

# The Unbent Support for Palestinian Cause: Historical Reflection of Indonesian General Offensive upon the Palestinian Aqsa Flood

## Jelang Ramadhan

"As long as Palestine's national independence is not given to Palestinians, and for that long Indonesian stands opposing Israeli Colonization." President of the Republic of Indonesia, Soekarno 1962.

### Abstract

The destinies of Indonesians and Palestinians are entangled in part due to Western colonialism. When Palestinians saw their distant brothers declaring independence after a long occupation in 1945, Indonesians witnessed a modern occupation in the form of illegal settlements and unjust killings carried out by Israelis against Palestinians since 1948. Humanity became once again at stake with the Aqsa Flood Operation of 2023, as Western countries, particularly the US and its ally Israel, deliberately framed the operation to acknowledge its success, turning the tide in favor of the Palestinians. The article aims to reflect on the success of the Indonesian General Offensive in March 1949, which culminated in Indonesia's liberation from Western re-occupation in 1950, and its strong connection to the Aqsa Flood Operation in October 2023. If the operation could be managed well by utilizing hard and soft power thoroughly, sporadically, and massively, Palestinian independence is foreseeable. The historical analysis and reflection were done utilizing qualitative research within literature and media studies. This article concludes that the wave of support for Palestine has sparked the international society's concern as the Israeli genocidal actions become blatant. The cohesion of people and authority in Palestine will be the key to reaching full-fledged freedom, free from the Israeli occupation by defeating them at the diplomatic table as Indonesians did 75 years ago.

**Keywords:** General Offensive, Aqsa Flood, Palestinian Independence, Colonialism.

## الدعم الثابت للقضية الفلسطينية: انعكاس الهجوم الإندونيسي العام على طوفان الأقصى الفلسطيني

### الملخص

تشابك مصائر الإندونيسيين والفلسطينيين جزئيًا بسبب الاستعمار الغربي. عندما رأى الفلسطينيون إخوانهم البعيدين يعلنون الاستقلال بعد احتلال طويل في عام ١٩٤٥، شهد الإندونيسيون احتلالًا حديثًا على شكل مستوطنات غير شرعية وعمليات قتل طالمة نفذها الإسرائيليون ضد الفلسطينيين منذ عام ١٩٤٨. أصبحت الإنسانية مرة أخرى على المحك مع عملية طوفان الأقصى في عام ٢٠٢٣، حيث قامت الدول الغربية، لا سيما الولايات المتحدة وحليفتها إسرائيل، بتصوير العملية في إطار يقرّ بنجاحها، مما قلب الموازين لصالح الفلسطينيين. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى التفكير في نجاح الهجوم العام الإندونيسي في مارس ١٩٤٩، والذي توج بتحرير إندونيسيا من إعادة الاحتلال الغربي في عام ١٩٥٠، وارتباطه الوثيق بعملية طوفان الأقصى في أكتوبر ٢٠٢٣. إذا أمكن إدارة العملية بشكل جيد باستخدام القوة الصلبة والناعمة بشكل شامل، ومتقطع، وواسع النطاق، فإن استقلال فلسطين متوقع. تم اتباع التحليل التاريخي والتأمل ضمن تصميم بحث نوعي مع دراسات أدبية وإعلامية. وتخلص هذه المقالة إلى أن موجة الدعم لفلسطين قد أثارت اهتمام المجتمع الدولي حيث أن الفعل الإبدي الذي ارتكبه إسرائيل واضح بشكل صارخ. سيكون تماسك الشعب والسلطة في فلسطين هو المفتاح لتحقيق الحرية الكاملة، بعيدًا عن الاحتلال الإسرائيلي من خلال هزيمتهم على طاولة الدبلوماسية كما فعل الإندونيسيون قبل ٧٥ عامًا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الهجوم العام، طوفان الأقصى، استقلال فلسطين، الاستعمار.

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## Introduction

Friday 10:00AM August 17th, 1945, in Jakarta, Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta were declaring the independence proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia amidst the power vacuum after the US atomic bombings on Japan on the 6th and 9th, and the subsequent surrender of Japan to the USA on August 15th, 1945 (Poesponegoro and Notosusanto, 2019, p.99).

It was a decent and modest declaration, but a blissful and joyful moment for Indonesian afterwards, especially since the proclamation occurred during the holy month of Ramadhan when the Muslim majority of the archipelago was fasting. The proclamation took place in Pegangsaan Timur 56, Menteng, Central Jakarta, with a flag ceremony as Sang Saka Merah Putih (The Sacred Red White) was raised. It had been sewn a year prior by Fatmawati (Soekarno's wife) and the spirit of independence rapidly resonated throughout the archipelago via radio announcement (Poesponegoro and Notosusanto, 2019, p. 99). When the first presidential cabinet was formed on September 2nd, it was led by President Soekarno, Vice President Mohammad Hatta and Achmad Soebardjo who was chosen as the first Foreign Affairs Minister. He was to strive for international recognition for Indonesia (Maeswara, 2010, pp. 1-18).

It was not so long after, Palestinians faced the catastrophe (Nakba) when almost a million had to flee the country as a result of atrocities committed by Israeli colonization helped by the Western powers, especially the English. This event was unprecedented in modern history and the conflict has lasted for so long. Hence, Palestinian independence was stolen by the great gradual migration made by Jews who came from Central Europe. Radicalized by the thought of the "promised land", Zionists assumed power after the English returned the mandate to the UN, which took part in letting the Israeli state rise over another people's independence in the mid 20th century.

Although, at the beginning of the 20th century, the liberal democratic order based on a laissez-faire economic system advanced unchallenged, developments turned the character of the ideological conflict which was so influential between 1917 and 1956, into the bipolar world order (Barraclough, 1967, p. 227). This impacted most industrialized countries including Japan which sought more resources to advance its industrialization to the next level, competing with European countries. Yet, the colonized nations seemed lacking in progress into industrialization era. Development was only experienced by those who resided in the urban setting and next to its European rulers. The poor living conditions and the feeling of being under occupation ignited social agitation. The research aims to show that the injustice and the military operation could turn the tide in favor of the Palestinians like what happened to the Indonesians 75 years ago. Even though the Indonesian military was not on the same level as the Dutch and the English, the Republican government led by President Soekarno and Vice President Mohammad Hatta won the battles by getting international recognition, sustaining domestic authority, and uniting Indonesian states into the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).

Indonesia is known as one of the majority-Muslim countries that was uncompromising towards colonialism including the very existence of Israel which was projected and planted by Western countries to perpetuate colonial interests. Before Israel even existed, the Palestinian struggle had caught Indonesian attention in 1945, as it was reported in *Kedaulatan Rakjat* on October 13th (Figure 1). The news reported about 200 Jews who had entered Palestinian territory illegally through Mount Carmel near Haifa.

They were caught on October 10th, and then escaped by killing the police. It was reported that they had come to Palestine from Central Europe without official permits. The exodus of Jews was facilitated by European countries which had colonized the Middle East under the guise of protectorates.

The colonized society was divided into two different groups. One was a single entity with different perspectives on nationalism which emerged as a national movement that was actually a response to discriminatory colonial policy, and which strove for self-determination and independence against the powers that sought to prolong the colonial exploitation (Kartodirdjo, 1975, pp. 301-302). Others were in favor of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' jurisdiction. As the opposition fought for full freedom and authority, the social agitation to pursue independence became more radicalized later influencing the resistance movements across the archipelago, particularly after the proclamation.

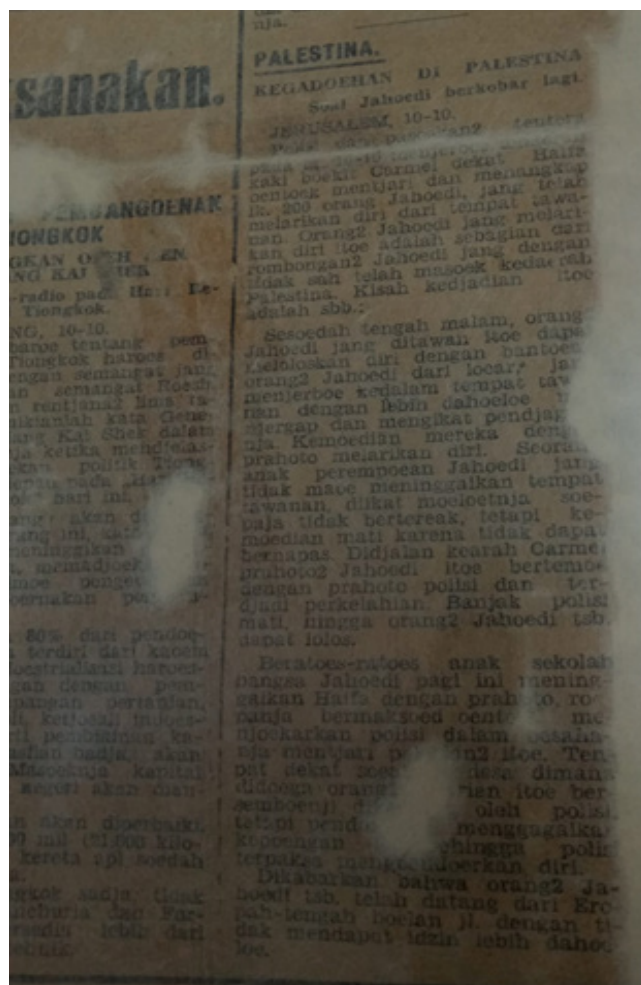


Figure 1: Daily Kedaulatan Rakjat reported incident of illegal trespassing by Jews (source: Private).

As the Japanese were losing more and more of its conquered territories in July 1945, Japan could not think of victory. Indonesia did, and its aim was to establish an independent state to prevent the restoration of the rule by the former colonizers. On August 7th, a day after the first horrible atomic bombing on Hiroshima by the USA, which killed approximately 78,000 lives, the membership of a new Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (PPKI) (the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence) was announced. A few days later the second atomi bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

In the following days, Soekarno, Hatta and Radjiman met Japanese Field Marshal Hisaichi Terauchi in Dalat, where they were given a promise on August 11th to gain independence for the whole of the former Dutch East Indies; the Field Marshal refused the inclusion of British Malaya's territory. A day after Soekarno and his colleagues had returned to Jakarta, Japan announced its unconditional surrender on August 15th, to the Allied forces leaving Indonesia in a political hiatus. Many parties wanted to see a quick transfer of power which drove the proclamation on Friday, August 17th, 1945 (Ramadhan 9th, 1364 AH), and pushed Indonesia to adopt a new identity as a free nation. There were consequences that followed in the struggle to keep the independence from reconquest by the Allied forces who attempted to annihilate the freedom of an independent nation.

It was a bitter struggle not only for independence but to also earn recognition from the international community. Fortunately, a year prior to the independence, the Grand Mufti of Palestine, Sheikh Muhammad Amin Al-Husaini, had announced his open support for the Indonesian cause on September 6th, 1944, through a radio channel. Soon after, the streets in Palestine were packed with Palestinian solidarity and support for Indonesians. In a time of need, the moral support from the Palestinian Renowned Religious Cleric and Arab Ulamas as well as Egyptian recognition of Indonesian independence in 1947, opened the path for more recognition by Arab countries and the world (Hassan, 1980).

### **Perseverance Trumps Power Superiority: A Reflection from the General Offensive of March 1st, 1949.**

The Dutch's second military aggression to finish off the Republic of Indonesia was initially successful but shortlived as it occupied Yogyakarta capturing virtually a whole Indonesian leadership for exile to various locations in the archipelago. Fortunately, as traditional rulers Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX and Prince Paku Alam VIII remained in their palaces believing to be the only capable administrators for their own people. The Dutch military operation occurred after Prime Minister Hatta had been conducting talks with the United Nations Committee for Indonesia (UNCI) in Kaliurang. The operation was a great slap in the face of peace arbitrators. The Dutch lost face amidst an outraged world opinion, and failed to achieve a fait accompli. The guerrilla fighters had become increasingly active, targeting Yogyakarta to retake the capital from the Dutch.

On February 18th, 1949, somewhere around Sumbing Mountain, under the command of Grand General Soedirman, Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Hutagalung presented his idea in front of the highest military and civilian command. Military Governor Colonel Bambang Soengeng, Lieutenant-Colonel Sarbini Mintohardjo, and Civilian Governor K. R. M. T. Wongsonegoro, Bupati (district head) of Banjarnegara and Sangidi were among the participants. To counter the Dutch military aggression, simultaneous attacks in the Division III area (Central Java) should take place to utilize the full potential of the military and civilians under the Military Governor while also announcing these attacks to the international community. The wehrkreise I, II, and III were involved in reoccupying Yogyakarta, which was the top target of the General Offensive, to deter the Dutch army. The Dutch declared the termination of the existence of the Republic of Indonesia including its government and military. This was why the strategy to revive the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI) (Indonesian National Army) presence in front of foreign journalists, military analysts and UNCI delegates in Yogyakarta was of utmost importance (Hutagalung, 2018, pp. 130-131).

Meanwhile, Sjafruddin Prawiranegara along with T. M. Hassan, the Head of Commissioner of Central Government for Sumatra, and Colonel Hidayat, the Supreme Commander for Military and Sumatra Territory, agreed to form the Pemerintah Darurat Republik Indonesia (the Emergency Government of the Republic of Indonesia) on December 22nd, 1948. They were continuously relocating the operational office to avoid the Dutch army and maintaining communication through radiograms with national figures in Java through the end of January 1949. The Emergency Government acquired support from TNI, but could not reach the national leaders in exile in Bangka Island. After seven months of leading the revolutionary struggle and maintaining the existence of Republic of Indonesia (RI), Acting President Sjafruddin Prawiranegara returned the presidential mandate to President Soekarno on July 13th, 1949.

The meeting in Sumbing Mountain was pivotal for consolidating the surprise attack on Yogyakarta and to maintain the chain of command amongst the guerilla leaders. Colonel T. B. Simatupang was ordered to coordinate the spread of news overseas through radio transmitters in Playen and Wiladek. He started his journey on February 25th, throughout Central and Eastern Java talking about an upcoming General Offensive to Yogyakarta. The Brigade IX under Lieutenant-Colonel Achmad Yani was commanded to obstruct the Dutch troop reinforcement to Yogyakarta. The central role put to Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto from Colonel Soegeng, was to execute the plan on March 1st, at 6:00AM. TNI managed to recruit young talents who could speak French, English, and Dutch to do military cosplay in front of foreign delegates in Yogyakarta to explain the truth of the events and to make known to the international community of the existence of the Republic of Indonesia (Hutagalung, 2018, pp. 135-138).

Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto and his troops struck a psychological blow by infiltrating, attacking, and holding Yogyakarta for six hours from the Dutch. Since the end of February, the wehrkreise had already been on the move and had infiltrated Yogyakarta and several surrounding cities Surakarta, Semarang, and Magelang to prevent the Dutch from sending reinforcements. According to Dutch resources in Major General A. H. Nasution's book, the ambush of the Dutch guard posts outside Yogyakarta happened at dawn around 4; later in the morning at 6 and the Indonesian troops managed to enter the city. Simultaneously, officers who were in charge of the radio station disseminated the news about the General Offensive on Tuesday, March 1st, with the text in English already prepared and distributed by Colonel Simatupang. This information managed to get through the Dutch information blockade (Hutagalung, 2018, pp. 139-147). More than 2,000 Indonesian guerillas were involved in the attack. Although the Dutch were able to stop the attack around 11 early noon, the TNI succeeded in confirming the existence of the Republic of Indonesia by displaying the ability to uphold its the sovereignty toward international community. An Indonesian delegate, A. A. Maramis in New Delhi, India was so excited to hear the news transmitted from Myanmar; Islam Salim, an Indonesian representative for UN heard about the attack from Singapore. There were more than 350 casualties from the Indonesian military and police as well as uncounted civilians killed; an estimated 200 Dutch troops were killed or injured in the same month (Hutagalung, 2018, pp. 139-147).

Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX played a strategic role in this attack. In the early afternoon he heard of Dutch reinforcements coming from Magelang, and he suggested to Soeharto to withdraw his forces. On March 2nd, Dutch officials led by General Meijer had a stormy meeting with the Sultan accusing him of cooperating with the attackers.

The Sultan then announced his abdication because of the Dutch provocations and threatened the Dutch that if they were to ransack the Keraton like Kepatihan before, it would be only over his dead body. The General Offensive was deemed a success due to multiple effects that changed the course of history, convinced the international community, strengthened the bargaining position of Indonesia in diplomacy, and changed the opinions and partiality of even members of the *Bijeenkomst voor Federal Overleg* (BFO), (the Meeting for Federal Consultation). The military initiative from the TNI pushed the international community to realize that the prolonged conflict between the Dutch and Indonesia could trigger an escalation and a domino effect in the region. So, the return to the diplomatic table was of utmost importance to prevent such a regional escalation.

What Palestinians did on October 7th, 2023, is almost what Indonesians had done on March 1st, 1949. Although the colonial power is considerably superior in terms of the defense system and weaponry, the spirit of independence and perseverance shall show the path to victory. It was proven during the Indonesian revolution that both diplomats and fighters played an important balance in winning multi-fronts against the Dutch. As the Palestinian cause has swept across the international community, raising its concern and creating pressure which has mounted over Israelis particularly as South Africa has filed a case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing it of committing genocide. Moreover, the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutors have applied for arrest warrants against supreme Israeli and Hamas leaders for alleged war crimes. The moment and opportunity must be used carefully to earn a fully independent status.

### **The Asia-Africa Conference in 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement**

Colonialism has shaped the Asian-African experiences as the West provided the motive for Asian and African peoples to oppose European domination and European ideas of modernization and other concepts. The Asians and Africans have managed to utilize in their own ways, European ideas of self-determination, nationalism, and democracy to raise themselves from subjugation to independence (Barraclough 1967, pp. 194-195). The nations then came together, met, and discussed their own fates amidst the global conference in Bandung between April 18th and 24th, 1955. Indonesia succeeded in hosting this grand event in the first decade of its national independence boosting its political influence in world politics as a new emerging force.

John Hobson argued that the modern era of world politics emerged with the birth of the sovereign state that was exported across the globe by colonial powers to make a 'globalized' system or so-called inter-state system based on the Westphalian system (Hobson, 2007, p. 297). Colonialism has also removed vast populations from the international community, negated equality, and prevented people from true freedoms (Pasha, 2013, pp. 144-165). In Southeast Asia, people were displaced from their origins and exiled to strange places which claimed to be part of the modernity process introduced by the Western colonialists. An example is Suriname's population, a country in South America where 14 percent of its citizens originate from Java Island in Indonesia. They were exploited for slavery during colonialism.

Southeast Asia has been a unique and crucially strategic region. No power challenged the claims of another until the Cold War tension rose. This is strongly related to decolonization in the region where rapid change and transformation have continued to progress (Devetak, et al. 2007, p. 214).

The subsequent emergence of newly-born nation-states and the rise of the Cold War exhibit the hesitation of new countries to be subordinate. These countries would rather be alone, or have a different path from the majority, than suffer once again under imperialism or neo-colonialism. The then called Third World Countries of the past (today the Global South) were previously excluded from, and underestimated by, Eurocentrism. For Westerners, the end of World War II (WWII) was the beginning of the Cold War. For Asians and Africans, it was the beginning of the era of flourishing independence and decolonization. The Asia Africa Conference (AAC) in Bandung in 1955, brought the former colonized countries and peoples together promoting a third way which counted in global politics in contrast with the the bi-polarized world.

The "Third World" has been depicted as the modern 'outside', or peripheral to, International Relations' (IR) Spatio-temporal gaze, because IR has remained Euro-American centric drawing from colonialism and restructuring the international community during decolonization. While non-Western history is greatly silenced, the AAC scarcely contests the triumphant narratives of Western civilization. Yet, the AAC was a defining moment in the international history of the 20th century for its contribution in laying the foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to IR. Initially, the AAC represented 29 independent and newly independent Asian and African states as if sending the message to the international community that there exists "Third World" Solidarity in the midst of the rivalry between two superpowers (Pasha, 2013, p. 148).

According to Chowdhry and Nair, post-colonial theory offers a distinct vantage point from conventional IR and criticizes the Eurocentric worldview that imperialism constitutes a critical historical juncture (Chowdhry and Nair, 2004, pp. 2-32). The theory likewise focuses on the importance of colonizing practices, counter-narratives, and the struggle of newly independent states during the decolonization era. Most post-colonial scholars focus on exposing the oppressions and on- changing the view towards colonizing and imperialist practices of Europe and USA (First World Countries), which constitutes a form of resistance. The AAC also reflects a distinct vantage point from the Western approach in managing IR, as it resulted in the subsequent Non-Aligned Movement with countries quite aware of the global threat during the Cold War.

President Soekarno proposed the idea to establish New Emerging Forces from the then called Third World Countries which evolved into the Non-Aligned Movement. Indonesia sought a way to reduce the tension by inviting American President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Soviet President Kliment S. Voroshilov to have a constructive dialogue amidst the rising tension of the Cold War. Unfortunately, only the USSR President Voroshilov answered the invitation by having an official visit to Indonesia in 1957, whilst President Eisenhower never came to Indonesia. US media propagated that Indonesian communists were planning to take over power in Jakarta.

Nonetheless, in the post-colonial era, newly independent states in the "Third World" necessarily formed alliances to maintain their security and to perpetuate the decolonization because they were still disadvantaged in resources in the post-WWII era (Demir, 2008, pp. 1-15). Above all, the 29 participants – whether they were already nation-states or nations-in-waiting who fought for their freedom– resided in Asia or Africa. Most of them were still fighting the colonial influence that was trying to regain control of the state or preventing the nations from becoming fully independent. In 1992, Indonesia as the host, invited the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to speak for the Palestinian cause and to gather a wave of support from the conference participants.

Israel was labeled as a manifestation of neo-colonialism, planted by Western hegemony. President Soekarno used the AAC to mobilize support not only for Indonesia and “Third World” countries but ultimately for Palestinian independence.

The first large-scale intercontinental conference of Asian and African peoples was considered by the First and Second World countries as a newly emerging force that needed to be counted in the global political constellation. The Bandung Ten Principles (Dasasila Bandung), which was the result of the AAC, urged a normative basis as the echo of the United Nations Charter and opened a new path for “Third World” countries out of mounting tensions between the USA or USSR that could lead to civil war. The Bandung Ten Principles propagated non-alignment and rejected the Euro-American standard of civilization.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of being colonized, has made Indonesia quite tough in opposing all forms of colonialism and imperialism. The preparation for the Asian-African Conference in 1953 showed that Indonesia and Pakistan adamantly refused the participation of Israel, as it was deemed to be a Western colonial project in the Middle East. In the opening speech of the AAC in Bandung where Palestinian representatives were present, President Soekarno stated, “Colonialism is not yet dead, only changing form. Neo-colonialism exists in every corner of the world, like Vietnam, Palestine, Aljazair, and so on” (Mukhti, July, 2014).

The event of the General Offensive on March 1st, 1949, created momentum for Indonesia to take back the independence, which was almost stolen, by utilizing the opportunity to struggle through the diplomatic table while continuing the guerilla war. Even though the military power of the Republic of Indonesia faced the Western power, which was out of its league, the international community’s support from the grassroots level to the elite level turned the tide in international relations. The ultimate power to success in the Indonesian independence lay in the strategy to utilize soft and hard power simultaneously; this Palestinians might be able to apply after October 7th, 2023. The wave of support for Palestine has spread all over the world, the cohesion of people and authority in Palestine will be the key to reaching full-fledged freedom - free from the Israeli occupation by defeating them in international relations.

The AAC and NAM are actually the medium for Palestine to generate and consolidate support from countries that have experienced colonization by Western powers. All the tools that could help to reach independence must be utilized. The four elements of foreign policy which are diplomacy, war, humanitarian aid, and gaining world opinion have to take turns, as has been utilized by the Indonesian government to succeed in its independence and to defend it afterward. Perseverance and agility are the keys to exercising those powers.

Finally, Indonesia continues to consistently defend the Palestinian cause in the international forum through foreign policy in the form of diplomacy and foreign aid while remaining unwavering in its stance against Israeli colonialism. Each of the Indonesian presidents have implemented the Bebas-Aktif foreign policy doctrine consistently by supporting Palestine and other countries affected by colonialism or neo-colonialism. This could be attributed to the influence of Indonesia’s past experience. The colonial legacy of divide et impera is still played by the hegemons to disintegrate rising countries like Indonesia and Palestine. This must be faced in modern and post-modern days.



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