abraham Accords, as it reflects the stance of the Malaysian public, which generally opposes normalisation and rejects the unsubstantiated claims made by an Israeli minister. PAS emphasized that Israel is a colonial regime, and Islamic countries should not establish any form of relations with it, nor recognise its existence (Anon, 2021).

In Indonesia, PKS also praised the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its strong opposition to the Abraham Accords, amid growing pressure on the country to normalise relations with Israel. PKS expressed hope that this firm stance would inspire other ministries, particularly the Ministry of Economy, to reconsider Indonesia's pursuit of OECD membership, as it requires diplomatic ties with Israel. Jazuli Juwaini, the head of the PKS parliamentary faction, stated that Indonesia had no valid reason to establish relations with Israel, a state

that continues to commit genocide against Palestinians (Farid, 2024). Hidayat Nur Wahid also praised President Jokowi's decision to contact the Palestinian president and reaffirm Indonesia's rejection of the Abraham Accords, regardless of developments in the Middle East. The deputy chairman of PKS's Majelis Syura noted that this move demonstrated Indonesia's solidarity with Palestine (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 2020).

Indonesia's firm stance was also supported by two of its largest social Islamic movements. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), through its Foreign Relations and International Cooperation division, lauded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for rejecting diplomatic relations with Israel and dismissing baseless claims from Israeli media (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2022). Meanwhile, Dadang Kahmad, chairman of Muhammadiyah, emphasized that this stance was consistent with the mandate set by the country's founding leaders. He mentioned that the issue of Indonesia-Israel normalisation arose during Blinken's visit, but the Indonesian government rejected the idea, in line with the 1945 Constitution (Afandi, 2022).

Commending Parties That Reject the Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords, spearheaded by the United States, gained support from most Middle Eastern countries and the Arab League. From Jordan to Oman, and Egypt to Morocco, many countries backed the agreement. However, there were notable exceptions, including Palestine, Iran, and Turkey, which vehemently rejected the Abraham Accords. Amr Yossef (2021), noted that Qatar also expressed its disapproval of the accords.

In response, KH. Muhyiddin Junaidi, vice chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), praised Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, for his firm stance against the Abraham Accords. In a speech, Muhyiddin urged Indonesia's leaders to follow Khomeini's example in rejecting the agreement. Khomeini had referred to Israel as a terrorist state and called for global Muslim unity to oppose Israel. MUI's statement reflects its broader stance against normalisation with Israel, and it called for stronger condemnations from the international Islamic community (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2021).

Clarifying the True Nature of the Abraham Accords

Islamic movements, particularly PAS, have described the Abraham Accords as a disaster currently plaguing the Middle East. In several official statements, PAS emphasized the various flaws in the agreement that Muslims need to understand so as not to support it. The primary fact that needs to be acknowledged by Muslims is that attributing the accords to Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim, AS) is a significant falsehood. PAS argued that Prophet Ibrahim never advocated for Judaism or Christianity, let alone uniting the two religions. It is widely known that the religion propagated by Prophet Ibrahim was Islam, and the prophets and messengers from among the Children of Israel also adhered to Islam. Therefore, the so-called peace agreement aimed at uniting the three religions under the banner of Prophet Ibrahim is nothing more than a fabrication (Abdul Hadi, 2021).

PAS also stressed that the primary agenda of the Abraham Accords is to solidify the presence of the Zionist regime in the Middle East. The chairman of PAS's International Affairs and External Relations Bureau argued that the UAE had been used as Israel's gateway to normalise relations with the Muslim world. The UAE is one of the closest allies of the U.S. in the Middle East, and by promoting the ideas of peace, unity, and reconciliation, it hopes to soften the

stance of Muslims towards Israel, thereby helping the Zionist regime gain acceptance among Arab countries and shift attention away from the Palestinian cause. Moreover, PAS views the accords as a political strategy to weaken Iran's influence in the region, as Iran remains one of the staunchest supporters of Palestinian independence and a significant threat to Israel (Khalil, 2021).

The MUI also voiced its view that the Abraham Accords offer no real benefit. Most Arab countries believed that by normalising relations with Israel, they could pressure the regime to stop its oppression of Palestinians. However, the reality is quite the opposite, as demonstrated by the failure of countries like Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, which have long maintained diplomatic ties with Israel, to halt its aggression. Hence, the MUI called on Muslim nations to reject the agreement and sever ties with Israel, emphasizing that the UAE's actions posed a danger to the Muslim world, as they could set a precedent for other Muslim countries to follow (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2021).

Deeming the Abraham Accords as Forbidden (Haram)

Many of the Islamic movements in Nusantara were founded by religious scholars, some of whom were highly knowledgeable in Islamic law and authorised to issue legal rulings. The MUI issued a ruling declaring it forbidden (haram) for anyone to support Israel, either directly or indirectly. This aligns with many Islamic scriptural prohibitions against aiding injustice, committing oppression, or killing innocent souls (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2023). From this ruling, it can be inferred that it is also haram for Muslim nations to participate in the Abraham Accords. The accords not only formally recognise Israel's existence as a colonial state but also imply tacit support for its policies.

PAS also declared the Abraham Accords to be forbidden, as stated by its president. He asserted that Muslims are obligated to engage in jihad to liberate Palestinian land from Zionist occupation, as mandated by Islamic law, regardless of race or sect. PAS also emphasised that the land of Palestine belongs to Muslims, and the establishment of the State of Israel is illegitimate from religious, historical, and political perspectives. While Islam does not reject the existence of a multiracial society, only Islam has the right to govern it according to Islamic principles. Therefore, when Islamic lands are occupied, it becomes the duty of every Muslim to strive for their liberation, and it is forbidden to assist or support the enemies in any way (Abdul Hadi, 2024).

Conclusion

The Abraham Accords have elicited significant responses from the global Muslim community. The accords' association with Israel, a state that occupies sacred Muslim land, has prompted widespread opposition. While the agreement was only signed by four Arab nations, its influence has reached Indonesia and Malaysia, two of the most populous Muslim countries in the Nusantara region. Certain efforts have been made to involve Indonesia and Malaysia as the next Islamic nations to sign the Abraham Accords.

However, the political structure of Indonesia and Malaysia differs from that of the Arab nations. Strong democratic practices in both countries ensure that government decisions are often aligned with the will of the people. Consequently, the firm stance of Indonesia and Malaysia against diplomatic relations with Israel is consistent with the views of their

populations. Additionally, the unwavering opposition of Islamic movements in both countries to the Abraham Accords plays a crucial role in shaping government policy. The efforts and roles of these Islamic movements must be sustained to ensure that neither the public nor the government is swayed by Israel's deceptive plans. The primary goal of Zionist Israel in establishing relations with more Muslim countries is to solidify its position in Palestine and weaken global Muslim support for the Palestinian cause.

Stemming from the significant geopolitical shifts introduced by the Abraham Accords, which have sparked intense debate and concern among Islamic communities worldwide, this research focuses on Indonesia and Malaysia, two of the most populous Muslim-majority countries. It seeks to illuminate the unique roles that Islamic movements play in shaping national policies and public opinion against the normalization of relations with Israel. The study contributes to the broader understanding of how Islamic movements can influence political discourse and decision-making processes in democratic settings. Furthermore, it highlights the resilience and unity of these movements in advocating for the Palestinian cause, thereby reinforcing the global Muslim solidarity against perceived injustices. This research not only provides a comprehensive analysis of the current political landscape but also serves as a crucial resource for policymakers, scholars, and activists interested in the dynamics of Islamic movements and their impact on international relations.

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