

ENGAGING NON-STATE ACTOR IN SECOND-TRACK DIPLOMACY: A STUDY OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA IN PROMOTING MODERATE ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia employs second-track diplomacy by engaging Islamic mass organizations as non-state actors and undertakes various forms of interfaith diplomacy to promote moderate Islam and achieve global peace. This article explains Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) 's efforts in promoting moderate Islam and addressing several global issues. The authors argue that Indonesia's collaboration with NU in the second-track diplomacy to project itself as a moderate Muslim country and utilize NU's influence to promote peace, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue globally. Hence, this partnership aims to enhance Indonesia's international reputation and address global challenges caused by religious and cultural misunderstandings. Overall, this article enriches the literature on Indonesia's global identity as a moderate Muslim nation shaped by the cooperation between the state and non-state actors.

Keywords: *Diplomacy on the second track, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Non-State Actor*

INTRODUCTION

Religion is perceived as an important element in international politics due to certain shifts in global politics during the Cold War. Some international relations scholars have turned their attention towards elucidating the significance of religious identity in future global politics (Modongal, 2023).

William Inboden examines how religion served as both a cause and an instrument in the Cold War, particularly through the United States' strategic engagement with religious entities, such as the Vatican, to counter communism (Inboden, 2008). In line with Toft's argument, which makes a similar point, highlighting the pivotal role religion played in the end of the Cold War. The Catholic Church, with the direct support of Pope John Paul II,

provided the legitimacy necessary to challenge existing political systems, ultimately leading to their collapse (Toft et al., 2011). In short, Religious identity had a complex role in shaping international relations and global politics during this period (Kirby, 2018).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States had increasingly convinced scholars of the need to understand the impact of religion in global politics. The events have put greater emphasis on the role of religion, which remains a powerful force in international politics (Herrington, 2015). However, the event in September had a significant impact on the global perception of Islam. As a result, Islam has been widely linked with terrorism, violence, extremism, and other undesirable aspects by the global society, leading to a negative perception of Muslims. After the attacks of September 11,

2001, there was a lot of discrimination and soaring levels of stigma from various countries towards Muslims.

Many label them as likely terrorists, discrimination in employment, acts of violence against both Muslim individuals and groups, soaring levels of racial profiling, and other unfair treatment experienced by Muslims. These attacks have an impact on the level of skepticism among Muslims who want to live or travel to other countries and affect the international community's view of immigration, especially in Western countries. Their government also took firm action by tightening security policies by carrying out full supervision of Muslims who entered their territory (Dalacoura, 2002). This creates a stigma that seems as if all Muslims are dangerous and have the potential to threaten the security of their country. Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, these attacks have triggered the emergence of Islamophobia, distrust, feelings of fear, and hatred towards Muslims and Islam, which will trigger physical or verbal attacks, anti-Muslim rhetoric, and restrictions on Muslims' rights to participate in society and worshiped (Dallmayr, 2002).

The impact of adverse perception also affects a country with a majority Muslim population. Thereafter, several countries with Muslim majority populations have started to promote themselves as moderate Muslim countries to revitalize their new identity on the global stage. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim majority population in the world, has also actively struggled to shape its international identity as a moderate Muslim country. Efforts to form a state's identity involve a complex process and strategy requiring various actors. As a part of Indonesia's strategy to create a moderate Muslim country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as a state actor, engages in collaborative diplomacy with non-state actors, such as Islamic mass organizations.

Literature Review

Several scholars have examined religious diplomacy, which refers to diplomatic efforts carried out by religious actors. In general, they argue that religious forces possess a certain degree of authoritative power to advance ideas through diplomatic means (Thompson 2015; Nagarjun 2025;

Fedele 2018; Blakemore 2019; Wahyu and Fadly 2023; Kaya and Drhimeur 2023). Indonesia has practiced a second-track diplomacy. For instance, in the context of Indonesia's diplomacy with China, religion and culture have played a significant role (Rohman, 2019). A similar dynamic in the United States, where Indonesian Muslim diaspora communities have sought to promote the image of Indonesian Muslims as moderate (Hoesterey, 2020). Within Indonesia, Muhammadiyah—one of the country's major Islamic-based organizations—has collaborated with the government in encouraging other countries to address the Rohingya conflict (Putra et al., 2024).

Other studies discuss the significance of Nahdlatul Ulama in promoting moderate and peaceful Islam globally and internationally through various initiatives. For example, a study conducted by Vyan Tashwirul Afkar and Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo (Afkar & Sundrijo, 2023) revealed that NU operates as a transnational Islamic organization, engaging in various cross-border activities and maintaining a global membership, which is in line with Bowen's three dimensions of Transnational Islam: demographic movements, transnational religious institutions, and Islamic references and debates. They show that the transnational characteristics of NU are manifested at the cultural, structural, and ideational levels, demonstrating its dual identity as both a national religious civil society organization and a transnational actor. Febby Islami Abdurahman, Angga Nurdin Rachmat, and Tholhah (Abdurahman et al., 2024) examine how NU uses public diplomacy through religious communication to engage the global community in addressing the Afghan conflict. This innovative approach not only highlights the importance of religious dialogue in conflict resolution, but also positions NU as a key player in the international discourse on peacebuilding. In addition, Djayadi Hanan, Ridwan Ridwan, Sally Azaria and Perwita Suci (2024) also examine the Religious Twenty (R20) forum in Indonesia as an example of NU's efforts in interfaith dialogue for peacebuilding. The study argues that R20 has successfully brought the paradigm of interfaith dialogue for peace building and its potential impact on global conflict resolution. However, the continuation of R20 in the future is still in doubt. This study is confirmed by

Mulawarman Hannase, Idil Hamzah, Akbar, and Mostafa Zahran, who pointed out that NU's approach is not only traditional Islam-based but also aligned with the government's religious moderation program (Hannase et al., 2024). Utama also highlighted the importance of R20 as a diplomatic tool. He showed that NU's efforts are based on its own principles and ideas rather than external influence (Utama 2024; Basid et al., 2024). NU also has the credibility to promote Wasathiyah that advances its diplomatic endeavour (Pratama and Ferdiyan 2021; Kasmuri Selamat 2023).

Previous aforementioned studies have primarily examined the efforts made by NU in spreading the narrative of peace and moderate Islam. The comprehensiveness of Nahdhatul Ulama's (NU) involvement in interfaith diplomacy remains lacking. Hence, this paper will enrich the discussion about the involvement of state actors in the diplomatic process carried out by Islamic organizations, especially NU, and simultaneously explore the reasons behind the involvement of state and non-state actors in second-track diplomacy.

This article examines the role of states in initiating second-track diplomacy, which is carried out by non-state actors, to enhance state influence on specific international matters. The arguments proceed in three main sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the Second Track Diplomacy as a conceptual framework for this article. The second and third sections describe the findings and discuss the results. The conclusion demonstrates that NU engages in interfaith diplomacy efforts to promote inclusivity, tolerance, and moderate Islam.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding Second-Track Diplomacy

Since the 20th century, second-track diplomacy has emerged, although it is not a new concept. Second-Track Diplomacy is an international strategy that involves non-state or unofficial actors. The non-state actors encompass advocacy groups, civil society, people collaborating either independently or semi-independently, and even academics who exert influence over some issues. These unofficial actors collaborate to achieve the objective of identifying resolutions for global issues, such as environmental concerns, human rights, and peace, through discussion,

advocacy, and collaborative study (Feng 2018). Second-track diplomacy, also known as Track II diplomacy, aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and coordinate human and material resources to facilitate the resolution of ongoing disputes (Staats, 2019). Track II diplomacy is not a substitute for Track I or traditional diplomacy, which entails official policy declarations, visits, and meetings between countries. Instead, it serves as an accompaniment to a set of Track I diplomacy agendas. It proves highly advantageous in scenarios where traditional diplomatic efforts fail or when profound conflicts exist that cannot be easily resolved through official procedures.

Second-track diplomacy emphasizes the participation of non-state actors, including civil society leaders, academia, and non-governmental community organizations, who possess diverse viewpoints and ideas that might enhance the peace process. as government authorities do not restrict participants. Thus, the discussions become more transparent and open (Volkan, 1987). The existence of second-track diplomacy also coincides with the emergence of various global issues in cultural, social, and religious dimensions. This is because the government often has limitations in responding effectively to global problems that transcend national boundaries. Therefore, through second-track diplomacy, non-government actors can channel their exceptional experience and expertise so there are solutions that are sustainable, inclusive, and address cross-sector (Bronheim, 1989).

Several important functions of second-track diplomacy were found based on its contribution. First, the important role of second-track diplomacy in influencing increased inclusiveness, which involves non-government actors. It creates space to create solutions based on different perspectives and interests. Second, the feasibility of second-track diplomacy in overcoming various global challenges. Due to the expertise and support from various non-state actors, diplomacy yields a more flexible and rapid response. With diverse thinking, they can also reach areas that are more difficult to reach with official diplomats (Kaye, 2007). Third, collaboration among various parties will strengthen the position of second-track diplomacy, as it involves collaboration from multiple sectors,

including society, civil society, academia, business, and government. Moreover, it will produce extensive knowledge, diverse resources, and strong collaboration in all aspects, enabling us to overcome global challenges effectively (Böhmelt, 2010).

After September 11, 2001, one of the national and international threats is terrorism. It has made us realize the significance of the participation of non-governmental religious organizations in international diplomacy. They are actively involved in promoting peace, providing aid, fostering global harmony, facilitating interreligious dialogue, and supporting recovery efforts following disasters (Bandyopadhyay, 2015). Religious organizations can have a significant impact on Track II diplomacy, particularly during the initial phases of the peace process. This is when the main obstacle is starting a conversation and establishing trust between the conflicting parties (Harpviken & Roislien, 2005). Religious institutions can serve as mediators in conflicts, leveraging the trust they often receive from both parties to facilitate conversations and steer them toward a peaceful resolution (Ruiz Giménez, 2022).

Furthermore, through reconciliation and peace efforts, Islamic organizations can best respond to conflict and build peace. In supporting local or international peace, they can begin to mobilize financial and human resources (Werbner, 2004). Through various social activities such as humanitarian aid programs, community development projects, they can also build strong harmony based on the value of peace in society (Parker et al., 2014). With all these efforts accompanied by a network of Islamic organizations, the goal of second track diplomacy can easily be achieved effectively and sustainably.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach. Based on Neuman's understanding, qualitative methods can explain and illustrate social problems through narratives. This type of research conducts systematic investigations of social phenomena in the natural environment, including, but not limited to, aspects of human experience and life, how individuals and groups behave, how organizations function, and how interactions form relationships. In this study, the researcher serves as an instrument for data collection,

examining why an event occurs, what happens, and what the meaning of the event is through participant studies (Neuman, 2013). Qualitative research seeks to explore social reality as it is. Neuman believes that the qualitative approach highlights the significance of comprehending the social and political context that influences the motivation of state actors in involving non-state actors in second-track diplomacy. It also examines how Indonesia, as a state actor, encourages the NU to participate in second-track diplomatic efforts (Neuman, 2013). In this research, secondary source data include written media, such as academic textbooks, publications, daily newspapers, and periodicals, which contain maps of the NU movement in the international arena, particularly in diplomatic forums. In other words, this study will utilize various sources, including publications, reports, and news articles, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the methods and reasons behind Indonesia's utilization of NU as a prominent aspect of Indonesian diplomacy. Finally, the data collected was analyzed using qualitative methods, which involve presenting data in a matrix, model, or summary, and the final step is to form conclusions from all the data.

DISCUSSION

The Global Diplomatic Footprint of Nahdlatul Ulama

Nahdlatul Ulama is the largest Muslim organization and has a visible impact on global diplomacy. Its influence at the domestic level in shaping Islam and socio-politics has also been well-documented (Hefner, 2000). Under the leadership of KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf—popularly known as Gus Yahya and currently serving as Chairman of Tanfidziyah at NU—has grown into a better organization, from structural to organizational movements. Gus Yahya is trying to revive the ideas of Abdurrahman Wahid, widely referred to as Gus Dur, at various levels, such as social movements, the consolidation of Nahdliyin citizens, and the aim of creating global peace (Mustain, 2022). PBNU shows its seriousness in creating peace and cooperation among religious communities worldwide through various means.

In 2004, NU invited scholars and thinkers from various countries to gather in Indonesia to share their perspectives and jointly seek solutions to global conflicts related to terrorism. This forum was called the

International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), with the principle of spreading moderate thinking and nationalism for world peace. There were several great scholars present at this conference, including Sheikh Wahbah Zuhaili (Syria) and Sheikh Ali at Taskhiri (Iran), as well as 67 scholars from 47 countries. The ICIS forum was formed with two objectives: the first is how to present Islam *Rahmatan lil Alamin*, and the second objective is to introduce that the Pancasila state, Indonesia, is an alternative model of a religious state and a secular state, where Indonesia is in the middle, and its citizens can live in harmony and coexist in diversity (Purwono 2020). The ICIS conference was held four times from 2004 to 2014, because it was considered an agenda to strengthen the network between scholars and moderate Islamic values worldwide.

Besides the ICIS forum, NU has a forum called *Al-Multaqa al-Sufy al-Alamy* (International Sufi Conference) (Zidni, 2023). This conference aims to explore the potential inherent in the values of Sufism and Tariqah teachings, helping to realize a world peace that is increasingly complicated to achieve. The International Sufi Conference was first held in July 2011, attended by Sufi scholars and Tariqah murshids from within and outside the country, numbering 300 people. Then, it was held again in April 2019 and was attended by more than 96 international Sufi scholars (Niam, 2012). The conference eventually became a network of moderate scholars from among Sufism practitioners, led by Jam'iyah Ahlith Tariqah Al-Mu'tabarah An-Nahdiyah (Jatman). JATMAN, under PBNU, eventually collaborated with the Indonesian Ministry of Defense to organize the Ulama International Conference. The conference was successfully held three times: the first in 2016, which created 9 State Defense consensus (Niam, 2012); the second in 2017, which resulted in 15 State Defense Consensus (Muiz, 2016), and the last in 2018 with the same theme, namely State Defense (Purwono 2020).

In 2016, PBNU began organizing the International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) with the aim of promoting peace and developing strategies to maintain interfaith harmony in various countries worldwide. There are 300 Muslim leaders from 33 countries, including those in the Middle East, Europe, North America,

Australia, and Asia, attended this agenda (Hamid, 2017). PBNU has also conducted a series of dialogue activities on various international issues as part of its efforts to promote global interfaith harmony. For example, in the Afghan peace process, NU participates in the peacemaking stage through mediation. NU uses the concept of Islam Nusantara as the religious approach to carry out all these efforts (Abdik, 2022). NU also creates its own independent program to strengthen the government's agenda through the *Nahdlatul Ulama' Afghanistan* (NUA) network, which consists of *ulama'* in various regions of Afghanistan, and the NU scholarship program for Afghanistan (Taqwim, 2021).

PBNU's efforts to promote international peace and humanity continue in various ways. In November 2022, PBNU initiated the organization of the R20 International Summit Authorities (ISORA) and the G20 Religious Forum in collaboration with the Muslim World League (MWL). The R20 Forum aims to serve as a global interfaith dialog to find solutions to religious problems that have been occurring (Schirrmacher et al. 2023). The forum is also designed to present religion as a solution to various sources of problems, particularly in preventing the use of religion as a weapon of identity politics, limiting the spread of communal hatred, and promoting solidarity and respect in a plural society (Ridwan, 2022). especially from countries that are members of the G20 group, namely the United States, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, India, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Italy, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Russia, France, Turkey, China, and the European Union. The first R20 Forum in Bali featured 40 speakers from five. It was attended by more than 400 participants from inside and outside the country. A total of 160 religious leaders, sects, and beliefs came from different countries (Haryanto & Syam, 2023).

The involvement of faith-based organizations in the international agenda serves as a reminder of the shift in global attention to the significance of religion in international politics. Religion can influence public diplomacy in various ways, such as fostering friction between cultural identities or serving as a source of civilization-building and social reconciliation (Haynes, 2022; Zellman

& Brown, 2022). Traditionally viewed as a private matter, religion has become increasingly prominent in the public sphere, influencing sustainable development goals and contributing to the discourse on peace and conflict resolution. The involvement of religious organizations in public diplomacy is seen as a response to the urgent need for religion to improve its image from one associated with conflict to one that promotes peace and reconciliation (Sachedina, 2001).

NU's Collaboration with the State

The government's decision to engage NU as a secondary diplomatic partner was primarily motivated by NU's significant influence and status as the most prominent Islamic organization globally. Due to its extensive background, NU possesses widespread access and exerts significant influence over Muslims worldwide. The efforts of NU to promote moderate Islam are highly significant. They have successfully organized international conferences, implemented educational initiatives, and facilitated inter-religious interaction. In 2014, NU successfully convened a summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, to address humanitarian concerns and collaborate with the Council of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and the Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference (KWI) in finding collective solutions (Hasyim, 2015).

Hence, the practice of second-track diplomacy significantly influences the promotion of moderate Islam and reinforces its presence in the global arena. With the aid and support of NU, the primary objective of this diplomatic effort is to promote and enhance the presence and favorable perception of the Islamic faith in different nations. In addition to striving to develop optimal resolutions for global issues such as religious strife, terrorism, and radicalism (Chaplin, 2017). The Indonesian government aspires to utilize NU to extend the diplomatic reach of the Indonesian state, encompassing all Muslim groups worldwide.

So, NU's involvement in second-track diplomacy has broad implications for international relations. By leveraging its influence and network, NU can effectively promote moderate Islamic values and solutions to solve various existing challenges. It is very crucial in the current global context, where

religious and cultural differences can often give rise to conflict and misunderstanding. NU's role in second-track diplomacy extends beyond promoting moderate Islamic values to also expanding dialogue and understanding among different religious and cultural communities. By engaging in unofficial and informal interactions, NU can help bridge divisions and facilitate dialogue between parties, even in the face of deep conflict.

At the heart of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts lies the concept of "*Wasathiyah*," or moderation, a principle deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. By embracing *Wasathiyah*, Indonesia seeks to put itself as a beacon of tolerance and moderation in an increasingly polarized world. This narrative of moderate Islam not only counters prevailing stereotypes but also emphasizes Indonesia's commitment to promoting peace and stability both regionally and globally. One of Indonesia's diplomatic strategies is to engage with non-state actors, particularly religious organizations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). As a prominent Islamic organization with millions of members, NU plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and promoting moderate Islam both domestically and internationally. Through its extensive network and deep outreach efforts, NU serves as a bridge between the Indonesian government and Muslim communities worldwide, facilitating dialogue and collaboration on issues of mutual interest.

In this collective action, the mobilization of Non-State Actors is significant in carrying out second-track diplomacy, ensuring it aligns with the state's goals. NU provides an attractive avenue for promoting moderate Islam and enhancing Indonesia's international reputation. This approach involves leveraging the influence and networks of non-state actors, such as NU, to complement official diplomatic efforts. In the Indonesian context, where NU has great influence over the majority of the Muslim population, its involvement in promoting moderate Islamic values internationally can be very important.

Moreover, Indonesia's promotion of moderate Islam extends beyond rhetoric to concrete policy initiatives aimed at enhancing religious education, fostering interfaith dialogue, and combating extremism. The National Medium Term Development Plan

(RPJMN) serves as a framework for these efforts, guiding the implementation of programs designed to promote tolerance and inclusivity within Indonesian society. By investing in education and social welfare programs, Indonesia seeks to create an enabling environment for the practice of moderate Islam while addressing the root causes of religious extremism.

In examining the nuanced relationship between Indonesia as a state actor and NU as a non-state actor in second-track diplomacy, we uncover a complex interplay of factors that drives their collaboration and shapes their respective roles in advancing Indonesia's diplomatic agenda. This analysis aims to delve into the motivations behind Indonesia's mobilization of NU in second-track diplomacy, as well as the mechanisms through which this collaboration is operationalized. The primary of Indonesia's strategy lies in the recognition of NU's significant influence both domestically and internationally. Established in 1926, NU has emerged as Indonesia's most prominent Islamic organization, with millions of members and wielding considerable sway over public discourse on Islam. Its historical commitment to promoting religious moderation, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue aligns closely with Indonesia's diplomatic objectives of projecting a positive image of Islam and fostering cooperation among diverse religious communities.

Indonesia's decision to engage NU in second-track diplomacy is driven by a combination of strategic imperatives and ideological alignment. As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia seeks to put itself as a global leader in promoting moderate Islam, a narrative that resonates with NU's longstanding advocacy for *Wasathiyah* or moderation in Islamic teachings. By harnessing NU's extensive network and deeper outreach capabilities, Indonesia can effectively amplify its message of tolerance and moderation on the international stage, countering prevailing narratives of extremism and Islamophobia.

Furthermore, Indonesia acknowledges the significant role that non-state actors, such as NU, play in shaping public opinion and influencing policy outcomes. NU's credibility and root legitimacy afford it a level of access and influence that traditional diplomatic channels may lack. As such, Indonesia

leverages NU's platforms and resources to disseminate its diplomatic messages and garner support for its initiatives both domestically and internationally.

Moreover, Indonesia's engagement with NU extends beyond rhetoric to concrete policy initiatives aimed at advancing shared objectives. The RPJMN serves as a strategic framework for Indonesia's efforts to promote religious education, combat extremism, and foster social cohesion. By aligning its policies with NU's priorities and values, Indonesia strengthens its partnership with NU and reinforces its commitment to promoting moderate Islam both domestically and internationally.

Indonesia's mobilization of NU in second-track diplomacy is not without its challenges and complexities. The recent trend of NU's growing political involvement, as highlighted in the case study, inflicts a potential risk to its credibility and impartiality as a non-state actor. The entanglement of NU's leadership in partisan politics threatens to undermine its traditional role as a promoter of religious moderation and social harmony. This politicization of NU could also strain its relationship with Indonesia's government and damage its effectiveness as a partner in diplomatic initiatives.

Moderate Islam is an Islamic approach that emphasizes inclusivity, religious dialogue, the value of tolerance, and a moderate attitude when experiencing differences. The values taught include peace, gender equality, mutual respect, social justice, and harmony. Moderate Islam outright rejects radicalism, violence, and extremism in the name of religion. In order to strengthen moderate Islam, Indonesia uses RPJM, which is related to programs designed to improve the quality of Islamic education and services, as well as not forgetting to improve special services for Muslims at all levels of society, both adults, children, and the elderly (Khan et al. 2020). The RPJM focuses on moderate Islam, which can strengthen it and produce a tolerant and inclusive society.

According to Indonesia's RPJMN 2020-2024, the country's plan to achieve moderate Islam is to create an education system that incorporates complete religious norms and values. In practice, the government emphasizes its desire to strengthen moderate Islam through various development programs, which aim to improve the quality of Islamic

education and advance religious education in schools. Also, improve the quality of special services for Muslims, including men, children, women, and the elderly, in realizing the welfare of Muslims. As a result, the RPJMN can be an effective tool in strengthening moderate Islam and contributing to the advancement of national diplomatic goals. Collaboration between the government and non-state actors, such as religious organizations, is essential for implementing the RPJMN, ensuring its positive impact and its primary objective is building a positive image of Islam at both national and international levels (Zaduqisti et al. 2020).

Additionally, Indonesia uses discursive practices to cultivate its global image as a peaceful and democratic Muslim-majority country by integrating the narrative of “Religious Moderation” into its diplomatic strategy. This multifaceted approach elevates Indonesia as a strong supporter of moderate Islam on the global stage. The term “Religious Moderation” is a concept rooted in the Islamic principle of *Tawasuth*, which encourages moderation and balance in religious practices and beliefs. Wali Songo also had an influence on this matter, which comprises a collection of Islamic teachings that emphasize tolerance, inclusiveness, and the importance of humanizing individuals. This term gained fame in Indonesian society due to the need to combat extremist religious interpretations and promote a more balanced and inclusive understanding of religious teachings. This concept is also applied in the context of interreligious dialogue and cooperation, emphasizing the importance of respecting and understanding the beliefs and practices of other religious communities.

The Indonesian government has collaborated with Islamic organizations, especially NU, to strengthen its efforts in presenting Indonesia as a moderate Muslim country. NU plays a crucial role in the social and political field, as well as in maintaining security within its respective communities. This organization had a significant role in advocating for and preserving the Islamic identity throughout the Dutch colonial era. NU was committed to upholding Islamic religious traditions even after the independence of Indonesia in 1945 (Syahnani, 2019). NU played an active role as an official government or state diplomacy partner in the 1970s to expand

Indonesia's diplomatic network. They dispatched young delegations to engage in religious discussions and promote peace on the international stage. NU's participation in the 2010 Interfaith Dialogue Congress, held in Indonesia, serves as proof (Heylen et al., 2018). Many prominent religious leaders from many regions of the world attended this significant event, demonstrating the ideals of tolerance and harmony amongst religions. Additionally, the event served to portray a positive picture of the Indonesian state.

NU's Effort in Propagating Moderation

The role of NU as a religious organization is evident here, as it helps to realize and advance educational programs in Indonesia, accompanied by more effective and sophisticated training and understanding. This demonstrates that Islamic teachings can be implemented effectively while remaining inclusive and moderate. NU has also successfully demonstrated its ability to collaborate and establish good relations with various countries worldwide. With its expertise in interfaith discussions, NU can share its positive thoughts with many other countries and collaborate on finding solutions together. For example, the success of the R20 forum (The Religion Forum of Twenty) in 2022 in Bali, Indonesia.

International scale forums are the ideal campaign tool for utilizing the soft power of non-state organizational actors. This consideration is justified because NU's status as an Islamic organization is close to the government, allowing it to have its political assessment on an international scale in forums. The orientation of religion as an integration tool for resolving the challenges of global skepticism towards religion is increasingly in a tactical position because NU not only offers campaigns for cultural diversity but also aspects of microeconomic development, domestic political mobilization, and increasing tourism are some of the main points that NU offers to the forum R20 (Haryanto & Syam, 2023).

The cooperation and outreach that NU carries out does not only stop at these religious forums, but NU collaborates with the MWL (Muslim World League) in the form of the participation of religious organizations (non-state actors) in diplomatic steps in collaboration with presidential or government

diplomats (Sumarto, 2021). Based on this, Muslim countries and international participation in the R20 forum focused on five specific studies (Sumarto, 2021). Firstly, the topic of spiritual ecology represents a form of every country's commitment to protecting nature and strengthening its defenses in the face of climate change. NU is one of those that places more emphasis on the importance of this study topic by basing it on spiritual science and modernity as an effort to preserve nature (Aprianto, 2020). Secondly, the rebuilding of the framework of religious teachings tends to be problematic and often appears outdated or fails to meet the challenges of modernity. Thirdly, NU and all forum participants conducted a comprehensive assessment of the beneficial value factors of religion to promote peaceful coexistence. Fourthly, reconciliation between international religious organizations is carried out to reveal the truth and forgiveness. Fifthly, Identify and accommodate religious values that are considered noble based on world civilization, which originates from religion. Then, KH Yahya Cholil Staquf, as the general chairman of NU, together with Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, attended the R-20 forum to participate in and address these five key agendas.

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, has had a significant impact on the international world's view of Islam and Muslims. There are many negative views aimed at Muslims, and people all over the world are starting to link the Islamic religion with the acts of terrorism that have occurred. As a result, violence, extremism, and other bad things are often attributed to Muslims by the international community. There is often stigmatization among them (Edkins, 2002). These attacks have an impact on the level of skepticism among Muslims who want to live or travel to other countries and affect the international community's view of immigration. Distrust, fear, and hatred towards Muslims and Islam often lead to physical and verbal attacks against Muslims in various countries, resulting in Muslims being restricted in their rights, including to participate in society and worship.

The promotion of moderate Islam has become a pressing imperative for countries seeking to counteract negative perceptions and foster peace. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, stands at the forefront

of this effort, wielding significant influence in shaping the discourse surrounding Islam and its role in international relations. In this discussion, we delve deeper into Indonesia's multifaceted approach to promoting moderate Islam, examining both the challenges it faces and the strategies it employs to advance its diplomatic agenda.

Indonesia, as one of the countries with the most significant Muslim majority in the world, also experienced a significant change in negative views after the September 11 attacks. Because the international community's stereotypes about Islam will certainly endanger security and social stability in Indonesia. Therefore, as a result of the change in negative views that occurred among Muslims, Indonesia is trying to introduce moderate Islam as a solution, not only at the national level but also at the international level (Haddad & Khashan, 2002). Indonesia has recognized the importance of promoting a more nuanced understanding of Islam, one that emphasizes tolerance, pluralism, and interreligious dialogue. This commitment to moderate Islam not only reflects Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity but also serves as a strategic diplomatic tool in its engagement with the international community.

Indonesia also must navigate the delicate balance between leveraging NU's influence and respecting its autonomy as a non-state actor. While collaboration with NU offers significant advantages in advancing Indonesia's diplomatic objectives, it is essential to ensure that NU retains its independence and integrity in representing the interests of its members and adherents. This requires Indonesia to adopt a collaborative and inclusive approach that values NU's perspectives and contributions while also upholding the principles of mutual respect and partnership.

Furthermore, NU's involvement in second-track diplomacy is beneficial not only for increasing peace and tolerance but also for the Indonesian government's diplomatic efforts. By engaging in second-track diplomacy, NU can help the government achieve its diplomatic objectives, such as promoting Indonesia as an international model for moderate Islam and fostering understanding among different religions, beliefs, and cultures. In this way, NU is not only a government partner but also an active

agent fighting for tolerance, peace, and harmony for all humanity worldwide. Its role in second-track diplomacy is essential in promoting peace, understanding, and cooperation between different religious and cultural communities, both domestically and internationally. By emphasizing the importance of tolerance, moderation, and understanding, NU contributes to developing strategies, influencing public opinion, and organizing human and material resources to help resolve conflicts and promote peace.

No doubt, NU plays a crucial role in promoting a moderate Islamic ideology through various strategies, including participation in international conferences and dialogue. The involvement of NU in the international arena reflects the non-state actor movement in interfaith dialogue, with the mission of achieving global peace, religious harmony, and unified views towards moderate Islam. The strategy implemented by NU in international diplomacy is second-track diplomacy or track-two diplomacy, which has been very influential in mitigating the tensions of rising Islamophobic movements that occur in various countries (Hoesterey, 2020).

Despite these gains, recent research raises grave questions regarding the internal and external challenges confronting NU's Humanitarian Islam diplomacy. Loo and Suryana (2024) discovered that while NU has made preliminary advances in establishing transnational alliances, for example, with the Imam Warith Deen Mohammed community as well as through the R20 forum, these endeavors remain plagued by conceptual ambiguities and a lack of grassroots engagement. Their ethnographic findings suggest that beyond a small elite group, the idea of Humanitarian Islam is poorly seized or does not generate a broad response, even within NU's internal networks. This gap poses the risk that international advocacy may not translate into sustainable or locally rooted impact, necessitating a more integrative and field-based second strategy.

In conclusion, Indonesia's engagement of NU in second-track diplomacy underscores the strategic importance of non-state actors in shaping diplomatic outcomes and advancing national interests. By harnessing NU's influence and resources, Indonesia can effectively promote its message of moderate Islam and strengthen its diplomatic

engagement with the international community. However, this collaboration must be guided by principles of mutual respect, transparency, and accountability to ensure its long-term viability and effectiveness in achieving shared objectives. As Indonesia continues to navigate the complexities of contemporary diplomacy, its partnership with NU remains a crucial asset in promoting peace, tolerance, and understanding on the global stage.

To take everything into account, the findings and arguments presented in this article raise further questions—particularly regarding the extent to which second-track diplomacy has had a tangible impact on society. This aspect calls for more in-depth empirical investigation to examine the public perception and reception of NU's diplomatic initiatives in both domestic and international contexts. Longitudinal studies or field-based research would be especially valuable in capturing the real-world effects, nuances, and sustainability of these diplomatic efforts.

CLOSING

Indonesia actively advocates moderate Islam in one way, namely the conceptualization of Wasathiyah Islam and peace through diplomatic initiatives, utilizing the strength of the Islamic mass organization, that is, NU. The concept of Wasathiyah (moderation) is at the heart of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts, which aim to position the country as a source of tolerance and moderation in an increasingly polarized world. This strategy aims to enhance the image of Islam and bolster Indonesia's position as a nation that promotes global peace and stability through moderate Islamic values. Some of the efforts that Indonesia has made to carry out diplomacy through NU are increasing cooperation with Afghanistan in the education sector through providing scholarships, establishing the NUA (Nahdlatul Ulama Afghanistan), establishing cooperation in the form of the Indonesian Afghan Women's Solidarity Network program, delegating NU cadres to the Hijaz Committee (Saudi Government) regarding freedom of religious values (including madzhab) and religious tolerance, holding the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS) or the World Conference of Muslim Scholars, in collaboration with 33 countries through the International Summit of Moderate Islamic

Leaders (ISOMIL). Then, Indonesia collaborated with NU and the Muslim World League (MWL) through the R20 International Summit Authorities (ISORA) - the G20 Religious Forum, in collaboration with the Council of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) and the Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference (KWI). Indonesia is also taking collaborative action in implementing concrete policy initiatives, namely the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which serves as the framework for these efforts. To conclude, NU serves as a medium for Indonesia's foreign diplomacy efforts through multilateral cooperation based on the concepts of mutual respect, transparency, and accountability to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness in achieving common goals.

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