

# Islamic International Relations as a Potential Tool to Indonesia's Soft Power Diplomacy

Sofi Mubarok<sup>1\*</sup>, Rudi Candra<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dept. International Relations, University of Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author. Email: [sofimubarok@unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:sofimubarok@unida.gontor.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the development of Islamic International Relations in Indonesia developed by several International Relations departments under the auspices of Islamic Universities, which are incorporated in the INSIERA (The Indonesian Islamic Studies and International Relations Association). The development of Islamic perspectives in the study of International Relations in Indonesia occurs in an international situation that is filled with internal or international conflicts, which can be seen from the political situation in several Muslim countries, such as Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and several other Muslim countries. It is clear evidence of how the diplomatic process of democracy did not work as it should. From this hope, the results of studies from thinkers of Islamic International Relations in Indonesia can crystallize into Islamic International Relations concept and method, as Indonesia's soft power diplomacy capital in the international sphere, as well as alternative solutions, to reduce the potential for world conflict. By using both qualitative-quantitative approaches, this research reveals that Indonesia as the largest Muslim country in the World, with the slow but sure progress of the study of Islamic International Relations, Indonesia in the future can use religious and cultural diplomacy as the main bargaining value with the strong academic basis. The development of the international world which is always changing has also changed the paradigm of diplomacy; If previously the ability of hard power was the main bargaining value in diplomacy, but soft power is a strategic medium of diplomacy between countries. Indonesia as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world has the cultural superiority and Islamic identity to then be used as the main diplomacy media.

**Keywords:** *Islamic perspective, international relations, international relations department, Islamic university, Indonesia*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic International Relations is a new discourse in International Relations. Although in practice it had been done by the Prophet Muhammad SAW during his preaching from in Mecca to establishing Islamic administration in Madinah, which was back then followed by his companions and the *Tabi'in* (the generation after the prophet's companions). Furthermore, if we examine a few verses and chapters in Al Qur'an, we can discover the diplomatic practices of the previous Prophets and Messengers of Allah. The existence of Islamic International Relations is a response from the development of International Relations (IR) which dominated by western philosophy and perspective. Islam as a religion that has a specific and comprehensive life's guidance of its adherents, will automatically respond to the development of modern science.

Another characteristic of Islamic International Relations is the main reference sources, on this point also giving the crystal-clear difference from the western perspective. The major sources of Islamic International Relations are the Qur'an, Hadith, and the consensus of the Islamic scholars or known as the *Ijma* summarized in the Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*). Thus, Islamic International Relations thinkers are

required to have two aspects of capability; understanding of Islamic sciences and modern international relations. In the next process, these two scientific aspects can collaborate and transform into a new perspective discourse in the study of international relations.

In the Indonesian context, the study and development of Islamic IR become an interesting discourse to be discussed. Then from this intellectual curiosity, some researchers and Islamic IR observers agreed to initiate and establish an epistemic group specifically to discuss Islamic International Relations, this group was later named INSIERA (the Indonesian Islamic Studies and International Relations Association). In the process of founding, it was initiated by Gontor Darussalam University (UNIDA), Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah University (UMY), Indonesian Islamic University (UII) Yogyakarta, Muhammadiyah University of Malang (UMM) and UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. By taking a sampling of several Islamic Universities in Indonesia that have International Relations departments. Standardization of development is measured by how many scientific articles produced by these campuses published in journals or student theses.

The existence of this new discourse in International Relations should be supported by leveling up the capacity, from mere discourse and theories to the level of practice and implementation. Disseminating information about Islamic International Relations, as new potential diplomacy and

implementation of Indonesia's foreign policy in the International sphere, in the future can be formulated as Indonesia's soft power.

Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, cannot deny a fact from the Islamic identity in the implementation of foreign policy. Moreover, history records that the implementation of 'Islamic identity' became the main diplomacy instrument to convince countries in the Arab League to give recognition of Indonesia's independence. Implementation of a perfect Islamic identity; Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Iran later recognized Indonesian independence

The golden history of the success of Indonesian diplomacy with Islam as an identity should be maintained even if it needs to be improved in the implementation of diplomacy and Indonesian foreign policy, especially when dealing with countries with Islamic identities. Moreover, the Islamic world today is truly in a situation that is not conducive. Conflicts in the Middle East such as Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Libya and other Muslim-populated countries to this day are unlikely to find a major solution, to deliver state stability. Palestine as one of the first countries in the world to recognize the sovereignty of Indonesia's independence, until this moment it has not been declared an independent state. The initiation of a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine has always failed. This is clear evidence of how weak Islamic countries are in dealing with American's hegemony and its allies

In the 2019 presidential debate, elected President (for the second period) Joko Widodo explained about Islam as a diplomatic capital for Indonesia in the international arena. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia can play a greater role in various sectors. In the security and peace sector, for example, how can Indonesia potentially mediate disputes in conflicting Muslim countries and communities, such as in Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Rakhine (Rohingya), and Afghanistan. In the economic field, the emergence of halal tourism and Islamic banking phenomena that have attractive economic prospects that have begun to be looked at even implemented in various countries including non-Muslim countries, make Indonesia with the largest Muslim population in the world have the opportunity to be a leader in this contestation. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the theoretical and methodological basis for the development of Indonesian diplomacy which has an Islamic pattern.

Finally, this paper is written as concrete evidence that explains the extent to which the development of Islamic IR discourse is developing in Indonesia. As well as a new offer for the Indonesian government, to be adopted for the implementation of Indonesia's diplomacy and foreign policy in response to the development of relations between countries.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The discourse on the Islamic worldview as an alternative perspective in international relations has been circulated for a long time. The collaborative scientific works conducted by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan [2] Titled *Non-Western International Relations: Perspective on And Beyond Asia*,

become the primary source to discover about the development of the Islamic perspective in international relations. This book discussed several perspectives with a background region or country like China, India, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and Islam, where Acharya and Buzan categorized the Islamic perspective as Arabic thought.

Acharya and Buzan stated that western perspective domination on international relations caused by two major reasons, firstly the primary source of international relations theories is based on western history and thought. Secondly, the discourse of world history formed by European-centrism [2]. But those major reasons do not mean that the possibility to form the alternative perspective is closed. In this book, Acharya and Buzan assume that if a concept fulfilled one of the three following categories, therefore it can be considered as a theory in international relations. First, the concept has been acknowledged by other international relations academics, second, acknowledged as a theory by the creator, and the last one the foundation of theory indicates a systematic effort to generalize international relations phenomena.

If Acharya and Buzan emphasis the general possibility non-western perspective comes out as the alternative perspective, Nassef Manabilang Adiong [1] in the article presented on ISA Conference in Hongkong more specific emphasis on the possibility to build Islamic theory on international relations. His article titled "Possibility of Islamic Theory of International Relations", Adiong states the development of the Islamic perspective on international relations in the international academic community. He revealed the fact that more and more international relations academics studying religion. The enthusiasm is also accompanied by the opening of a focus on Religion and International Relations (REL) studies in the International Studies Association (ISA) organization. Not only in ISA, in several academic communities such as the International Political Science Association (IPSA), the American Political Science Association (APSA), the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) similar studies were also made [1].

Ather writings that try to elevate Islam as a new perspective in understanding IR studies are books entitled "Islam and Modern Science; Islamic Touch Against Various Disciplines of Science" written by Ali Anwar Yusuf. In one chapter, Ali specifically talked about the touch of Islam in IR. Starting an explanation of the basics of humanitarian relations, Ali then discussed the relationship between Islam and peace, which was then closed with the basics of human rights [14]. But even if no one of the three works above specifically addresses the development of Islamic perspectives in IR in Indonesia.

The only literature that discusses explicitly this condition is the work of Muhammad Qobidl 'Ainul Arif, one of the initiators of the founding of INSIERA with an article entitled "The Rise of Islamic Perspectives in the Study of Contemporary International Relations". According to him, the perspective of Islam in International Relations is familiar in Indonesia. In the pre-independence era, the reflection of the Islamization of International Relations was seen from the correct interpretation of the concept of jihad - a term derived from the study of Siyar or the discipline of International Relations in Islam. Not stopped there, he even mentioned that the concept of cooperation which Sukarno emphasized

as the essence of Pancasila was a reflection of Ibn Khaldun's Ashabiyah theory. his assertion carries the meaning that the development of this perspective in Indonesia is indeed something natural. Moreover, the momentum of the transition of the status of several Islamic tertiary institutions in Indonesia to the University at the end of the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who was demanded to hold non-religious majors made many Islamic perspectives developed as a methodological basis for a general scholarship [3].

But unfortunately, Arif's thought stops only at the level of historical presentation and the initial development of this perspective in Indonesia, especially in several Islamic Universities. Researchers observe it is very important to elaborate on the progress of the perspective of Islam in International Relations in Indonesia further and deeper. Especially when explained by Arif that there has been a euphoria of the development of this perspective in Indonesia, the question that must then be answered is the extent of the development of this perspective and how the results of the euphoria are mainly in producing scientific works. This research fills the gap left by the treatise by elaborating more deeply on the progress and results of the development of Islamic Theory in International Relations in Indonesia.

**3. METHODOLOGY**

This research methodology uses qualitative approach. The research aimed to analyze various information from data that has been obtained from the sources which are primary or secondary. The data explanation followed by the research object analysis. The data is collected from the publication of scientific journals that are online and offline, while some data collected from the interview process with the persons in authoritative institutions and universities. After being verified, analyzing data were taken, then it describes as reality and fact.

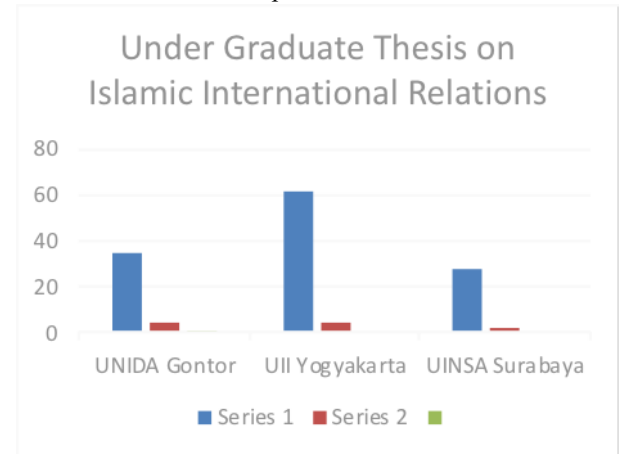
**4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The development of Islamic studies in International Relations which is so massive in several Islamic universities in Indonesia in recent years was not comparable with the number of theses that raised the issue of Islamic International Relations.

The University of Darussalam Gontor, for example, with the slogan "Islamization of Science" and a curriculum with a comprehensive content of Islamization, apparently has not had a significant influence on the thesis themes written by final students. The data shows, from 2014 to 2019, of the 35 thesis titles produced only 5 writings specifically discussed HI from an Islamic point of view. This means that only 14.29% of the total thesis talks about Islamic International Relations. Still far from ideal.

This phenomenon did not only occur at Darussalam Gontor University, at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University (UINSA) Surabaya, of all graduates, tested a total of 28 students, only two took the theme of Islamization of International Relations or 7.1% of the total thesis. Several Islamization courses such as the Study of the Qur'an, Hadith

Studies and the methodology of integrative International Relations have been applied in the curriculum of the International Relations department.



**Figure 1** International Relations Alumni Thesis from Three Islamic Universities since 2014

Meanwhile, if we take a look at the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII), from the sixty-one graduates, only four theses wrote about IR in Islamic perspectives. It means that only 6.56% of the students' thesis titles use the Islamic approach in their thesis

From the data above we can conclude that many new international relations departments under Islamic University, apparently have not been able to boost the tendency of students to use the Islamic perspective as an alternative approach in assessing the reality of inter-state relations in their research.

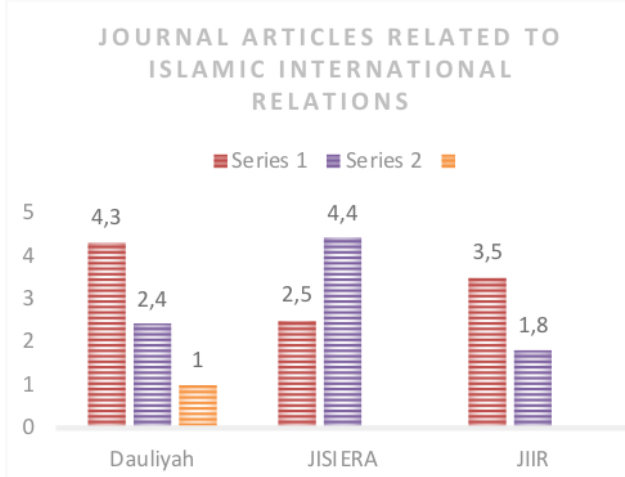
Whereas in the scope of publications outside of the thesis, journals published by national journals. Facts show the same thing. Of the three national journals that focus on international relations and Islamic studies, namely Jisiera (Journal managed by the INSIERA epistemic community), Dauliyah (Journal of UNIDA Gontor IR department), and Journal of Integrative International Relations [JIIR] (Journal of IR department) also does not publish significant results

From what we observed, in the journal Jisiera until August 2019, there are 24 articles published there were only 5 articles that related to Islamic views, meaning that there are only 20.8% of the writings with an Islamic background. This research also found an increase in the percentage related to the publication of Islamic international relations articles in the Dauliyah journal, which was 30.4%, with the following details: overall articles published until August 2019 were 46 articles, and from those articles, there were at least 10 writings with the Islamic theme.

While in the JIIR journal published by UINSA, from the 10 journals published online, there are only 2 articles that focus on the study of the Islamic perspective, meaning that only 20% of writings with an Islamic background. From the data above, therefore the conclusion that can be taken, that the publication of journals related to the alternative perspective on international relations in national publicity media is still below expectation, it has not even reached the 50% level and only stopped at the highest level of 30%.

Seeing the statistics above, at least several reasons can elaborate on why this idea is "stagnant" in Indonesia,

following the lack of journal publications on the idea of the Islamic perspective on the inter-state's dynamics.



**Figure 2** Journals Related to Islamic Perspective and International Relations until 2019

Based on the interviews, including with Dr. Surwandono, S.Sos, M.Sc as the chairman of INSIERA who is also the head of the UMY Yogyakarta Politics & International Relations Graduate School, Muhammad Qobidl 'Ainul Arif, S.IP., M.A. as INSIERA Secretary and Lecturer at HI UINSA Surabaya department, Irawan Jati, S.IP., M.Hum., M.S. The Chairperson of Insiera Yogyakarta Chapter who is also the head of the Yogyakarta UII International Relations Department, and Syaprin Zahidi S.IP, MA., As the head of the UMM IR Department and Moh. Fathoni Hakim, M.Sc as Head of the UINSA IR department in Surabaya

At least three major factors are underlying the phenomenon of 'stagnation' of the development of Islamic International Relations in Indonesia, among them: first, to the date, the methodology of Islamic international in Indonesia has not been developed as an alternative approach in studying International Relations. Secondly, while the Islamic perspective, by the majority of its reviewers, is still in the level of initial/notions and has not yet been transformed into advance. Third, the internal conditions of the department carried out by the majority of IR Muslim enthusiasts and thinkers, more or less have an effect on their productivity in producing scientific works based on international relations thinking in Islamic perspectives.

If the main factor of this problem is the level of success, then we begin this issue with a deep discussion related to the evolution of the Islamic view in International Relations. But before we explain what is agreed with Islam, it is interesting to be together, we need to first of the Islamic International Relations itself. In a paper published by Manabilong, there are three HI Islamic resolutions added, first is Islamic international relations is an attempt to be approved by IR based on Siyar science (international law), secondly, Islamic international relations is all about philosophical and methodological endeavors related to the discourse of Islamization of International Relations, quickly Islamic international is an attempt to develop a normative study of IR within the framework of Islamic norms carried out by ibn Khaldun in the work "Muqaddimah" which he wrote.

From all the things that have been said, it means that Islamic international relations, aside from being a legal product, Islamic international relations also include methodological studies. Then what is a methodology; in the book "International Relations Methodology, Paradigmatic Debate and Alternative Approaches" written by Alexander Wendt et al, described at least three definitions of methodology, first: the procedure used to achieve the goal, which is to achieve these objectives the methods or tools used tools (Huang Jianping), the second understanding is the method that must be taken to obtain a theory in science (Toeti Heraty Noerhadi) and the third is the procedure used in describing and predicting phenomena (Mohtar Mas'oed), although different sentence formulations are used, but in fact, from these three definitions one can draw conclusions that what is meant by methodology is procedure [13]. And therefore, a scientist needs a procedure in achieving 'new' knowledge. Without a clear procedure explanation, a scientist will have difficulty in producing knowledge in his research.

While the Islamic methodology is still very diverse, Moh. Fathoni Hakim explained, today the Islamic international relations practitioners were presented with several variations of the Islamic international relations methodology that could be used, such as: Kuntowijoyo with "Islam as Science", or Abu Sulaiman in the book "Toward an Islamic Theory of International Relations", Naguib al-Attas with "Islam and Philosophy of Science" and many other Islamic international relations methodology choices. The variety of methodological choices that can be used contributes to positive and negative things. The positive thing is that Islamic international relations researchers or international relations students who will examine International Relations in Islamic perspectives can freely choose the methodology to be used, which is considered the easiest to apply, while the negative effect of the diversity of methodologies results in some students or Islamic HI reviewers confused about which methodology is considered the most likely to be used. At the level of undergraduate students, for example, this condition might lead them to 'turn away' and choose the 'Western' methodology approach which is considered more familiar to them. This is where the position of DPA (Academic Supervisor) plays a vital role in directing students while giving them an understanding of using the Islamic perspective on international relations.

Meanwhile in a broader scope and higher level, such as in the INSIERA organization, for example, it is deemed necessary as soon as possible to gather enthusiasts, researchers and Islamic IR thinkers to discuss in a symposium or a special workshop that discusses IR methodology in the Islamic perspective, the objectives of These activities are sharing experiences and sharing knowledge related to Islamic IR methodology, which can then be implemented or recommended at universities where they serve or are implemented directly in researches that are currently or will be carried out. Meanwhile in a broader scope and higher level, such as in the INSIERA organization, for example, it is deemed necessary as soon as possible to gather enthusiasts, researchers and Islamic IR thinkers to discuss in a symposium or a special workshop that discusses IR methodology in the Islamic perspective, the objectives of These activities are sharing experiences and sharing knowledge related to Islamic IR methodology, which can

then be implemented or recommended at universities where they serve or are implemented directly in researches that are currently or will be carried out.

Islamic international relations methodology workshop actually planned by INSIERA management, Dr. Surwandono, S. Sos, M.Si as the chairman of INSIERA (04/25/2019) explained that the planned activities were included in the INSIERA agenda even though as of August 2019 it had not yet been implemented, it was most likely to be implemented in 2020 [11].

The results of the workshop can also be compiled into books and then recommended within the scope of the IR department especially if it can be adopted for the development of teaching and research curriculum for lecturers and students. This systematics is expected to introduce Islamic international relations as a methodology or just a discussion discourse.

Another problem underlying the stagnation of Islamic IR thought followed by the lack of journals or thesis using the Islamic approach is due to HI in the Islamic perspective itself, at the student level even in some INSIERA members themselves are still in the initiation level and have not yet entered the realm of advance. As what explained by Irawan Jati, S.IP., M.Hum., M.S. The Chairperson of Yogyakarta's INSIERA Chapter and head of the HI UII department that most INSIERA members today still make the study of Islam in IR at the level of initiation rather than advance, so there are difficulties in having to write articles that purely discuss Islamic international relations [9].

This condition felt the same way by the chairman of INSIERA, Dr. Surwandono, for example, one of his graduate students eventually used the development perspective by Samuel Huntington, although the subject discourse was mawardi's thought. It happened since several supervisors may not familiar with using some Islamic methodology approaches to international relations. As just this research emphasis many times that, since the idea of the Islamic approach toward international relations was just kicked off, looking for someone who has expertise on this approach in Indonesia still becomes a big issue for everyone who wants to conduct research-based on Islamic perspective. Furthermore, the head of the international relations department from UMM said clearly that he is still struggling in recruiting a lecturer with expertise in Islamic international relations, "so, now we are recruiting lecturers who have expertise in Islam and International Relations. Which it is our goal to see Islamic views in International Relations. What I meant here were Islamic methodologies." [15].

And the solution upon this obstacle is to upgrade the knowledge itself, it can be done through seminars related to the Islamic approach in International Relations or even more serious action like taking specialization on Islamic perspective in doctoral degree (Ph.D). And the last reason why the discourse on the Islamic perspective on international relations is internal of the IR department. Often the condition in the university/institution does not provide the researchers or lecturers develop this alternative approach.

In terms of department level, developing theory or the western methodology is still dominant upon the curriculum that taught to the students. Indeed, some subjects can encourage the students to have an interest in the Islamic approach, for instance, Qur'anic studies, Hadith studies,

international relations in the Islamic perspective. And yet, if all subjects combine with the Islamic discourse, it does not even reach over 50%. In other words, the domination of western thought on international relations holds a pivotal role in forming the interest and mindsets of the students.

International relations department from UINSA for instance, although taught several subjects related to Islamic discourse until this august, having no students who publish using Islamic methodology. This issue is in a line with what Muhammad Qobidl 'Ainul Arif, S.IP., M.A. as the lecturer as well as the secretary of INSIERA stated in an interview "Even though we have the introduction of Islamic studies, Qur'anic studies, Ulumul Qur'an methodology, as a religious tool. It should have done! Moreover, we have subject on international integrative, mix method, Islamic international relations worldview, international relations in Islamic perspective, I think the students can discuss those approaches so they can apply to their thesis. But it does not work" [3].

And of course, other things that obstruct the development of the Islamic approach productivity the IR academics in conducting the research. They have massive tasks that bureaucratic and administrative for the continuity of education at the university level. For example, 3 universities were to develop the idea of Islamisation on international relations, UNIDA, UII Yogyakarta, and UINSA, in 2018 were in the process of accreditation assessment. So, all energy and thought are devoted to succeeding in the assessment. Despite this, in reality, the development of Islamic international relations thought feels like "stagnant", but actually, if the whole pictures were captured. The improvement has made some outstanding results either as discourse or institution/organization. INSIERA which just established in 2016, now it has been recognized as an epistemic organization that has structural coordination under AIHI (Asosiasi Ilmu Hubungan Internasional Indonesia), it became even the most productive in term of publishing journals. As what Irawan jati S.IP., M.Hum., M.S "the advantage of INSIERA compares to other communities, INSERA is the only one that has a journal and alhamdulillah has a website also".

Furthermore, the members of INSIERA are not exclusive only for any specific religion, as a fact that this epistemic group is open for everyone. Muhammad Qobidl 'Ainul Arifi, S.IP., M.A. explained: "Now the facts that a lot of religious high education open the international relations program and the members of INSIERA is not Muslim only".

From the above conditions, there is great enthusiasm from International Relations scholars to answer this challenge. Although the progress of the results of thoughts on Islamic International Relations is still not encouraging, there has been progressing toward positive, albeit slowly. Therefore, making Islamic International Relations a soft power in Indonesia's diplomacy in the future is likely to get a powerful academic foundation. This could shift the Western traditions that are still used by the foreign ministry as a basis for decision making. The idea of a government that wants to use the "largest Muslim country" as its diplomatic media, soon, will get a reliable intellectual principle.

## 5. CONCLUSION

International relations in Islam is not something new, moreover, it happened since the age of Hegira or the journey of the prophet Muhammad PBUH moved from Mecca to Yathrib (later renamed to Medinah) to the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, the Islamic international relations has been conducted. Yet, if it saw as theory and methodology the Islamic perspective on international relations is a new alternative worldview, as a response to the “western” international relations that more or less is not in line with Islamic values.

Eventually, this circumstance encourages some individuals from different Islamic universities in Indonesia, established the association of Islamic international relations thinkers that later known as INSIERA. The establishment of this organization for sure supported by the enthusiasm of Islamic higher education’s interest in international relations. Therefore, it initiated the idea of Islamisation of international relations or in other terms, “integrative international relations”. It is a new term that wants to combine international relations and Islamic discourse into a new scientific discipline. Unfortunately, the euphoria of establishing Islamic international relations at several universities, actually not followed by the journals of scientific writings themed on Islamic international relations. Either at the student’s level or the researchers. But, of course, there is something that we must understand that the progress is still on, and the Indonesian International Relations thinker should be positive and proud of.

Therefore, when the government has raised even in the past has implemented Islam as Indonesia's soft power diplomacy while on the other hand International Relations scholars are developing the basic theory of Islamic International Relations, it means that the future of the Islamic perspective in the study of International Relations is very clear, both in terms of theoretical and methodological as well as from the practical side.

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