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Irvan Aladip Mahfudin

Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia, mirvan4@gmail.com

Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo

Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia, riris.sundrijo@ui.ac.id

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FAITH-BASED TRANSNATIONAL ACTORS AND PEACEBUILDING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA IN AFGHANISTAN'S PEACE PROCESS

Irvan Aladip Mahfudin and Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo

Department of International Relations
Universitas Indonesia

Email: mirvan4@gmail.com & riris.sundrijo@ui.ac.id

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Abstrak

Seusai Perang Dingin, peacebuilding telah menjadi bagian dari diskursus utama dalam agenda perdamaian internasional. Untuk jangka waktu yang lama, agenda peacebuilding liberal dan sekuler menjadi dominan dengan negara sebagai aktor utamanya. Namun, dalam beberapa kasus, aktor non-negara—khususnya aktor transnasional keagamaan—mempunyai kontribusi penting dan signifikan dalam transformasi konflik melalui aktivitas-aktivitas peacebuilding keagamaan mereka. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi modifikasi Rüländ, von Lübke, dan Baumann terhadap konseptualisasi peacebuilding milik Lederach, dengan membagi proses peacebuilding ke dalam dua dimensi: dimensi evolusi konflik dan intervensi krisis. Dimensi evolusi konflik berfokus pada identifikasi akar penyebab dan perkembangan konflik, sementara dimensi intervensi krisis menekankan pada manajemen konflik dan transformasi konflik serta dampaknya terhadap perdamaian di suatu wilayah tertentu. Berdasarkan studi kasus keterlibatan Nahdlatul Ulama dalam proses peacebuilding di Afganistan, model analisis yang ditawarkan Rüländ, von Lübke, dan Baumann terbukti memberikan peluang bagi keterlibatan aktor transnasional keagamaan dalam proses peacebuilding.

Kata kunci:

peacebuilding, aktor transnasional keagamaan, peacebuilding berbasis agama, intervensi krisis

Abstract

After the end of the Cold War, the idea of peacebuilding has been central to the main narrative within the study of international peace. For a significant period, the narrative was dominated by liberal and secular approaches which put state as the primary actor in peacebuilding processes. Nevertheless, many cases show that non-state actors, in particular faith-based transnational actors, might have contributed significantly to the conflict transformation mechanism through their faith-based peacebuilding activities. This article explores the modification that Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann have made on Lederach's concept on peacebuilding, which categorises peacebuilding processes into two dimensions: conflict evolution and crisis intervention. The first dimension of conflict evolution focuses on the identification of the root causes of the conflict and its development, while the second dimension is more concerned with the management of conflict and its transformation, as well as its impacts to the peace establishment process in certain areas. Referring to the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama's involvement in the Afghanistan peacebuilding process, this article shows how the model offered by Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann can well explain the opportunity transnational non-state actors have to contribute significantly to promote the establishment of peace in conflict areas.

Keywords:

peacebuilding, faith-based transnational actor, faith-based peacebuilding, crisis intervention

INTRODUCTION

In traditional approaches to International Relations (IR), the study of war and peace has always been focusing on the way states create stability or peace within international political order. This is particularly in respect to the world out of which IR as a scientific discipline was born—the 1920s after World War I when threats from interstate wars were looming, and when states were still very much traumatised and threatened by the possibility of another outbreak of war. This then led to the domination of scholarly thoughts associated with Realism and Liberalism in the study of IR which focus on analysing the behaviour of great powers, such as the United States (U.S.), the then Soviet Union, as well as Europe, whereas the middle and small powers were positioned more as the allies of one of the more powerful actors (Acharya, 1997, pp. 301–307).

With the end of the Cold War, IR researchers faced big challenges when the long-dominant Realism and Liberalism were unable to explain the emergence of new phenomena in the study of IR. These phenomena are, for example, global climate change, poverty, terrorism, human rights, and transnational crime (Hadiwinata, 2017, p. 19), which are accompanied by the increasingly important role of non-state actors in world politics. Those actors are, among others, multinational companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), terrorist groups, and various forms of social movements.

One of the direct consequences of the emergence of this new phenomenon is the need to redefine the understanding of "war" and "peace" in IR studies. Previously, classic IR thinkers such as Alfred Zimmern, Norman Angel, John Mearsheimer, Hans J. Morgenthau, E.H. Carr, and Kenneth Waltz defined war as simple as a state of armed conflict between countries—an understanding that currently is considered as conventional and narrow. Following the rapid development of IR in the post-Cold War era, what is understood as "war" is no longer limited to conflicts between states, but also includes various conflicts involving non-state actors. From 1990 to 1999, for example, there were 118 recorded conflicts in different parts of the world, among which, only ten could be categorised as purely inter-state conflicts, while the rest significantly involved non-state actors (Smith, 2001, p. 113). These conflicts, known as non-traditional security issues, includes internal and sectarian conflicts, for example those that happens between India and Pakistan, in Mindanao (Philippines), as well as the conflict in Afghanistan.

Seeing from a different perspective, security issues which emerged post-Cold War, such as internal conflict in Afghanistan and separatism in both Southeast and South

Asia, prove how the traditionally considered non-security dimensions such as economic, identity, and environmental might also influence the dynamics of war and peace significantly (Acharya, 1997, pp. 308–315). Furthermore, human security related issues such as global pandemic (SARS, Swine Flu, Ebola, and COVID-19), identity conflicts, natural disasters, global climate change, refugees, poverty, and gender equality have triggered further academic interest to the construction of new understanding on the concepts of war and peace. These, along with the increased significant of the role of non-state actors in the dynamics, then encourage the expansion of the understanding of “peace” in contemporary IR studies; it is not only about the absence of conflict between states, but more fundamentally also includes the conditions where basic needs of human security are met.¹

One of the IR scholars who initiated the expansion of the meaning of “peace” is Barry Buzan. In his article entitled “The New Patterns of Global Security in Twentieth Century”, Buzan (1991) argues that there is a need for expanding “the shift away from political/military priorities towards a more non-military security agenda,” i.e. economic, social, and environmental security. In line with this, in 1994 the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) issued a Human Development Report which stated that in the post-Cold War era, the issue of security or peace should not only concern weapons and military but should also deal with issues related to livelihood and human welfare, such as economic, agriculture, health, environment, personal/individual, community, and politics (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

This new meaning of “peace” has ultimately triggered the development of numerous new methods of conflict resolution and ways of achieving peace itself (Richmond, 2008, pp. 15-17). From the 1920s until the end of the Cold War, the approach was mostly focused on how to manage states’ behaviours as the conflicts were interstate. For example, liberal thinkers such as Alfred Zimmern, Robert Cecil, Woodrow Wilson, and Hunter Miller—who were heavily inspired by Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (1795)—established the League of Nations in the aftermath of World War I as an effort to prevent another global war and maintain world peace (Hadiwinata, 2017, pp. 83–84). Despite the failure of League of Nations in preventing World War II to happen, the liberal ideas remain, which well explained the establishment of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods institutions—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the World Bank.

Meanwhile, Realists such as Morgenthau, E. H. Carr, Kenneth Waltz, and Mearsheimer argues that national interest and power struggle are two underlying conditions that must be considered in knowing how to achieve peace. Although there are many variants to these theories, one assumption that all have in common is that stability or peace can be achieved by increasing the power of state. This perspective seems to be able to successfully explain the power politics during Cold War, when great powers involved in arms race, competed to increase their hard power capabilities, and were trapped in a security dilemma.

The end of the Cold War, which triggered the shifting of the character of war and peace (as explained earlier), has allowed for the development of various new approaches in the efforts to find ways for conflicts resolution and to achieve peace. In 1992, in a document entitled *Agenda for Peace*,² the UN came up with the idea of liberal peacebuilding which seeks to bring about international peace by upholding liberal values. The underlying idea is that there is a positive correlation between democratic practices, such as the rule of law and transparency in policy making, and the process towards the achievement of regional peace (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 16). The assumption is that the spread of values of democracy would promote peace in an area of conflict. This democratisation agenda was continuously applied until 1995 when peacebuilding was identified as one of the UN's main strategies in creating stability and peace (Sens, 2004, p. 145). The same document also stated that the liberal conception of peacebuilding is basically universal in values which is held by all members of the international community; also that the UN and its member states are the key actors in achieving the idea (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 4).

Apart from the UN, in the post-Cold War era, actors which also play significant roles in efforts to achieve peace are organisations at the national and regional level (including NGOs and CSOs), as well as international financial institutions (Sens, 2004, p. 150). Remarkably, the inabilities of states and/or international organisations to function well in certain ways open up opportunities for transnational actors to take a central role in promoting regional peace (Sudira, 2017, p.167). Many cases show how peacebuilding efforts initiated by states failed to achieve the expected outcome, mainly due to the unbridgeable mutual suspicions occurred between the conflicting parties. Under these circumstances, some civil society actors, who have never been seen as capable of promoting peace, have proven to be able to play a crucial role. In certain cases, for example in Mindanao and Maluku, the role of church as a faith-based transnational

actors, was evident in the role of the Church in encouraging the transformation of conflict (Rüland, et al., 2019). In these two conflict areas, Church activism were proved to be more acceptable to the society than the peace initiatives taken by the state.

Based on his research findings on the constructive role of the Church in facilitating the process of conflict resolution in Maluku and Mindanao, Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann (2019) further elaborated Galtung's conception of conflict and violence, and Lederach's conception of peacebuilding. The elaboration stipulated by Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann. leads to a conception which highlights the important role of transnational faith-based actors in peacebuilding processes—which we argue as the first and only conception on this matter available to date. Before Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann, there were other writers, such as Bouta, et al. (2015), Haynes (2009), Abu-Nimer (2010), and Ahu Sandal (2011), who tried to explain the roles of religion or religious actors in promoting peace in certain areas, mainly domestic. However, none of them come up with concept which particularly explains the role of faith-based transnational actors in the process. Henceforth, the model that Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann have developed so far is still the only one.

This paper is developed in support of Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann's main argument that faith-based transnational actors are able to make strategic contributions to peacebuilding processes. Moreover, this paper also examines the applicability of Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann's model in a case study of the involvement of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—as a faith-based transnational actor—in the process of building peace in Afghanistan. This case study is interesting to us, because until now, there is no literature found discussing the significance of the role of religious actors in promoting peace in Afghanistan. This is despite NU's active involvement in resolving the conflict since 2011. This is also despite the identification found in various literatures of the important role of religious actors on peacebuilding processes that occur in other countries, such as in Indonesia (Al Qurtuby, 2013), South Africa and Northern Ireland (Ahu Sandal, 2011), Mali (Hinkel & Traore, 2020), as well as in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Nigeria (Haynes, 2009). The existing literature on the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan so far discussed more about the efforts of other actors including international organisations, such as the role of the UN (Ponzio, 2007), or the roles of states, such as Japan, China, and Indonesia (Ashizawa, 2014; Hirono, 2019; Farizan & Hariyadi, 2020).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Johan Galtung's Conception of Violence and Positive Peace

In general, conflict can be understood as a confrontation between two or more parties caused by differences in interests and goals (Miller, 2005, p. 22). Galtung seems to agree with this understanding when he argues that the roots of conflict lie in contradictions or incompatibilities of objectives between parties (Galtung, 2007, p. 15). He also argues that when conflict remains without any effort to transform it into peace, it will potentially lead to violence (Galtung, 2007, p. 14).

Galtung divided violence into three, i.e. direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990, p. 292; 1996, pp. 196–197). Direct violence takes the forms of war, murder, torture, rape, and various other events or actions which are visible. Structural violence is violence that is hidden within structures in the society. Poverty, low level of education, and marginalisation, for example, can be considered as violence. Meanwhile, cultural violence related more to a belief, or point of view that applies in the everyday life of a society concerning the practice of power and violent behaviour. For example, the punitive hand amputation for thief applied in certain society with sharia laws (Siregar, 2008).

In the context of these three forms of violence, Galtung developed two categories of peace which he called negative peace and positive peace (Galtung, 1996, pp. 31–33; 2007, p. 31). Negative peace is defined as a condition where there is no war or open physical violence (direct violence) visible on the surface, while positive peace is understood as a condition where justice and freedom has been achieved in a conflictual society which will eventually lead to the elimination of structural and cultural violence in the community (Galtung, 1996, p. 14).

We argue that having these two conceptions of peace allows for wider, and more strategic, involvement of non-state actors, including transnational faith-based actors, in the processes of peacebuilding in areas of conflict. Positive peace, for example, can be achieved through intrapersonal approaches which might help to overcome misperceptions between parties in conflict. Approaches like this can only be carried out by those who belong to the grassroot level as they understand the roots of the conflicts properly; and they are mainly the non-state actors. This, for example, was seen in the role of the Church in promoting peace in Mindanao and Maluku (Rüland, et al., 2019). The achievement of positive peace, in the end, either directly or indirectly, will lead to the end of war or open conflicts in the society. Unlike the condition of negative peace, here the peace is not

superficially achieved mainly because the root cause of the conflict has been, presumably, utterly resolved.

J. P. Lederach's Conception of Comprehensive Peacebuilding

Long before the UN developed the post-conflict liberal peacebuilding policy in 1992, Galtung has introduced the concept of peacebuilding in 1976 through his writing published as a part of a book titled *Peace, War, and Defense*. Galtung defines peacebuilding as an effort to promote peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and violence by involving, supporting, and strengthening the capacity of local communities in conflict management and resolution (Galtung, 1976, p. 297). However, the idea of peacebuilding started to become central in the global discourse of international peace only after the UN developed the liberal idea of peacebuilding as one of their main approaches in maintaining and achieving world peace after the Cold War (refer to previous discussion). However, in contrast to that introduced by Galtung, the UN defines peacebuilding more as an action to identify and support political structures that will strengthen and solidify peace, that is by democratising the ruling government (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 17). Therefore, unlike Galtung who emphasises the importance of involving the conflicting local communities in the peacebuilding process, the UN is basically pursuing (liberal) peacebuilding through strengthening and modernising the state, that is through developing good governance, achieving stable institutions, enforcing the rule of law, protecting human rights, having fair and free elections, as well as ensuring the running of economic and social development that are all assumed to have a positive impact to conflict resolution.

It is known that this approach has been highly criticised as it failed to secure sustainable peace in many conflict areas, including Rwanda, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, as well as Afghanistan. One of the criticisms is on its tendencies to be paternalistic, top-down, Eurocentric, teleological (leading to one goal: democracy), and was carried out heavily with the aim of modernisation in the system, including Western-style democratisation and rationality (Rüland et al., 2019). This approach was considered a failure, mainly due to its inability to accommodate the complexity of the conflict as well as the cultural differences that existed in conflict areas, and due to its negligence of the significance of local agents (Rüland et al., 2019). As it tends to be implemented in a top-down manner, this approach has also been criticised for its inability to build local ownership of the peacekeeping programmes undertaken, including denying the importance of active

involvement of local communities. These issues have resulted in obstruction of the implementation of this UN agenda (Thiessen, 2013). In practice, the peacebuilding concept developed by the UN tends to be seen as part of the “global liberalisation project,” where the main agenda is not the peacebuilding itself, but the promotion of the interest of the great powers for democratisation (Kharisma, 2017). One example is the peacebuilding efforts undertaken by the U.S. in Afghanistan. Rather than trying to find the source of conflict to identify the best way to achieve peace, the U.S. focussed its peacebuilding effort in injecting the value of democracy in the area (Susanti & Monika, 2005), a western-centric value which is not necessarily compatible with the local value.

One of the scholars who are interested in the development of peacebuilding as an IR concept is Lederach. His concept is more transformative in nature and relies more on a bottom-up and comprehensive approach. For Lederach, peacebuilding should be defined as “a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships” (Lederach, 1997, p. 20).

Based on their characteristics, Lederach divided the involvement of peacebuilding actors into three, namely top-level, middle-range level, and grassroots-level leaderships (Lederach, 1997). At the top-level (Lederach, 1997, p. 38) are political and military leaders. If an internal conflict occurs between the state and community groups, the key figures in the peacebuilding process would be the government elites and leaders of the opposition. The process usually involves external actors, such as other countries and international organisations, for example, the UN. Media spotlight helps to increase the profile of the actors involved, as well as the public’s attention towards the process. The peacebuilding process will be highly top-down in practice. It is assumed that when an agreement to end the conflict is reached at the level of top leadership, peace will simultaneously follow at the level of the community in conflict.

Second, middle-range leadership (Lederach, 1997, p. 41) is defined as those who play strategic leadership role in conflict resolution, but do not actually hold formal positions in both the government and in opposition groups. They are, among others, those who are given the honour and trust by the community or ethnic group, religious leaders, or leaders of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) directly engaged in the humanitarian issues. Usually, those at this level own a strong network and maintain good relations with both elites at the governmental level and the leaders of the community at

the grassroots level. Compared to the top-level leadership, effort by actors at this level usually receive less media attention.

Thirdly, grassroots-level leadership (Lederach, 1997, p. 42) represents the people in a conflict. They, among others, are members of NGOs, health workers, leaders of refugee camps, and other familiar figures in the community who interact directly with the people in a day-to-day basis. Among the three categories of leaders, the grassroots leaders are assumed to be those who understands the nature of the conflict the best.

The paradox of this categorisation is that the higher the level of category of actors, the greater the access they have to various sources of information related to the conflict, but the less the impact of the policy they make on the communities in conflicts. This is presumably because they only have the information, but do not understand the root causes of the conflict, nor the character of those are involved in the conflict. Then, this leads to a formation of policy which are based more on assumption and generalisation, which does not necessarily fit the need. Conversely, the lower the category of the actor, the less access they have to see the conflict from broader perspectives, but the greater the impact of their words on the people involved in the conflict (Lederach, 1997, p. 43). This is also problematic as sometimes their words are good only to solve the conflict on the spot, but not strong enough to maintain peace in the long term. From this perspective of the nexus between information and policy, we argue that middle-range leaderships are those who have the bigger modality in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. As can be seen in the role of NU in Afghanistan discussed in the following section of this article, not only the middle-range leaders have the access for wider information about the conflict, but they also have the ability to process the information based on their knowledge and understanding on the nature of the conflict itself to come up with approaches to conflict resolution that serve the needs of parties in conflict.

Lederach further conclude that top-level leadership will not be able to initiate peace without public support, and that leaders who benefit from the conflict situation tend to close their ears from public opinion. Furthermore, of the three categories, those at the middle-range level have the biggest potential or opportunity to build infrastructure to support the peacebuilding process in the long run (Paffenholz, 2014, p. 15). It is at this level, as well as at the grassroots-level, the opportunities are opened for the transnational non-state actors to contribute significantly at the peacebuilding process.

Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann's Conception of Faith-Based Transnational Actors in the Peacebuilding Process

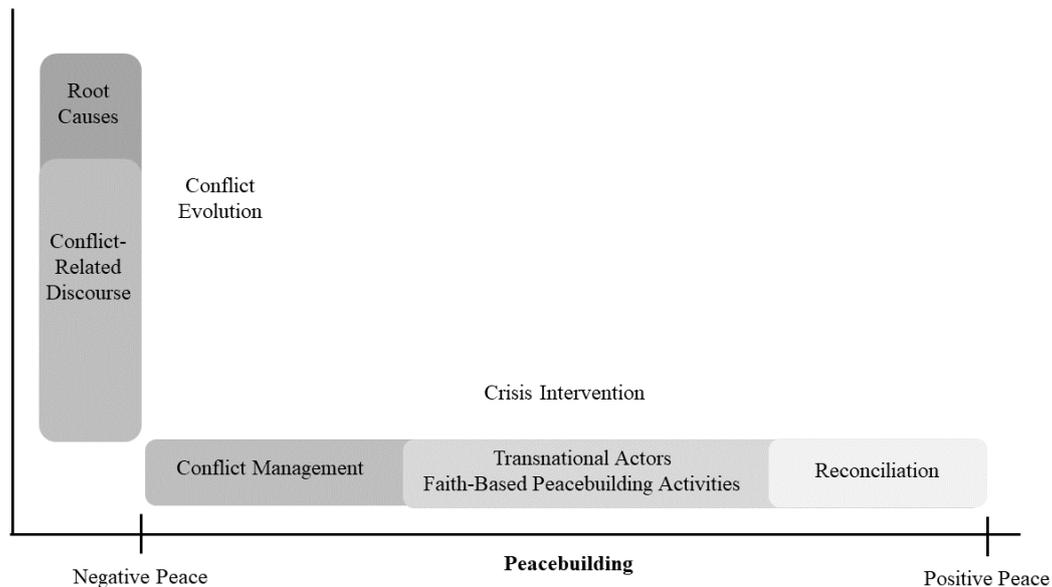
In his book (2019), Jürgen Rüland, Christian von Lübke, and Marcel Baumann adopted the concept of peacebuilding developed by Lederach to explain the role of Church as a religious institution in facilitating peacebuilding in Mindanao and Ambon. In its identification, Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann categorise the process into two. The first category focuses on the evolution of conflict; it tries to explain the root causes of conflict and how the conflict develops in such a way as it might be influenced by religious narratives. It is from this type of conflict that violent groups which use religious beliefs as justifications would occur.

The second category focuses on the behaviour of certain actors in seeking peacebuilding (crisis intervention) in conflict areas. Adopting Lederach's three leadership level, Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann classify actor's behaviour based on three stages of conflict, i.e. conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict transformation (Rüland et al., 2019). The goal of conflict resolution and conflict management is to end conflict and violence through an agreement achieved between the parties in conflict. Galtung argues that this process will contribute to what he calls negative peace. Meanwhile, conflict transformation aims to end conflict through changes at personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions. These processes are obviously more complex and complicated compared to conflict management or conflict resolution. The goal of the multidimensional changes is to create a long-term peace, a condition which Galtung calls positive peace, i.e. situation where conflictual approaches and the use of violence are no longer considered as rational ways to bridge differences in the society.

In their research, Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann (2019) argue that the peacebuilding activism initiated by local Church contributed positively to the transformation of conflict in Maluku and Mindanao. Compared to peace initiatives undertaken by state actors, Church activism is proven to be more acceptable to local communities. This acceptance is mainly due to the inclusive (open), fair, and neutral nature of the mediation processes, which are different from the elitist and non-dialogic coercive approaches generally applied by states (Rüland, et al., 2019). We argue that the behaviour of the Church in Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann's research well-represents the behaviour of faith-based transnational actors in promoting peace in a conflict area. In this article, we examine the applicability of Rüland, von Lübke, and Baumann's peacebuilding model using a case study of NU's contribution to the peace process in

Afghanistan. As in the below figure, we include elements of “transnational actors faith-based peacebuilding activities” to replace an element which in Ruland's original model was labelled as “Church based peacebuilding activities.”

Figure 1. Involvement of Faith-Based Transnational Actors in Peacebuilding



Source: Adapted from Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann's (2019) analytical framework.

The strength of religious actors, whether they are organisations or individual leaders, that contribute significantly to conflict resolutions lies in their ownership of transcendent authority, both spiritual and emotional. Their approaches in solving conflict tend to be more acceptable, especially in communities experiencing religious-based-conflicts (Johnston, 2003, p.14). Their other strengths in facilitating the process of conflict transformation include: (1) motivations based on strong religious beliefs to encourage peace; (2) ability to create peace over a long period of time; (3) the existence of moral and spiritual authority which is required to reduce conflict tensions; and finally, (4) their capacity to build relationships based on trust between the parties in conflict (Bouta, et al., 2005, p. 43).

Meanwhile, the weakness of religious organisations/individuals in their involvement in peacebuilding process is their tendency to focus more on processes, and less on achieving the goals. Some also argues that they do not have the necessary skills, as well as proper knowledge and experiences on negotiation processes as their involvement in the process are mainly based on their religious mandate (Bouta et al., 2005, pp. 43–44).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques on data gathering and analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 627). This approach is commonly chosen for purposes such as complementing the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, the need for triangulating the research, or simply to gather more information using various techniques on some specific topics (Lamont, 2015, p. 115). This research applies such an approach because in addition to aiming for a theory testing (on Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann's conception of peacebuilding), this research also plans to further develop the concept based on the research findings that we gathered during the process of case study analysis.

Data analysis in this study is carried out by using the process-tracing method. Process-tracing is an attempt to trace the process in which the relationship between the cause (or set of causes) (factor X) and the outcome factor (factor Y) has been confirmed to occur. Henceforth, the focus of the observation is only on what ways or how factor X can lead to the occurrence of factor Y (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 88; Lamont, 2015, p. 127). In this study, the factor X is NU as a faith-based transnational actor, and the factor Y is the peacebuilding dynamics in Afghanistan. We try to trace how NU works in the peacebuilding process through primary and secondary data. The secondary data are obtained through literature studies on books, journal articles, mass media articles, and other grey literature sources, including official reports and press releases issued by the state and/or other governmental institutions, both in Indonesia and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the primary data is obtained through interviews and studies of unpublished documents and records, which come from personal collections of NU figures.

After data collection, the next step is to organise each piece of data to construct an explanation on how NU contributed significantly to the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. The organisation of the pieces of data is carried out partly in reference to Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann's initial peacebuilding model, while the final output of the construction is the modification of the model, as seen in Figure 1.

DISCUSSION

Strategic Role of NU in Peacebuilding Process in Afghanistan

In 2007, the Indonesian Government, through NU, was involved in the release of South Korean citizens who were taken hostage by Taliban in Afghanistan ("Indonesia Jadi Tokoh Kunci", 2007). For that, the South Korean Government expressed their gratitude

to their Indonesian counterpart (“Korea Selatan Berterima Kasih,” 2007) as well as to NU (“Korsel Berterima Kasih”, 2007). At that time, Mullah Omar, the highest leader of Taliban, exchanged letters with As’ad Said Ali³—to whom the Executive Board of NU (widely known as *Pengurus Besar NU* or PBNU) would later grant the responsibilities to lead dialogues and peace initiatives in Afghanistan—to express his gratitude for the success of the mission. In his letter, Mullah Omar urged the Indonesian Government and NU to voice the situation of the people of Afghanistan who were—as he said—in ‘*madzlum*’ (being colonised), and who sincerely wished for peace upon their land (Said Ali, 2021). In the same letter, Mullah Omar also voiced out his wish to foster brotherhood with the Islamic community or *ummah* in Indonesia.

Within such a context, when the Indonesian Government—represented by Hassan Wirajuda as the Foreign Minister and Syamsir Siregar, the Head of the State’s Intelligence Agency (*Badan Intelijen Negara*, hereinafter referred to as BIN), and mediated by As’ad Said Ali—requested NU to communicate with religious and community leaders in Afghanistan, K.H. Sahal Mahfudz as PBNU’s *Rais Aam*⁴ accepted the request, but under one provision that he would be given a full trust. To have a full trust from the government is very important mainly because entering Afghanistan was known to be difficult (Mun’im DZ & Damasky, 2018, pp. 73–75), and NU would need to be able to use their own approaches, which were not necessarily the approach that would be taken by the Indonesian Government. The decision to accept the assignment was in line with NU’s mission to exist globally to disseminate the value of *Islam rahmatan lil alamin*,⁵ which rested upon the principles of *tawasuth* (moderate), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (proportionate/equal), *i’tidal* (just), and *tasyawur* (consensus) (Purwono, 2013).

Its first attempt in pursuance of peace in Afghanistan happened around the celebration of NU’s 85th anniversary in June 2011. To commemorate such a moment, NU, in cooperation with BIN and the Foreign Ministry of Indonesia, held a forum titled “Consultation Forum for Peace in Afghanistan” on 18 July 2011 in Jakarta (“Indonesia religious group”, 2011), which became a forum for dialogues involving various community and religious groups from Afghanistan. The forum was attended by twenty significant Afghan public and religious figures, among others, Burhanuddin Rabbani (Head of the *High Peace Council* or HPC and former President of Afghanistan), Mohammad Muhaqqiq (a member of the Afghan Parliament and the Head of *Hezb Wahdat Mardom Afghanistan*), Waheedullah Sabawoon (the President’s Advisor and a leading figure in the United Islamic Party of Afghanistan), Abdul Salam Zaeef (Taliban’s

Ambassador for Pakistan and a member of HPC), Ghulam Farooq Wardak (Minister of Education), Fazal Ghani Kakar (a moderate religious leader and a leading figure in NECDO), and Maulawi Hayatollah Talib Zada (a religious leader from the Province of Mingarhar) (Muhtadi, 2011). Meanwhile, NU was represented by As'ad Said Ali—who held the responsibility for the commencement of the forum—and other prominent NU figures (Mun'im DZ & Damasky, 2018, pp. 95–115). The forum was considered as successful in facilitating communication not only between NU and their Afghan counterpart, but also among Afghan leaders themselves. The forum provided opportunities for an open discussion and exchanges of information and ideas on what would be alternative solutions on how to best deal with the fundamental differences found among the Afghans, and how to establish peace amidst the differences.

The forum agreed upon a joint statement which stated that the participants: (1) agreed that the core of Islamic religion, *rahmatan lil alamin*, relied on the principles of *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, *tawasuth*, and *i'tidal*; (2) agreed to end the conflict in Afghanistan; (3) acknowledged that in order to establish peace, the role of facilitators (which better be external parties) were required thus should be accepted by all components of the nation (Mun'im DZ & Damasky, 2018, p. 118). The joint statement was a realisation of what Rüländ conceptualised as conflict transformation, in which changes occurred at the personal level of the forum's participants. The participatory nature of the dialogue enabled all participants to elaborate their thoughts and understandings on the cultural and structural roots of the conflict, which further opened possibilities for discussions and debates on ideas on alternative solutions for conflict resolution. Within this context, NU as a faith-based transnational actor played an important role in facilitating the dialogue and mediating tensions that occurred among the participants every now and then. In the end, it was evident that the dialogue served as an important first step in the Afghan peace process for at least two reasons. First, as previously mentioned, the dialogue allowed for exchanges of information and ideas around alternatives for peacebuilding efforts. Second, even more significant, the dialogue facilitated relational transformations to happen, as the participants were given a way to eliminate suspicions and build trusts among them. It is expected that the twenty Afghan leading figures who participated in the dialogue would be willing to transmit the personal and relational changes that happened within them to their respective communities to further create cultural and structural changes.

The joint statement allowed for more intensive cooperation between NU and their Afghan counterparts. NU actively initiated and participated in various peace dialogues,

among others, a dialogue entitled “Role of Ulama in Development and Reconstruction of Afghanistan” involving different factions in Afghanistan, which took place in Jakarta, on 18–19 July 2012. In January 2013, NU partook in a workshop titled “Role of Ulama in Peace, Reconciliation and Brotherhood in Afghanistan,” organised by the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Afghanistan in cooperation with the Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organisation (NECDO). Twenty-two religious leaders represented their respective provinces in Afghanistan attended the workshop (NECDO, 2017). Within the same year, 13 religious leaders, who came from 12 provinces in Afghanistan, visited Indonesia to have a discussion with NU and observe some Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), universities, as well as the Istiqlal Mosque, museums, and other Islamic sites (Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia Kabul Afghanistan, 2015). These dialogues were held by NU aiming at widely empowering and involving Afghan religious leaders in the pursuance of a long-term peace—or, in reference to Rüländ, a positive peace—in Afghanistan (NECDO, 2017).

During the series of dialogues involving both the moderate and Taliban-affiliated groups of religious leaders, NU attempted to introduce *tawasuthiyah* (a moderate outlook to the religion) which NU abides to by showing examples of the daily life of Islamic communities in Indonesia (Mun'im DZ, 2021). Indonesia is not a secular nor a religious state; yet the Pancasila as the national ideology allows the strategic role of religions in the society as well as in the state-society relations. Many religious practices, such as hajj, zakat, and waqf, as well as the more secular practices such as education in *pesantren*, and laws on marriage, are governed by the state following the value of Islam. To adopt religious values for the running of the governance system turned out to be an important suggestion, as one of the causes of conflict in Afghanistan was the lack of agreement on a governance platform that was deemed as appropriate for the country (Malik, 2016, p. 303), in which some *mujahideen* groups wanted to apply modern liberal platforms, while some other were willing to have a state which would be based on Islamic laws.

Another example of NU's attempt in introducing *tawasuthiyah* was by highlighting a different (and broader) understanding of the idea of *jihad*. In his visit to Afghanistan in 2013, As'ad Ali, in his capacity as the head of NU's peace initiative, explained to Afghan community leaders that *jihad* should not be interpreted limitedly as going to physical war for the sake of Islam; it should rather be understood in a broader sense as the fight for developing the society and, at the personal level, controlling greed (Mun'im DZ & Damasky, 2018, p. 131). *Jihad* should not be conducted in anyplace we

want; if *jihad* were conducted without considering the context of time and place, it could be considered as a form of terrorism. These understandings differed from what was widely understood in Afghanistan. For decades, the people of Afghan were indoctrinated with narrow understandings of *jihad* and *shaheed* (martyrdom) through the education provided in *madrasas* and books published by external parties—such as the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Such indoctrination projects were put in place to push the Afghan to drive away the Soviet Union and its influences out of their territory. Although these indoctrination projects were terminated in 1994, the public teaching on the shallow understanding of *jihad* were still on going until the 2000s (Manchada, 2020).

In these meetings, the participants expressed their interests towards ideas introduced by NU. Furthermore, these meetings also helped them to strengthen their trusts on NU and its willingness to help in finding the best way for a conflict resolution in Afghanistan (Mun'im DZ & Damasky, 2018, p. 131).

A historical meeting happened on 5 May 2014, in which various groups of religious leaders from different factions including Taliban-affiliated leaders, agreed to establish the Nahdlatul Ulama Afghanistan (NUA) (Mun'im DZ & Damasky, 2018, pp. 213–221). NUA was officially inaugurated in June 2014, adopting the values of NU Indonesia, namely *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, *al-'adalah* (just), *tasamuh*, and *musyarakah* (participation/consensus) as its underlying values (NECDO, 2017). In a span of only two years, NUA had managed to establish branches in 22 provinces in Afghanistan, and having a total of 6,000 local religious leaders as its members (Sapiie, 2016). NUA's rapid development demonstrated that ideas introduced by NU Indonesia were well received by different religious groups in Afghanistan. Referring to Rüländ's conceptualisation of peacebuilding, the establishment of NUA and the wider acceptance of it showed how a series of dialogues initiated by NU as a faith-based transnational actor might facilitate a conflict transformation at the personal, relational, structural, and cultural levels. This further allowed for bigger opportunities for positive peace in Afghanistan.

The relationships between NU and various religious leaders in Afghanistan were strengthened during the establishment of the Indonesian Islamic Centre (IIC) in Kabul (Sapiie, 2016). IIC was NU's ideas which was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. It was built on a land area of 10,000 square metres, which consists of four main buildings functioned as a mosque, library, shelter house, as well as clinic to treat those who were injured by the conflict. The aim was for IIC to facilitate NU's further cooperation with Afghan religious leaders through NUA in promoting a more moderate

outlook of Islam with the hope to slowly, but gradually, reduce the tension between those in conflict.

In 2018 NU–NUA’s harmonious partnership also succeeded in reducing the increased political tension in Afghanistan, which was unintentionally triggered by the top-level leadership. In an attempt to fulfil Ashraf Ghani’s request for Indonesia’s participation in resolving the conflict in Afghanistan (Pradiba, 2017), the Indonesian Government organised the Bogor Ulama Declaration of Peace in 2018, which brought together religious leaders from Indonesia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (Gumelar, 2018). The declaration was highly criticised by Taliban, who considered the convention more as an instrument to legitimise the presence of a ‘*kafir*’ nation in Afghanistan (“Taliban Afganistan Desak”, 2018). Despite their disagreement with Taliban’s point of view in this matter, NU understood where it came from, and why Taliban saw Indonesia’s peace efforts as a rather pragmatic political manoeuvre. This is what Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann recognised as a conflict resolution effort which—at the maximum—may lead to a superficial negative peace.

In response to this escalating situation, NU and NUA held a dialogue with various Taliban leading figures (Mun’im DZ, 2019). This dialogue was an effort to embrace the Taliban, who felt that they were side-lined during the Bogor Ulama Declaration of Peace. NU understood that, although the Taliban was no longer in power in Kabul, they still had immense influence among the people, hence their strategic position in peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan. The dialogue came up with a joint statement in which the Taliban, NUA, and NU agreed to support the peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan, emphasising that the mediation processes should be held in a neutral manner. The following is the excerpt from the statement.

“We the Ulama from Afghanistan (Former Taliban Prominent Figures), NUA (Nahdlatul Ulama Afghanistan), and NUI (Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia) in result of our dialogue and discussion about peace in Afghanistan from the perspective of former Taliban leaders and prominent figures agree to recommend the following points:... 4) The mediator should build trust between actors of the conflict by remaining neutral during whole peace... 8) We highly recommend that next step should be taken as soon as possible, an informal meeting with the medium or top level leadership of the Taliban.” (Mun’im DZ, 2019, p. 76)

The achieved agreement proved two points. First, from the Taliban's side, as a result of NU's (along with NUA) dialogue initiatives, there have been some personal and cultural transformation at the key actors (middle-range leadership). This transformation was based upon mutual trust and collective will to end the prolonged conflict, which—if maintained—would lead towards the formation of positive peace in Afghanistan.

Second, from NU's side as the mediator, it was proven that in comparison to the state actors, NU, which entered Afghanistan as a faith-based transnational actor, was able to gain more trust from the parties in conflict. NU's success to embrace Taliban—although not *all* factions within Taliban had agreed to talk to NU—proved its ability to fill in the gap which, in this particular case, failed to be filled by any state actors. This was made possible by, according to Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann, NU's ability to employ a comprehensive peace approach which was inclusive, just, and neutral. Conducting its multiple dialogue efforts, it can be concluded that NU contributed significantly to the establishment of a more peaceful atmosphere in Afghanistan.

NU's Role in Afghanistan's Peacebuilding Process: A Conceptual Reflection

This article is not intended to justify that NU was the only non-state actor, nor its initiatives were the only strategic efforts, in the pursuit of peace in Afghanistan. This article aims to highlight that NU's involvement in Afghanistan, as explained, proves that there are opportunities for faith-based transnational actors to significantly contribute to peacebuilding processes. Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann's analytical framework—which was derived from Lederach's (1997) concept on peacebuilding—can be an option for IR scholars, especially those who are interested in security and peace studies, to elaborate the process of conflict transformation towards positive peace through a perspective differed from those offered by mainstream IR approaches.

Unlike the conventional views, this article proves that a peacebuilding process may be initiated by middle-range level leadership (whose involvement in the process may initially be facilitated by the top-level leadership, and later be supported by the grassroots level leadership). Peacebuilding may also be processed through soft power (which utilises personal, relational, structural, and cultural instruments), without having to involve hard power—as believed by the traditionalists. Moreover, this article confirms the effectiveness of bottom-up, comprehensive, and inclusive approaches which increase the opportunity for the establishment of positive peace. These approaches facilitated the construction of shared understanding of differences, the need to properly deal with the

differences, and the collective will to put an end to the conflict. Referring to NU's involvement in Afghanistan, it is identified that this approach is reflected in series of dialogue which are conducted in a friendly, non-political, accommodative atmosphere, along with a sense of sensitivity towards differences among the parties involved.

CONCLUSION

The Afghanistan conflict, which has occurred for more than 30 years, provides opportunities for IR scholars to explore some alternative explanations about the possibility of ways in pursuing peace in the region. One of them is the emergence of transnational faith-based actors. These actors, who are considered as non-traditional security actors, hold unique characteristics which differ from traditional actors, such as states and regional/international organisations whose involvements in conflict resolution processes have been well elaborated. Their unique characters may be evident in the methods they apply to bridge differences in perspectives, values, and interests held by the parties in conflict. The ability to include religious beliefs into the dialogues further strengthens the unique importance of these actors, which make their facilitating role in the peacebuilding processes cannot be easily replaced by any traditional actor.

This article demonstrates the applicability of Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann's model in underlining the contribution of faith-based transnational actors in peacebuilding processes. Moreover, this article fulfils the gap found in the model. Rüländ, von Lübke, and Baumann's model presents a macro-level framework to understand the opportunities non-state actors have in order to get involved in peacebuilding, yet it does not explain detailed steps which those actors may take, nor to what extent their efforts may significantly contribute to conflict transformation. This article fulfils the following gap: efforts towards conflict transformation for the establishment of positive peace as initiated by transnational faith-based actors may happen through dialogues involving as many parties in conflict as possible. This article also reveals the importance of networks among transnational faith-based actors, particularly among those who hold strategic influences in their respective areas.

To further understand the strategic roles non-state actors may play in peacebuilding processes, it would be necessary to conduct further research on the dynamics of vertical power relations among actors in the top-, middle-, and grassroots-levels. It is also important to understand how middle-range actors play their roles as a 'transmission belt' to bridge different interests between the top- and grassroots leaderships.

Acknowledging the findings of our research so far, we argue that further research on NU's involvement in Afghanistan may well address those issues.

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Note:

¹ According to Bob Hadiwinata (2017), the notion of “human security” was popularised by practitioners who worked on issues on human empowerment while academics prefer to use the term of ‘non-traditional security’ which contains both the military and non-military elements in it. The development of this concept was triggered by the concerns of some traditional security scholars to secure the importance of IR’s security

studies in the Post-Cold War era, which was believed as threatened by the diminishing relevance of the use of military power in dealing with the emergence of some new non-traditional threats in the security sector.

² The official document of *Agenda for Peace* contains the UN's first systematic strategy of peacebuilding.

³ As'ad Said Ali was involved in this case as the Deputy Head of BIN who was directly assigned with the task of commanding the whole process. Ali was directly involved in the process, including leading the dialogue of coordination both with Taliban and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in order to ensure the safety of the hostages. This explained the high gratitude Mullah Omar expressed in his personal letter to Ali. It is also contextual to note that BIN's involvement in this matter, particularly the decision to also involve NU, was because of the negotiation deadlock which occurred during initiatives taken by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁴ *Rais Am* (president general) is the title of the head of *Syuriah*. PBNU was made up of three bodies: a supreme council (*Syuriah*), an administrative council (*Tanfidziyah*) and an advisory council (*Mustasyar*). Structurally, the *Syuriah* is the highest and most authoritative body within NU, responsible for formulating policy and given the final say in all major decision making.

⁵ The term of *rahmatan lil alamin* refers to the interpretation a Quran verses, Al Anbiya: 107, "And we sent you (Mohammad) for no purpose other than to be a *rahmatan lil alamin* (blessing for all creation)". There is no consensus about the exact definition of this term. Referring to the term "*Islam rahmatan lil alamin*," Abdurrahman Wahid (2006) argues that every Muslim has the duty to establish a non-violence universal human brotherhood, which are fundamental for a prosperous, just, and peaceful life.