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Feasibility Study of Indonesia and Malaysia Joining the Abraham Accords

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Abstract

This article investigates the feasibility of Malaysia and Indonesia, as two Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, joining the Abraham Accords. Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country, is also one of the emerging economies of the world and expected to become one of the five largest economic powers in the future. Malaysia, a Muslim country with a flourishing economy, industry, and academic circles, is also among the most important Muslim countries in the world. Their location in Southeast Asia, hosting 240 million Muslims, and lying at the forefront of the geopolitical battle between the United States of America and China, adds to their importance.

On September 15, 2020, President Donald Trump, along with Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, and the foreign ministers of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, unveiled the Abraham Accords. Bahrain and the UAE became the first

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countries in the Persian Gulf to recognize Israel. Since then, Sudan and Morocco have also normalized their relations with Israel, and the United Arab Emirates has signed a trade agreement with Israel.

From August to December 2020, Israel normalized its relations with the four countries of the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. It is said that the Abraham Accords could potentially expand to include up to ten countries.

Using the descriptive-analytical method and library sources, this article seeks to determine the feasibility of Malaysia and Indonesia normalizing relations with Israel and joining the Abraham Accords. Forging a relationship with Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country, has always been of paramount importance for Israel. Before the start of the so-called Abraham peace process, there was an idea among some that establishing relations with Indonesia could be a turning point in Israel's relations with Muslim countries. If other Muslim countries witnessed the normalization of Israel's relations with the largest and most populous Muslim country, it would be possible for Jakarta to become a model for them to follow. However, it has not been possible for Israel to establish relations with Indonesia, and Jakarta is one of the 28 countries that have not officially recognized Israel. In addition, according to a BBC survey conducted in 2017, only 9% of the people in Indonesia have a positive view of the foreign policy of Israel. Even in the Pew Institute survey in 2007, Indonesia ranked first in terms of solidarity with Palestine and opposition to Israel after five Middle Eastern countries.

Regarding Malaysia, the anti-Israel sentiment among Malaysians is also high. According to a survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, 61% of the country's population have anti-Semitic sentiments. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Institute, only 11% of Malaysians support Israel in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and 82% are pro-Palestine.

When analyzing the feasibility of normalizing relations between Malaysia and Indonesia, several factors must be considered. One of the influencing factors is the United States of America. Both Malaysia and Indonesia are not among the so-called revisionist governments in the international order, and they may join the Abraham Accords if they are encouraged, insisted or forced by the United States. This is especially true for Indonesia, as we have seen the efforts of the Trump and Biden administrations to have Indonesia join the Jirga of Abraham Pact member states.

Another important point that can affect the normalization of relations between Malaysia and Indonesia with Israel is Saudi Arabia's joining the Abraham Accords. Indonesia and Malaysia have warm relations with Saudi Arabia, which is

the second Middle East partner of Malaysia, and relations between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia are also warm. According to the 2021 survey by Australia's Lowy Institute, Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, is the most popular foreign leader in Indonesia. Therefore, it can be argued that Saudi Arabia's joining the process of normalizing relations between Muslim countries and Israel can also influence Indonesia and Malaysia and encourage them to do so.

In conclusion, while the hypothesis of this research was based on the proposition that Indonesia and Malaysia joining the Abraham Accords and normalizing relations with Israel is not likely, the findings of the research confirm this hypothesis. Due to various reasons, especially the strong anti-Israel sentiments of the people of these two countries, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur's joining the Abraham Accords is not likely, at least in the current time frame. However, factors such as the role-playing of the United States may make the atmosphere for the normalization of Indonesia's relations with Israel more favorable than that of Malaysia.

Key words: Abraham Accords, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Southeast Asia.