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RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF INDONESIA: SOFT POWER, RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY AND NORMATIVE EXPORT

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Abstract. *This article explores how Indonesia has transformed its domestic experience of religious tolerance and of moderate Islam into a resource of foreign policy. It analyses the Bali Democracy Forum, the Bogor Message, the Religion of Twenty forum and the transnational activities of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, and sets out through them the principal mechanisms of Indonesian religious diplomacy. The article argues that Indonesia does not export a ready-made political model to other Muslim countries; rather it brings into the international arena a normative experience centred upon the compatibility of Islam, democracy, national statehood and religious diversity. The study conceptualizes this process as religious soft power and as normative export.*

Keywords: *Indonesia, religious diplomacy, soft power, normative export, Bali Democracy Forum, R20, Bogor Message, Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, wasaṭiyya.*

INTRODUCTION

In the international relations of the twenty-first century the influence of states is not determined by economic or military force alone. Political experience, cultural attractiveness, values and international standing likewise determine the possibilities of a state's international influence. J. Nye explained this mechanism by the category of soft power (Nye, 2004:5-15).

Indonesia is one of the most interesting examples of this conception in the field of religious diplomacy. The country strives to present itself in the international arena as a democratic, multi-confessional and moderate society the greater part of whose population is Muslim. This experience is of particular interest also for Uzbekistan,

which is advancing the ideas of religious tolerance and enlightenment in its foreign policy. The aim of the article is to determine the principal mechanisms and institutions of Indonesian religious diplomacy and to evaluate its features as a normative export.

MAIN PART

The theoretical foundation of the research is the conception of soft power elaborated by J. Nye (Nye, 2004:5-15). J. Hoesterey, noting that the Islamic factor has grown stronger in the foreign policy of Indonesia in the recent decades, that is that an Islamic turn has taken place, shows that the country strives to form the image of a moderate Islam as a brand of foreign policy (Hoesterey, 2021:185-206). The study of R. Ridwan, D. Hanan and T. S. Astuti analyses the interfaith initiatives of Indonesia within the framework of the new public diplomacy (Ridwan, Hanan & Astuti, 2024:477-510). In the research, institutional analysis, the content analysis of official documents and speeches, and comparative methods were employed; the documents relating to the Bali Democracy Forum, to the Bogor Message and to the R20 forum were compared with the conclusions of the scholarly literature.

The Bali Democracy Forum, established in 2008, became one of the important platforms of the international diplomacy of Indonesia. It took shape as one of the platforms of dialogue upon democracy at the level of governments in Asia. The distinctive feature of the forum consisted not in exporting democracy as a ready-made model but in organizing the exchange of experience between various states.

In 2013, in his speech at the forum, the President of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono connected the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of the country with the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, that is «unity in diversity», and presented religious freedom, the protection of minorities and inter-communal dialogue as the fundamental elements of democratic governance. In 2016, at the forum held upon the theme of religion, democracy and pluralism, President Joko Widodo likewise emphasized the mutual harmony of religion, democracy and tolerance as important for state policy. In this manner the forum served to transform the domestic political experience of Indonesia into the capital of international standing (Hoesterey, 2021:185-206).

The religious diplomacy of Indonesia does not rest upon the activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs alone. Such religious organizations as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah possess wide networks of religious leaders, universities and schools,

international branches and relations of cooperation, and a great social legitimacy. As a result state diplomacy is joined with the diplomacy of civil society and of religious leaders. J. Hoesterey shows that in the international religious policy of Indonesia the government and the Muslim organizations of civil society make joint use of bilateral, multilateral and second-track channels of diplomacy (Hoesterey, 2020:191-214). This system may be described as a model of multi-actor religious diplomacy.

The high-level consultation of the Muslim scholars of the world held at Bogor in May 2018 was an important stage in bringing the Indonesian conception of wasaṭiyya into the international political and religious discourse. Within the framework of the Bogor Message such concepts as tawassuṭ, iʿtidāl, tasāmuḥ, shūrā, iṣlāḥ, qudwa and muwāṭana were advanced as the fundamental categories of religious moderation (Bogor Message, 2018).

The concept of muwāṭana in particular, that is the recognition of the national state and of citizenship, is significant as a conceptual mechanism that diminishes the opposition between religious identity and modern national statehood. Here Indonesia does not propose to other Muslim countries that they copy its constitution; on the contrary, it brings into transnational discussion the religious and political terminology formed in its own experience (Bogor Message, 2018).

On the second and third of November 2022, upon the island of Bali, within the framework of the presidency of Indonesia in the Group of Twenty, the religious forum of the Group of Twenty, the Religion of Twenty, was held. At the forum, religious extremism and the constructive role of religion in global political and economic life were discussed. In the official information of the government of Indonesia it is recorded that the forum was organized in cooperation between the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muslim World League (Kementerian Koordinator, 2022).

The significance of the R20 is that in it religion was presented not merely as a source of conflicts or of violence but as a constructive resource in the solution of global problems. Studying the World Peace Forum and the R20 within the framework of the new public diplomacy, R. Ridwan, D. Hanan and T. S. Astuti have established that moderate Islam has become one of the international faces of Indonesian diplomacy (Ridwan, Hanan & Astuti, 2024:477-510).

This activity of Indonesia may be described as an export of religious tolerance, yet the concept of export must be used with caution. Indonesia does not propose the

system of Pancasila to foreign states in a compulsory manner, does not demand of other Muslim states that they copy its religious legislation, and exercises its religious and political influence chiefly by a normative path founded upon standing. For this reason export here signifies normative transfer. Indonesia brings into the international arena the theses that an active Islamic identity is not contrary to democracy, that national citizenship does not deny religious belief, that religious diversity may be harmonized with the national state, and that religious organizations may be constructive actors of international peace (Hoesterey, 2021:185-206; Bogor Message, 2018).

The religious influence of Indonesia differs from the historical religious influence of Egypt or of Saudi Arabia. The authority of such centres as al-Azhar rests upon a theological and scholarly tradition, while the influence of Saudi Arabia is bound up with the holy cities, with religious education and with a material infrastructure. The principal international resources of Indonesia, by contrast, consist of its democratic experience, its multi-confessional society, its strong religious civil society, such organizations as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, and the Pancasila model of the relations between state and religion. For this reason Indonesia may be described not as a traditional theological centre of the Muslim world but as an alternative normative and diplomatic centre (Hoesterey, 2020:191-214).

The most complex question of the international religious diplomacy of Indonesia is bound up with its domestic policy. Although the country propagates tolerance and moderation in the external arena, the questions connected in domestic policy with religious minorities, with houses of worship and with religious heterodoxy, that is with the non-traditional or alternative religious views that depart from the doctrinal views generally accepted in a given religion or school, have not been fully resolved. This circumstance bears directly upon the credibility of normative diplomacy; the international brand of a moderate Islam accordingly raises high demands in regard to the domestic policy of religious freedom as well (Ridwan, Hanan & Astuti, 2024:477-510).

CONCLUSION

According to the results of the research, the religious diplomacy of Indonesia may be described upon three levels: the first is the transformation of domestic experience into international standing; the second is the creation of a normative language by means

of wasaṭiyya and moderation; and the third is the institutionalization of these ideas through the Bali Democracy Forum, the R20 and transnational religious networks (Nye, 2004:5-15; Bogor Message, 2018; Kementerian Koordinator, 2022).

This process bears the character of a normative export rather than of the export of a political model. At the same time the experience of Indonesia shows that the credibility of religious diplomacy depends upon the correspondence between domestic policy and the values advanced in the international arena. This conclusion is of practical significance also for Uzbekistan, which is advancing the ideas of religious tolerance and enlightenment in the international arena.

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