



## **A Comparative Study of Iran and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Objectives in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Looking from a geographical perspective, Indonesia and the two most influential Islamic countries that promote two major denominations of Islam, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, are located in different parts of the world. However, holding the ground for the majority of Muslim in the world makes Indonesia a suitable place for Iran and Saudi Arabia to exercise their influence. Since Iran and Saudi Arabia have a set of contradictory ideologies, the need to expand their influence is competitive. The article starts by analyzing the foreign policy objectives of the two countries in Indonesia. Then, a comparative study is made between them. The main theory used in this work is based on neorealism to ascertain the objectives of Iran and Saudi Arabia. The article uses secondary data that have been used in the literature. The article concludes that although these objectives have started becoming more economical, the religious aspect continues to play a dominant role in the foreign policy objectives of the two countries.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Foreign Policy, Ideology, Iran

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## Endonezya’da İran ve Suudi Arabistan Dış Politika Hedeflerinin Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışması

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### Öz

Coğrafi perspektiften bakıldığında Endonezya ile iki büyük İslam mezhebini destekleyen İran ve Suudi Arabistan dünyanın farklı bölgelerinde bulunmaktadır. Coğrafi uzaklığa rağmen dünyadaki Müslümanların çoğunluğunu barındıran Endonezya, İran ve Suudi Arabistan’ın dini etkilerini kullanmaları için uygun bir yer olmaktadır. İran ve Suudi Arabistan bir dizi karşıt ideolojiye sahip olmaları sebebiyle siyasal etkilerini genişletme çabasındadırlar. Bu makale, İran ve Suudi Arabistan’ın Endonezya’daki dış politika hedeflerini karşılaştırmalı bir şekilde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale iki ülkenin Endonezya’daki dış politika hedeflerini analiz ederek başlamaktadır. Daha sonra, aralarında karşılaştırmalı bir çalışma yapılmaktadır. Makalede geçmiş literatürlerde kullanılan ikincil veriler kullanılmıştır. Teorik yaklaşım olarak İran ve Suudi Arabistan’ın hedeflerini belirlemek için neorealizm perspektifi temel alınmıştır. Makalede, son zamanlarda ülkelerin hedefleri daha çok ekonomi kaynaklı görülse de iki ülkenin dış politika hedeflerinde dini yönün hala baskın bir rol oynamaya devam ettiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Endonezya, Suudi Arabistan, Dış Politika, İdeoloji, İran

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## 1. Introduction

In order to know if Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is motivated by dogmatic anti-Shiism or more pragmatically by geopolitical rivalry with Iran for regional hegemony, it is important to know that in order to counter the potential effects of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and trying to establish its economic interests, Saudi Arabia has set up and financed several organizations for teaching Arabic and spreading of its Wahhabi doctrine in Indonesia since the early 1980s.

Neorealism, which is the theoretical framework in this article, argues that the structure of the international system is said to be 'anarchic'. According to Waltz, 'anarchy' does not imply the presence of chaos and disorder. It refers to the absence of a world government.<sup>1</sup> Since neorealists argue that the international system is anarchic, this has made it difficult for neorealism and other international relations theories to predict the outcomes and objectives of the foreign policy of a state, therefore making it difficult for neorealism to explain foreign policy analysis, because it offers no single theory of state behavior but rather a "meta-scientific construct."<sup>2</sup> This "meta-scientific construct" offers a set of core assumptions on how states interact.<sup>3</sup> However, this article is not based on foreign policy analysis, but a comparative study of the differences and similarities of Iran and Saudi Arabia's foreign policy objectives in Indonesia. Comparative in the sense that both Iran and Saudi Arabia's foreign policy are goal-oriented in ensuring their hegemony in the Muslim World, which neorealists see as a 'security competition.'

With regard to foreign policy, Mearsheimer argues that all states are continuously searching for opportunities to gain power at the expense of other states.<sup>4</sup> Mearsheimer concludes that "states recognize that the best path to

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading, Mass: Adison Wesley, 1979): 88.

<sup>2</sup> Elman, Colin, "Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, no.1 (autumn 1996): 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ellinor, Mahmalat, "Saudi Arabia's and Iran's Policies in the Post-Gulf War Era: Re-Thinking Foreign Policy Analysis in the Gulf at the Intersection of Power, Interests, and Ideas," University of Hamburg, (2012): 9

<sup>4</sup> John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001): 21.

peace is to accumulate more power than anyone else.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Iran and Saudi Arabia; both countries might see religion as a tool to ensure their hegemony, and one can also argue that the two countries are not only trying to have a reliable alliance with Indonesia, but they also try to take advantage of Indonesia's large Muslim population to disseminate their ideologies as a means of foreign policy objective for security maximization. Having said that the two countries represent two major denominations of Islam, Sunnism, and Shiism.

One of the main foreign policy objectives of Saudi Arabia is to reduce its economic dependency on oil and gas, and pilgrimage business, which is one of the biggest sources for Saudi Arabia after oil, is parts of this policy's implementation. Unsurprisingly, Indonesia is likely to serve this purpose by sending an estimated number of 200.000 people for annual pilgrimage<sup>6</sup> which is the highest in the world. Meanwhile, Iran seems to be an isolated country with its own version of Islam, and its clashes with the West, pushes Iran to seek supports and alliance in order to maintain its national interest and survival in international politics. Thus, Indonesia's neutrality in the Muslim World seems to be an open door for Iran to further steps at attaining its foreign policy objectives and to win support from the most populous Muslim country, and the result had so far been shown by the fact that Indonesia abstained from voting at the United Nation to bring the issue of Iran's nuclear program before the Security Council in 2006.<sup>7</sup>

The diplomatic relations established between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Indonesia are noteworthy because Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam, and Indonesia is the home of the largest Sunni Muslim population in the world. The economic and trade relations are also particularly important, especially in the oil and human resources (migrant workers) sectors. Saudi Arabia has an embassy in Jakarta, while Indonesia has an embassy in Riyadh and a consulate in Jeddah. Both countries are

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, "Realism," in *The Globalization of World Politics*, eds. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92-103.

<sup>6</sup> "World Bulletin," Indonesia says Saudi Arabia increased its Hajj quota, Last retrieved: February 15, 2019, <https://www.worldbulletin.net/hajj/indonesia-says-saudi-arabia-increased-its-hajj-quota-h183044.html>

<sup>7</sup> "Critical Threats," Indonesia-Iran Foreign Relations, Last retrieved: January 12, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/indonesia-iran-foreign-relations>

members of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation and the Group of Twenty (G-20).

Iran's foreign policy has been marked by two different phases, each defined by an essential policy in Iran's regional and international role. First, the one conducted under the Shah characterized by the strengthening of ties with the West and, that led by Khomeini since his accession to power through Islamic Revolution in 1979, which bases the foreign policy of Iran on geostrategic and ideological considerations. It is this foreign policy, translated into diplomacy, which today and since the end of bipartisanship has allowed Iran to play a growing regional role and regain a place in regional affairs. The transformation of Iranian society induces changes in the direction of its foreign policy.

Despite differences over the political role of Islam, Indonesia and Iran have similar views on international issues. Therefore, they are both parts of the non-aligned movement and are working together to unite Muslim countries through meetings between Shiite and Sunni clerics<sup>8</sup>. Indonesia's rejection of a draft Security Council declaration of June 2007 condemning the Iranian President's words about Israel's 'disappearance'<sup>9</sup> Jakarta believed that, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Security Council was biased, and it was not 'fair' to condemn the Iranian position without denouncing Israeli policy. In March 2007, Indonesia voted in favor of the Security Council's coercive measures against the Iranian nuclear program. This vote is nonetheless a diplomatic failure for Tehran, which supports the candidacy of Indonesia as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>10</sup>

Iran is a member of several regional forums associated with Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Example of these regional forums includes Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED), which brings together fifty Middle East-

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<sup>8</sup> "Critical Threats," Indonesia-Iran Foreign Relations, Last retrieved: January 12, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/indonesia-iran-foreign-relations>

<sup>9</sup> "Kuwait News Agency," Indonesia blocks UNSC Action to Condemn Ahmadinejad Remarks on Israel, Last retrieved: January 12, 2019, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1752924&language=en>

<sup>10</sup> The Iranian president said it was an "Islamic duty" to support the Indonesian bid. "BBC Monitoring Middle East," Iran Says Will Support Indonesia's Permanent Seat at UNSC, January 30, 2006.

ern and Asian countries.<sup>11</sup> Iran is also a member of the Developing-Eight (D-8)<sup>12</sup> group, an arrangement created in 1997 for the establishment of development cooperation, and the establishment of Group of Fifteen (G15),<sup>13</sup> whose objective is to facilitate national efforts for economic progress and development. At the D-8 Summit in Bali in May 2006, the member states of this organization concluded a preferential trade agreement.<sup>14</sup> It is also worth knowing that Saudi Arabia is not part of the above-mentioned regional forums and cooperation. The active presence of Iran in these regional forums could possibly explain a different means of foreign policy strategies and objectives attainment, in which Iran is trying to secure its hegemony in the Muslim world by getting closer to other Muslim countries, particularly Indonesia. One could argue that the relationship between Iran and other developing countries in these forums is merely an attempt to establish more trade zones because of the sanctions for its nuclear program.

## 2. Foreign Policy

In simplified definition, foreign policy consists of the actions, goals, and plans of national government directed toward other countries.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, foreign policy objectives are the set of goals which a state pursues in another state. These objectives differ depending on the state.

Pertaining to Iran and Saudi Arabia, two main foreign policy objectives (economic and religious) are discussed in this article. Furthermore, this paper makes a contribution to the objectives of foreign policy by studying 'religious influence' as a foreign policy objective. That is, the desire of a state to spread its doctrines and ideologies can be considered as a goal of foreign policy.

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<sup>11</sup> See member countries on <http://www.amed.sg.english/>

<sup>12</sup> This Developing-8 (D8) organization aims to strengthen economic ties between major Muslim countries. It was created in 1997 at the initiative of Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and brings together Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Nigeria.

<sup>13</sup> It brings together 18 members: Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>14</sup> Kellner, Thierry and Therme, Clément, "Iran's Multipolar Agreements Russian and Asian Aspects of Tehran's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, (Paris: Winter, 2007) 5.

<sup>15</sup> Howard H Lentner, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1974).

Studying foreign policy is imperative because the world has been going through a degree of interconnectedness also known as globalization. This implies that states are in need of better policies and goals based on national interest in order to effectively do international politics with other states.

### **3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

In this work, I attempt to apply a theory of International Relation, neorealism, as the main theoretical framework, by using secondary data such past literature in books, journals, and online newspapers to analyze the foreign policy objectives of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Indonesia.

There has been a contradictory line between the theories and approaches to foreign policy retrieved from International Relations on how to understand the actors and their fundamental incentives but these theories of the foreign policy of states have been studied from different perspectives.<sup>16</sup> But, one important approach that can explain this article is the “top-down approach”, which sees the behavior of states “from above.”<sup>17</sup> According to this theory, the key behavior encompasses the incentives, constraints, and standards of behavior.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, these behaviors are systemic in origin. Neorealism takes this systemic perspective. That is, what interest the actors are relative power position in the international domain and the polarity of the system.<sup>19</sup> Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are concerned about their economic growth, but for security reasons, both countries are also concerned about what objectives they pursue in their foreign policies. Hence, Saudi Arabia’s active role in the international arena increased after the Iranian revolution of 1979.

In neorealism, the actor’s motivation for pursuing a certain foreign policy is goal-oriented, which is sometimes an influence-seeking policy.<sup>20</sup> Neo-

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<sup>16</sup> Hollis Martin and Smith Steve, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Volker Rittberger, “Approaches to the Study of Foreign Policy Derived from International Relations Theories,” *Center for International Relations/Peace and Conflict Studies, Institute for Political Science, University of Tübingen*, no. 46 (2004): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Rittberger, “Approaches to the Study of Foreign Policy” 10.

<sup>19</sup> Rittberger, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Rittberger, 11.

realists agree that international politics is intrinsically a struggle for power. They argue that security competition and inter-state conflict are lack of an overarching authority over states.<sup>21</sup> Waltz argues that ‘the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security’.<sup>22</sup> Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have been in a diplomatic war for hegemony in the Muslim World since the Iranian revolution of 1979. This diplomatic war often has some religious backing and suspicion, which lead the two states into a tight security competition and drive them to actively take a significant role in influence-seeking policy in the Muslim world by reinforcing diplomatic negotiations and alliance politics. This competition has been a manifestation of a state of insecurity, pushing them to seek religious and economic interest in Indonesia. Having said that Indonesia has the biggest Muslim population, winning its side becomes the main objective of these two rival states.

Waltz emphasizes that power maximization proves to be dysfunctional because it triggers a counter-balancing coalition of states.<sup>23</sup> Although Indonesia is not located in the Middle East, this argument could explain why Iran and Saudi Arabia want a coalition with Indonesia as a part of seeking hegemony in the Muslim World. This also proves why the two states are sensitive to each other’s foreign policies in Indonesia and it is worth reminding that Iran and Saudi Arabia are not allies in the international system.

Neorealist scholars believe that states depend on their own means to ensure security through self-help, also known as the ‘security dilemma’. Robert Jervis developed the “security dilemma” theory which attempts to identify the conditions under which states interact are probably conflictual.<sup>24</sup> According to this neorealist theory, all states become potential enemies among which conflicts are likely to happen. These conflicts and chaos can turn into an unending struggle since every state will continue to fight in

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<sup>21</sup> Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, “Realism,” in *The Globalization of World Politics*, eds. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92-103.

<sup>22</sup> Waltz K, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, eds. R.I. Rotberg and T.K. Rabb, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 39-52.

<sup>23</sup> Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” 40.

<sup>24</sup> Shiping Tang, “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis,” *Security Studies*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, LLC no.18 (2009): 587.



order to survive.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Herz notes that “it is one of the tragic implications of the security dilemma that mutual fear of what initially may never have existed, may subsequently bring about exactly that which is feared most.”<sup>26</sup>

Pertaining to ‘security dilemma’, what I try to postulate here is that, the foreign policy objectives of both Iran and Saudi Arabia are driven by security reasons. For example, in order to ensure its stability and fight for hegemony, Iran may want to foster diplomatic relations with Indonesia and vice versa, considering that Shia is a minority in Indonesia, which likely to look up to Iran, and has been struggling living among Sunni and Wahhabi’s influences of Saudi Arabia in the country. Additionally, although Iran’s foreign policy objectives might appear in any forms of alliance politics such as trade and education, it is worth noting that Shiism constituted the ideological basis of Iran’s foreign policy.<sup>27</sup>

Saudi Arabia has used religion as a source of its legitimacy “to further state interests against those of rival claimants for Islamic and regional influence”<sup>28</sup> including Iran. Saudi Arabia has also used its petrol-dollar wealth and Islam to pursue an expansionist policy abroad<sup>29</sup> and according to Steinberg, Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy post Iranian revolution has been “governed by the fear that Iran might mobilize the Shiites in the Arab world and even in Saudi Arabia”<sup>30</sup> and it is worth reminding that the Saudi monarchy was attacked right after the Iranian revolution. These statements clearly show the foreign policy objective of Saudi Arabia is also driven by a security dilemma to counter the influence of Iran and the spread of Shiism in the Muslim World.

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<sup>25</sup> Dorian Jano, “Aspects of Security Dilemma,” *Perceptions*, (2009): 73-90

<sup>26</sup> Herz John, “Idealist Internationalization and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, vol.2 no.2 (1950): 157.

<sup>27</sup> Rouhollah K. Ramazani, “Khumayni’s Islam in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” *Islam in Foreign Policy*, (1983): 29.

<sup>28</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics, and Ideology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 218.

<sup>29</sup> Al Rasheed, Madawi. *Kingdom Without Borders: Saudi Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2008): 2.

<sup>30</sup> Steinberg, “Leading the Counter-Revolution: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring,” *SWP Research Paper*, 7, *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, (2014): 6.

#### 4. Iran's Foreign Policy Objectives in Indonesia

Iran is a state whose foreign policy has been transformed by an Islamic revolution, which is essentially pan-Islamic and hostile to any foreign influence. In 1979, the street took up slogans such as “neither East nor West, Islamic Republic” (na sharqi na gharbi, jomhuri-e eslâmi). Today, the regional balance has changed since the renaissance of Iran as a player in international relations, a consequence of the recognition of the Islamic Republic by Barack Obama on the occasion of the Persian New Year in March 2009, by the joint action concluded on July 14, 2015 or by the place acquired by Tehran in the settlement of the Syrian crisis.<sup>31</sup> This Iranian renaissance redefined the regional balance of powers, especially vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia, but also the place of religious conflict between Sunnism and Shiism. In such a context, what place does the Shia factor occupy in the foreign policy of a country generating an Islamic revolution?

Iranian diplomacy is based on pragmatic alliances, without the Shia factor being constantly decisive: with Dubai, Qatar or Oman, or with Tajikistan, Indonesia, Persian and Christian Armenia<sup>32</sup>. Today, support for the loyalist forces in Syria is mainly due to the fear of a seizure of power by Saudi Arabia and its allies in Iraq.<sup>33</sup> This alliance sometimes faces conflicting interests. For example, while Iran supported a Shiite power in Iraq, Syria supported the idea of a government associating Sunni and Baathist elements.

The influence of the Iranian Revolution on the change in the structure of relations between the Middle East and Southeast Asia can be analyzed, and the effects of the revolution on the intergovernmental relations between Iran and Malaysia and Iran and Indonesia can be examined here. If we look at official statements and official departures, the revolution has little to do with these relations. However, this external likelihood holds the serious interest of Southeast Asian authorities about the effects of events in Iran on

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<sup>31</sup> “The White House,” Remarks by President Obama on Nowruz, Last retrieved: January 14, 2019, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/19/remarks-president-obama-nowruz>

<sup>32</sup> The geopolitical environment of Shiite Iran is that of Shiite or not, thus constituting an “archipelago” (B. Hourcade). This term is apt to understand the geopolitics of Iran in that it highlights the types of alliances scattered in the region that Tehran is united.

<sup>33</sup> B. Hourcade, “Iran against the Sunni encirclement,” in *No Spring for Syria*, eds. F. Burgat and B. Paoli, (Paris: The Discovery, 2013): 4.

the people. Nonetheless, neither Jakarta nor Kuala Lumpur seemed willing to openly criticize Islam's apparent victory over Western imperialism and the secular attitude.

In particular, the official response to the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 was to remain silent; No favorable, unfavorable or impartial explanation has been provided by the Indonesian and Indonesian regimes. This silence lasted until the response of the Foreign Minister of Malaysia to a question asked at Dewan Rakyat.<sup>34</sup> In this response, the Minister stated that the relations between Iran and Malaysia were "normal" and that the establishment of the revolution in Iran was "Iran's internal affairs". He also noted that the diplomatic staff had fulfilled their duties as usual.<sup>35</sup> The Indonesian government was more silent. It had carefully avoided commenting on the Shah's forced to escape and the release of American hostages.<sup>36</sup> Even during the Iran-Iraq War, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur implemented a neutral attitude towards both warring countries.

In addition, Iran has also used the religious factor in its foreign policy by relying on various Shia networks. However, the aim of pursuing its national interest is prioritized.<sup>37</sup> This is indeed the application of a pan-Islamic doctrine stemming from the revolution and in which the support on Shiite communities, main targets of the Iranian foreign policy to the detriment of the alliance, which would be more profitable in the region, is the key. Moreover, the evolution of the regional geopolitical balance reinforces the sectarian dimension of Iranian foreign policy, that is to say, linked to Shiite objectives, while the re-emergence of Iran supports a reading by the states of the region based on the denominational prism.

Studying Iranian foreign policy objectives in Indonesia is significantly advantageous even if the foreign policy objective might not be aimed at spreading Shiism but the growing hostility towards the Shia communities of Indonesia is a result of both Iran and Saudi Arabia's foreign policy

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<sup>34</sup> Malaysia, Foreign Affair, no. 4 (1979): 12.

<sup>35</sup> Malaysia, Foreign Affair, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Siddique, Sharon (1980), "Contemporary Islamic development in ASEAN," *Southeast Asian affairs* 78-90.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammad Javad, "What Iran Really Wants," *Foreign Policy*, no.3 (2004):1, Last retrieved: January 15, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2014-04-17/what-iran-really-wants>

objective in Indonesia. This is supported by the propaganda of Indonesian groups hostile to Syrian power which puts forward the supposed Shia character of the regime.<sup>38</sup> It is about legitimizing ‘jihad’ by designating Shiism not only as heresy but as a threat to pure Islam. This speech led Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, an Indonesian Muslim cleric and the leader of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, to describe the ‘Syrian Shiite regime’ as ‘worse than the infidels and Jews’.<sup>39</sup>

The rise of Shiism in Indonesia is debatable as there is no crucial source to clarify how Shiism started in Indonesia, but the effects have been on several occasions. The following quote supports this statement, ‘The conversion of Shiites is the solution’, this shocking headline, on the front page of *The Jakarta Post*, was stated by the Indonesian Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali.<sup>40</sup> For him, the conversion to Sunnism of followers of Shiism is the only solution to the recurrent violence between the two Muslim communities on the island of Madura, located in north-east Java. The minister spoke a few days after the attack by Sunni Muslims against Shiite families from the Sampang region, on August 26. But, far from providing a solution in the conflict, the minister’s remarks fuel religious intolerance.<sup>41</sup> The conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in Madura would have been encouraged, according to *Kompas*, by a fatwa pronounced by the Council of Ulama Indonesians (MUI) from Sampang. This edict indicates that Shiism is a heretic sect of Islam. Although the council has not yet pronounced anything on the subject, this local fatwa legitimized the attackers. The case ignites the national opinion and the Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs, Nasaruddin Umar, tried to delay by declaring on the *Jakarta Post*: ‘We never condemned Shia Islam as a heresy or banned its practice in our coun-

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<sup>38</sup> Joe Cochrane, ‘Indonesian Militants join Foreign Fighting in Indonesia,’ *The New York Times*, Last retrieved: March 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/01/world/asia/indonesian-militants-join-fight-in-syria.html>

<sup>39</sup> Mark Woodward, ‘ISIL Influence in Fueling Sectarianism in Indonesia,’ *COMOPS Journal*, (2004), Last retrieved: January 15, 2019, <https://csc.asu.edu/2014/08/22/isil-influence-is-fueling-sectarianism-in-indonesia/>

<sup>40</sup> Margareth S. Aritonang, ‘Shia Conversion is Solution: Minister,’ *The Jakarta Post*, Last retrieved: March 8, 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/09/06/shia-conversion-solution-minister.html>

<sup>41</sup> Mathias Haryadi, ‘Sunni Mob sets Fire to Shia Boarding School in East Java,’ *AsiaNews.it*, December 30, 2011, Last Retrieved: March 10, 2019, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sunni-mob-sets-fire-to-Shia-boarding-school-in-East-Java-23570.html>

try, because Saudi Arabia, for example, has never forbidden its followers to come on its soil to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.”

According to President of the Indonesian Shiite Council (Jabir), Jalaluddin Rakhmat, the highest number of estimations stated there are around five million Shiites in the country, but he personally claimed that it's about 2,5 million. He went on saying that only a few openly claim their Shiite membership in the archipelago. The security issues have caused them to live hidden from the public.<sup>42</sup>

According to him, first members of the Shiite community reportedly arrived in Aceh (Sumatra) around the eighth century.<sup>43</sup> Several traditions attest to their ancient presence in the archipelago. Thus, the taboo, the typically Shia processional rite during which the followers replay the tragedy of the assassination of the family of the prophet and the death of Hussein in Karbala, is today practiced by the Sunni community of Bengkulu. A wave of conversion to Shiism then developed in the early 1980s, with the Islamic revolution in Iran. For many Indonesian Muslim militants then muzzled by the dictatorship of Suharto, Imam Khomeini was a hope. Students who did not have the right to protest returned to the mosque. They began to devour books on the Iranian revolution and on Shiism. At first, the country thought it was just an intellectual movement. But tensions arose when newly converted students to this branch of Islam began to be interested in canon law, thus opposing the Sunni interpretation of Quran.

During the final decade of the Cold War, both Khomeini's Iran and Suharto's Indonesia adopted an opposing position with the West.<sup>44</sup> The government of President Abdurrahman Wahid reinforced relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia, and this would later provide Iranians more access to Indonesia. Iranian presidents, government officials, and delegations started visiting Indonesia and gave scholarships to Indonesian students to study in Iran. Trade ties between Indonesia and Iran increased because Indonesia

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<sup>42</sup> “Tempo.co,” Berapa populasi Syiah di Indonesia, Last retrieved: March 8, 2019, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/426965/berapa-populasi-syiah-di-indonesia/full&view=ok>

<sup>43</sup> “Vivanews,” Jejak Syiah di Nusantara, Last retrieved: March 10, 2019, <https://www.viva.co.id/indepth/sorot/347992-jejak-syiah-di-nusantara>

<sup>44</sup> Sterling Jensen, “Indonesia-UAE Relations in the Context of Regional Governance,” *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, (2017), 11:4, 100-111, DOI: 10.1080/25765949.2017.12023320

abstained from the UN vote to impose sanctions against Iran in 2007<sup>45</sup> when the UN Security Council and other countries began imposing sanctions on Iran for its nuclear program in 2006. In a press conference in April 2007 Indonesian President called Iran's nuclear program peaceful and the UN resolutions against the country illegal.<sup>46</sup> However, in 2008 Indonesia voted in favor of UNSCR 1835 against Iran.<sup>47</sup>

## 5. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Objectives in Indonesia

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy objectives in Indonesia are based on multiple interests. Economic first because it must be remembered that the pilgrimage is the second source of income of Saudi Arabia and, obviously, the largest Muslim country in the world that is Indonesia sharpens the interest of the Saudis. It should also be noted that nearly 1.5 million Indonesians work in Saudi Arabia as of 2014.<sup>48</sup>

Recently King Salman made an exceptional visit in 2017 (the first of such magnitude in 47 years), confirming the weight that Saudi Arabia intends to have on Indonesia, which has the potential to be one of the greatest world powers in a few years. Under criticism for its proven propagation of a particularly intolerant Islam, Saudi Arabia multiplies the diplomatic steps aimed as much to mark its goals on the Muslim world in order to perpetuate its regional domination (rapprochement with Israel, isolation of Qatar, the struggle of domination against Iran, war in Yemen, etc.)<sup>49</sup> In this context, a rapprochement with a rather progressive image of Indonesia seems highly strategic beyond this simple defense of economic interests. Here is what the Saudi King said during his visit: "The challenges that the Muslim community and the world, in general, are facing, such as terrorism

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<sup>45</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Santa Barbara, CA; Praeger, 2010):135-138.

<sup>46</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*,

<sup>47</sup> "Critical Threads," Indonesia-Iran Foreign Relations,

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Victor and Jennifer Jett, "Indonesia Protests Saudi Arabia's Execution of Maid," *The New York Times*, Last retrieved: February 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/world/asia/indonesia-maid-executed-saudi-arabia.html>

<sup>49</sup> Sterling Jensen, "Indonesia-UAE Relations in the Context of Regional Governance," 107.

and the conflict of civilizations and the lack of respect for the sovereignty of the people and nations require us to unite to fight against” The 11 agreements signed between the two parties during this visit concerned mainly economic issues.<sup>50</sup>

The visit was also a success for the Indonesian president at the international level in reconciling the differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran: “This geopolitical issue should play in favor of Indonesia, which Saudi Arabia sees the bond as an intermediary between the two countries. Iran has already agreed to a range of cooperation with Indonesia, now Saudi Arabia wants guarantees that Indonesia remains on its side,” said Zuhairi Misrawi (observer of the political life of the M-O).<sup>51</sup>

In an article named *The Impact of Saudi King's visit to Indonesia* by Siwage Negara concludes that there has been a mismatch between Saudi's intentions and Indonesia's expectations. The Saudi King pledged a 1 billion US dollars investment in Indonesia while it pledged 7 billion US dollars investment in the neighboring country, Malaysia. The Indonesians were too optimistic to calculate that approximately 25 billion US dollars would be invested by the Saudi government. Meanwhile, the King's main objective is to increase bilateral trade between the two countries, due to the fact that the Saudi economy has started to decline since the fall of oil prices. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Saudi Arabia's fiscal deficit has significantly expanded from 3.4 percent of GDP in 2014 to 15.9 percent of GDP in 2015. The Indonesians also expected the two governments to address the issues of Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi, this issue was not discussed during the King's visit.<sup>52</sup> From this explanation, the King's visit had no concrete impact on Indonesia's foreign policy, though both governments agreed to reinforce ties in combating extremism, radicalism, and terrorism in the Islamic World.

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<sup>50</sup> “Le Courrier du Vietnam,” Indonesia and Saudi Arabia Sign 11 Agreements, Last retrieved: February 14, 2019, <https://lecourrier.vn/indonesie-et-arabie-saoudite-signent-onze-accords-de-cooperation/372718.html>

<sup>51</sup> “Qirotatif,” Indonesie: Histoire, Terrorisme, Islam et Actualite’ *AgoraVox*, Last retrieved: March 10, 2019, <https://www.agoravox.tv/tribune-libre/article/indonesie-histoire-terrorisme-77446>

<sup>52</sup> Siwage Negara, “The Impact of Saudi King's visit to Indonesia,” *ISEAS*, no.16 ISSN2335-6677 (2017):10 [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2017\\_16.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2017_16.pdf)



According to Amanda Kovacs, Saudi Arabia often takes advantage of the lack of some home countries (most especially developing countries including Indonesia) to provide quality education and modern educational facilities. Therefore, they use educational institutions to stabilize the system. The author argues that after Indonesia switched to democracy in 1998, the country has still been influenced by Salafi religious discriminatory activities and violence.<sup>53</sup> Most of this violence often comes from the graduates of Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Bahasa (English: Islamic and Arabic College of Indonesia) LIPIA college in Jakarta, which was established in 1980 by Saudi Arabia. In addition to this, the author states that LIPIA portrays a Saudi microcosm, where Salafi norms and values predominate. LIPIA also acts as an entrance to all of Southeast Asia. Finally, the author argues that Saudi Arabia, in order to tackle the influence of Iran and confronts Iran for religious hegemony in 1979, started building schools and universities worldwide to propagate its educational traditions and ideology.

One interesting thing about the above article is that the author recommends that Muslim countries need to improve their educational systems and infrastructures in order to stop the coming in of religious radicalization because one of the easiest ways this religious-oriented foreign policy objective is achieved, is by building religious schools and centers.

Since 1980, Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars exporting its ideological brand, Salafism and Wahhabism, to a historically tolerant and diverse country. It has built more than 150 mosques (the country already has 800,000), a huge “free” university in Jakarta and several institutes of Arabic language; it has provided over 100 boarding schools with textbooks and teachers (in a country with between 13,000 and 30,000 boarding schools); to which are added cohorts of Saudi preachers and teachers.<sup>54</sup>

One crucial effect of this Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy in Indonesia is that in the 1980s, some Indonesian students received scholarships to complete their teaching in Saudi Arabia, and some of them went on to Afghanistan

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<sup>53</sup> Amanda Kovacs, “Saudi Arabia Exporting Salafi Education and Radicalizing Indonesia’s Muslims,” *German Institute of Global and Area Studies*, no.7, ISSN 2196-3940 (2014): 7 [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184727/gf\\_international\\_1407.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184727/gf_international_1407.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Ammar Belhimer, “A lost funds Indonesia: Wahhabi overdose,” *Algeria News*, Last retrieved: January 20, 2019, <https://www.lesoirdalgerie.com/articles/2017/03/14/article.php?sid=210673&cid=8>



for practical purposes. They found themselves in the region of Kunar, an isolated region under Saudi domination. It is these Indonesians, who have gone through the Saudi literalist teaching and the Afghan armed struggle, who on their return to the country, gave their seat to the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia<sup>55</sup>, an organization whose goal is the dawah (proselytism) in view of promotion and implementation of Sharia law. Their ultra-conservative positions and their targets are classic for such a movement: the corruption of the government, the Javanese mysticism and the other religions in general, the Muslim liberalism and the challenge of certain economic domination of the Chinese. Obviously, they are radically anti-Christian and anti-Amadhis (the Amadhis are a Muslim sect judged heretical and apostate by the rest of the Muslims).<sup>56</sup>

But on one hand, this type of movement remains minor, on the other hand, the religious competition rages and in September 2014, the Council of the Ulama of Aceh condemned Salafism as deviant. Clashes occurred several times. Salafists linked to centers in Yemen are particularly in the spotlight and initiatives funded by funds of Saudi and Qatari origin are considered with suspicion. It is difficult to assess what factor, between incompetence and relative complicity of the authorities, leads to the existence of such movement. The latter explains that Islamists remain nevertheless relatively spared by the repression.

One of the means used by the Salafists, who are wary of the Indonesian authorities, is the radio to achieve some of the foreign policy objectives of Saudi Arabia in Indonesia.<sup>57</sup> Numerous stations have been created or brought closer to this movement originating from Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Salafists are mostly quietists, but some advocate the armed struggle. The largest Islamic organization in the country Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) created in 1926 has been actively fighting against promoting Salafism in

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<sup>55</sup> Solahudin, *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia: From Darul Islam to Jem'ah Islamiyah* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 145-191.

<sup>56</sup> "Les Cahiers de l'Orient," *Madrasas salafistes de l'Archipel*, Last retrieved: February 15, 2019, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-cahiers-de-l-orient-2008-4-page-15.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Haeril Halim and Fadli, "Salafi Movement gains ground in Public Sphere," *Jakarta Post*, Last retrieved: February 15, 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/09/02/salafi-movement-gains-ground-in-public-sphere.html>

Indonesia.<sup>58</sup> In an article in the *Jakarta Post*<sup>59</sup> of 2016, experts estimated about a hundred of these radios, with wide dissemination means throughout the country. The scholar and specialist of Salafism Ayang Utriza Yakin of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta (UIN), who analyzed the sermons of the most popular of them (Radio Rodja) concluded that the Islamic teachings of these made the promotion of intolerance and rejection of modernity. A very detailed study<sup>60</sup> of this phenomenon was made in 2016: It explains the central purpose of these media, the dawah (or dakwah). They are part of a challenge to religious authority with many subdivisions, all claiming to represent “true Salafism” (a constant in Islam). Several notable features are present such as the absence of commercial breaks, music, entertainment programs. They are devoted exclusively to the recitation of the Quran donated rhythmically, hadiths and prayers loop. The only entertainment “is the” daurah broadcasts, “a sort of workshop where Middle Eastern preachers are sometimes invited for readings, which usually end up on widely distributed CDs and podcasts.

One of the reasons explaining the use of the radio is the fatwas pronounced in the Middle East by the Salafist Ulema in this respect; the use of the radio is allowed provided that nothing of haram (prohibited by Islam) be broadcasted. This limits their use to reading the Quran, hadiths and some important news about Islam. The same goes for television but the ulamas are much more reluctant about it because you could hear music or, even worse, watch the presenters. They make a clear difference between Salafist radios and “corrupt radios” on the one hand.

Salafism has thus gained momentum over the past three decades. For Din Wahid of UIN, the center of the Salafist scene in Batam (an Indonesian island not far from Singapore) is Hang Radio. Originally a radio broadcasting music, its owner, a businessman (Zein Alatas), has converted himself to Islam.<sup>61</sup> In 2016, this radio (now heard in Hong Kong, Singapore, Ma-

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<sup>58</sup> Haeril Halim and Fadli, “Salafi Movement gains ground in Public Sphere,” *Jakarta Post*,

<sup>59</sup> Haeril Halim and Fadli, “Salafi Movement gains ground in Public Sphere,” *Jakarta Post*,

<sup>60</sup> Sunarwoto, “Salafi Dakwah Radio: A Contest for Religious Authority,” *Archipel* (May 2017): 204, DOI: 10.4000/archipel.314

<sup>61</sup> Krithika Vargur, “Salafi Movement Grows on Indonesia’s Batam Island,” *VOA*, Last retrieved: February 19, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/salafi-movement-grows-on-indonesias-batam-island/3764858.html>

aysia, Australia) was involved in a scandal; two men became radicalized and were preparing to leave for Syria to join the ISIS. Once arrested, they explained that listening to Hang Radio would have radicalized them. The radio has been summoned to stop broadcasting extremist preaching and the problem seems settled but until when? One thing is certain, this Salafist influence tends to grow which has been a direct result of one of the foreign policy objectives of Saudi Arabia, which is to disseminate its ideology. Fortunately, there is now a de-radicalization school in Indonesia founded in 2015 that rehabilitates children who have been involved in terrorist activities. A short, interesting report about these very young children, who have been brainwashed and whom this school intends to apply a brainwashing method, which has been consistently realized. The professor himself was once convicted of terrorism and involved in the Islamist movement of Jemaah Islamiyah which was, among others, behind the attacks in Bali (2002 and 2005) attacks.<sup>62</sup> This man himself indoctrinated children to become terrorists when he was in the organization. According to him, 300 children are involved in terrorist activities throughout Indonesia.

## **6. Comparative Study of Iran and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy in Indonesia**

The current regional atmosphere of sectarian division and rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is impacting Indonesia's foreign relations and policy with the Gulf States. Iran and Saudi Arabia have all tried to influence religious discourse in Indonesia.<sup>63</sup> This statement shows that Iran and Saudi Arabia try to disseminate religious ideologies in the country. Saudi Arabia is principally concerned about Iranian Influence in Indonesia.<sup>64</sup> And as for Afshon Ostovar "most of Iran's relations are not based on ideological or religious considerations".<sup>65</sup> Iran's policy towards the Middle East is driven

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62 "EveryCRSReport.com," Terrorism in Southeast Asia, Last retrieved: January 17, 2019, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL34194.html>

63 Yon Machmudi, *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy Conflict, and Cooperation*, (London: I.B Tauris, 2016): 290-304.

64 Sterling Jensen, "Indonesia-UAE Relations in the Context of Regional Governance," 102

65 A. Ostovar, "Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2016).

by a desire for regional balance; a counterbalance to the influence of Saudi Arabia, allied with the United States since the Quincy pact of 14 February 1945. In the Kingdom of Bahrain, an island connected to Saudi Arabia and an outlet for the Saudi, the Iranian influence is limited. Following the “Arab Spring”, the February-March 2011 demonstrations were suppressed thanks to Riyadh’s intervention, without Iran interfering. While the presence of the US Fifth Fleet may explain this distance to a country conquered by the Safavids and considered as a province until recently by an Iranian nationalist fringe,<sup>66</sup> Tehran respects the sovereignty of this former British protectorate, which became independent in 1971.

Both Indonesia and Iran are seen as representing Islamic World globally<sup>67</sup> due to their large Muslim population. Indonesia represents the largest Sunni Muslim population while Iran, on the other hand, is the home of many Shiite Muslims.<sup>68</sup>

Iran has also financed the building of the Islamic Cultural Center (ICC), which was completed in 2002. The ICC is the largest site of Shia activity in Indonesia, it offers courses in religion, Arabic and Persian language and also facilitates scholarship to Iran. Subsequently, the significant impact of such relations and activities resulted in one blatant example, seen in 2014, when a National Anti-Shia Alliance of Indonesia was founded in Bandung, West Java. Before the creation of this Anti-Shia Alliance, an East Java branch of the National Ulama Council issued a fatwa against Shia Muslims in 2012. Several Shia were driven out of their homes in the same year. One explanation for the previously mentioned intolerance against Shia is a growing popularity of Saudi Salafism.<sup>69</sup> However, this paper does not intend to study the rise of fundamentalism in Indonesia.

The relation between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia was formally initiated in 1948, with the establishment of the Indonesian Embassy in Jeddah. Two

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<sup>66</sup> B. Hourcade, “Iran Against the Sunni Encirclement” 7.

<sup>67</sup> Priyambodo RH, “RI-Iran Relations have no limit,” Antaranews.com, Last retrieved: March 1, 2019, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/80709/ri-iran-relations-have-no-limit>

<sup>68</sup> Yon Machmudi, “Cultural Cooperation between Indonesia and Iran,” *Academia*, Last retrieved: March 2, 2019, [https://www.academia.edu/2602966/Cultural\\_Cooperation\\_between\\_Indonesia\\_and\\_Iran](https://www.academia.edu/2602966/Cultural_Cooperation_between_Indonesia_and_Iran)

<sup>69</sup> Krithika Varagur, “Iran-funded Center a lifeline for the Jakarta’s marginalized Shia Minority,” *VOA*, Last retrieved December 28, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/iran-funded-center-helpful-to-shia-community/4055767.html>

years later Saudi Arabia opened its representative office in Jakarta that was eventually turned into a formal embassy in 1955. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was among the first country that recognized Indonesia in 1945 when it gained independence. In 2015, the total trade between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia amounted to 8.6 billion dollars. Indonesia's main exports to Saudi Arabia are palm oil, motor vehicles, tuna, rubber, pulp, wood, charcoal and textile.<sup>70</sup>

From the arguments in this section, it is clear that Saudi Arabia is more concerned about spreading its ideologies because the investments Saudi Arabia made, have deeply rooted in religious institutions and centers. This could possibly explain the mismatch between Saudi's intention and Indonesia's expectation during the King's visit in 2017, that is, the Saudis made an investment lesser than expected. Iran, on the other hand, has also been involved in spreading its ideologies but the present Iranian government is more interested in ameliorating its trade and bilateral ties with Indonesia as a way of expanding its influence.

Although both Iran and Saudi Arabia pursue the foreign policy objectives in Indonesia through many approaches of diplomatic relation such as trade, education, and common national and international security issues such as combatting global terrorism, the motives carried by both rival states in Indonesia can also clearly be seen as a form of security and hegemonic competition between the two rival states. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia's approach to their foreign policies in Indonesia have been exercised in nearly the same forms of relation, which are educational, cultural and trade.

Saudi Arabia has obviously concerned about disseminating its religious influences through investment in education while Iran might seem to obtain its alliance politic interests, which aim to serve its survival in international politics. Nevertheless, in the case of Iran's foreign policy in Indonesia, the fundamental ideology, Shiism, which constitutes Iranian's foreign policy, might appear in one way or another.

Regardless to what motives and how far the impact of Iran and Saudi Arabia foreign policies in Indonesia have taken its toll, Indonesian's Muslim

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<sup>70</sup> "Jakarta Post," Saudi Arabia to Double Trade by 2020, Google, Last retrieved: January 12, 2019, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/05/05/indonesia-Saudi-Arabia-to-double-trade-by-2020.html>

society might become a spot for both countries' competitive struggles over security and hegemony in the Muslim world.

## **7. Conclusion**

This article started by giving a brief introduction to Iran and Saudi Arabia's foreign policy objectives in Indonesia. The article makes a comparative study of those objectives in details. The article shows two important foreign policy objectives that are common to both countries which are economic and religious objectives. However, the significance of these objectives differs. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have been involved in several activities to ease the spread of their ideologies in Indonesia. Both countries also have economic interests in Indonesia. Saudi Arabia wants to serve the implementation of reducing its dependence on oil policy by securing pilgrimage services while Iran wants to reinforce its bilateral trade ties with Indonesia.

The article also shows that Saudi Arabia started investing in its religious objectives immediately after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. One of the principal objectives of the Khomeini's regime in Iran was to spread Shiism all over the World and Indonesia was a suitable place to do this due to its large Muslim population. In order to counter-attack the spread of Shiism in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia started building Islamic schools and Mosques to spread the Wahhabi Ideology, which neorealists believe to be an underlying factor of influence-seeking policy. Furthermore, one can argue from a neorealist perspective that both Iran and Saudi Arabia foreign policy objectives are not solemnly based on power competition in the Muslim World, but the increasing 'suspicion' and their 'perception' of one another have led to a security competition in Indonesia because a friendly and sincere diplomatic relation with Indonesia can be seen as a support for them in the Muslim World. Although these objectives have started becoming more economical, the religious aspect continues to play a dominant role in the foreign policy objectives of the two countries.

The arguments provided in this article indicate that foreign policy objectives are often based on national interests. As a theory, from structural realism, the arguments are based on the security dilemma because one factor that encourages the two countries to do international politics in Indonesia is security maximization. The article argues that the influences of both

countries in the Muslim World, including Indonesia, started immediately after the Iranian Revolution.

It should be kept in mind that a very large majority of Indonesian Muslims are attached to “Pancasila”, the five great founding principles of the Indonesian state. The first of these principles is that Islam is not the foundation of independent Indonesia, even if this religion is the majority. The first concerns the belief in one God: this might seem paradoxical, but this principle is supposed to allow each religion to conduct its practice accordingly.

As a policy recommendation, foreign-funded educational institutions and centers should be well monitored because some of the arguments presented in this paper stipulate some particular activities that trigger sectarian, ethnic and religious conflicts, which violates the main principle of the nation, Pancasila. In addition, the growing numbers of foreign-funded educational institutions shouldn't overshadow the quality and quantity of state-owned institutions. That is, the Indonesian government should pay more attention to public educational infrastructures.

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