NORMALIZATION OF THE ARAB-ISRAEL EMIRATE UNION RELATIONSHIP AND PALESTINE ISSUES

Simela Victor Muhamad

Abstract
The normalization agreement on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel relationship announced on August 13, 2020, has recently been attracting media attention. The United States (US), which facilitated the realization of the agreement, praised the steps taken by the UAE and Israel as a path to Middle East progress. Meanwhile, the criticism came from Palestine who strongly opposed the settlement between the UAE and Israel. Through this paper, we briefly examine the reasons for the emergence of the UAE-Israel agreement and how it is related to the Palestinian issue. In the US context, the emergence of the agreement is closely related to the interests of Donald Trump who will return to the US presidential election in November and US policies in the Middle East that favors Israel. Meanwhile, economic interests have become a determining factor for the UAE and Israel to normalize their relationship. The rejection from Palestine is understandable because the UAE-Israel agreement can weaken the solidarity of Arab countries for the struggle for Palestinian independence. Therefore, the issue of Palestinian independence needs to continue to be voiced by the international community, including Indonesia, through various diplomatic channels.

Introduction
The agreement to normalize the relations between the UAE and Israel was signed on August 13, 2020. This makes the UAE the third Arab country to open full ties with Israel following Egypt and Jordan. Unlike Egypt and Jordan, Israel has never fought against the UAE. The agreement to normalize the UAE-Israel relations, announced directly by President Trump on August 13, 2020, was strongly criticized by Palestinians who called it a "betrayal" of their struggle. In protest of the peace agreement between the UAE and Israel, Palestine withdrew its ambassador from Abu Dhabi (cnnindonesia.com., August 14, 2020).

Strong criticism also came from Iran and Turkey over the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel which was facilitated by the US.

Both accused the UAE of treason for the Palestinian struggle to gain independence from Israel.
Meanwhile the US side praised the UAE-Israel peace deal as "a pathway to progress" in the Middle East. The US hopes that other Arab countries will follow in the footsteps of the UAE (Kompas. Com., August 31, 2020). It is interesting then to discuss why the agreement on normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel emerged, and how it is related to the Palestinian issue, because there may be an assumption that with an agreement between the UAE and Israel to normalize relations, the Palestinian issue can be put aside. This brief study tries to discuss it and is important to raise because it is related to the prospect of security stability in the Middle East and at the global level, which among other things is also determined by a comprehensive and fair solution to the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

**Trump's interests**

It cannot be denied that the emergence of a normalization agreement between the UAE and Israel is closely related to Donald Trump's interests as the USA President, in addition to those of Israel and the UAE. This can be seen from the direct announcement by President Trump of the UAE and Israel agreement to establish diplomatic relations on August 13, 2020. Trump shared his statement via Twitter with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. , cited the agreement as a very historic moment and hopes that more Arab countries will follow the UAE (thejakartapost.com., 14 August 2020).

Trump's direct presence in the announcement of the agreement to normalize the UAE-Israel relations above cannot be separated from Trump's interests ahead of the US presidential election (pilpres) to be held in November 2020. Trump, who is struggling to win again the US presidential election, needs voting support, including from the US publics who support his policies in the Middle East. Trump's support is urgently needed amidst the decline in the US president's popularity, which is partly due to his ineffective policies in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and widespread demonstrations related to racism (liputan6.com, August 2020). Trump seems to be gambling that the UAE-Israel peace settlement that he announced will lift his popularity in the upcoming US presidential election, at least for certain circles, especially the Jewish community in the US.

Apart from the interests of the presidential election, Trump's support for the normalization of EU-Israel relations is actually inseparable from the US president's policy towards the Middle East which is more pro-Israel, especially on the Palestinian issue. During his tenure as US president, Trump often issued unilateral policies that harm Palestine and benefit Israel. The US exercised its veto power over the UNSC Resolution rejecting Trump's decision on Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to the city. The US is actively lobbying Arab countries to accept Jerusalem as the
capital of Israel and asks Palestine to accept a capital city outside Jerusalem with billions of dollars in compensation, as stated in the US peace proposal proposed by Trump in early 2020.

Lately, although not explicitly disclosed and still being cautious, the Trump administration does not seem to oppose Israel's latest plan to annex about 30 percent of the West Bank and Jordan Valley belonging to Palestine, which many of the world community oppose. It can be seen that Trump's interests in favor of Israel, coupled with the presence of a senior adviser and son-in-law of President Trump, Jared Kushner who is of Jewish descent, can certainly influence the US president's support for the normalization of Israel-UAE relations. Israel, which is sandwiched between Arab countries in the Middle East, has not yet been faced with Iranian power, and finally Turkey, as if it needs the support of the US to expand relations with Arab countries in hopes of suppressing Palestine. Trump's other interest, of course, is to maintain good relations with the pro-Zionist Jewish community in the US and its business power.

Economic Interests of the UAE and Israel

The official diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE, which President Trump announced on August 13, 2020, are certain to be followed by the opening of a large-scale Israeli-UAE trade relationship. Israel will soon become the UAE's main trading partner and vice versa. The UAE is already very interested in building trade relations, particularly in the technology sector, with Israel. In fact, this sector is one of the main factors pushing the UAE to open official diplomatic relations with Israel even though the Palestinian issue is far from over. The UAE company, Apex Group, has signed a collaboration with the Israeli group of companies, Tera, for research and production of the Covid-19 vaccine (Rahman, 2020).

On the other hand, Israel has long dreamed of penetrating the rich Arab Gulf market, which is known as the largest and most powerful market in the Arab world. The Gulf Arab countries are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which consists of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman. The GCC, which was founded in 1981, has an average per-capita income of 34,265 US dollars or is number 25 in the world. The UAE itself has a per-capita income of 41,476 US dollars or is in the 19th position in the world and the GDP reaches 432,612 billion US dollars. The UAE is the second largest economic power in the Arab world after Saudi Arabia (Rahman, 2020). The big market of the UAE and the GCC is now in front of Israel's eyes. Israel through the territory of the UAE can more freely maneuver in the business sector of the rich Arab Gulf region.

It can be seen here that the agreement between the UAE and Israel to normalize relations is also motivated by economic interests, even a decisive factor. Apart from that, the normalization of relations between the UAE and
Israel was also overshadowed by the UAE purchase agreement for US F-35 aircraft, and if this did not materialize, the UAE threatened to terminate the deal. However, once again, the economic interests seem to have come to the fore for the initial stage of officially opening the normalization of relations between them.

**The Palestinian Issues Cannot Be Put Aside**

The agreement to normalize the relations between the UAE and Israel facilitated by the US can be understood if we take a look at the interests behind it. The agreement has nothing to do with the Palestinian peace. Nor is it related to the Palestinian struggle for independence from Israeli occupation. The agreement is indeed related to Trump trying to win again the presidential election at the end of November, and is also part of the interests of the Trump administration in the Middle East. The agreement is also motivated by the economic interests of the UAE and Israel. So, how is it related to the Palestinian issue? This is what needs to be revealed so that it can be understood why Palestine strongly criticizes the agreement to normalize the UAE-Israel relations, and most other Arab countries are not yet willing to open diplomatic relations with Israel if the Palestinian issue has not been resolved.

Relating it to the Palestinian issue is understandable, because the order of the Arab world in the Arab-Israeli conflict still refers to the Arab Peace Proposal in 2002 initiated by the King of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. The Arab Peace Proposal confirmed the willingness of the Arab and Islamic world to open collective diplomatic relations with Israel, in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state on land in 1967 with the capital city of East Jerusalem. The Arab Peace Proposal should become a stepping stone for Arab countries in responding to the Palestinian issue. The position of most Arab countries until now still refers to the Arab Peace Proposal of 2002, although it is in its development, and at the same time, the Jewish lobbies continue to try to persuade a number of Arab countries to be willing to open diplomatic relations with Israel. In the case of the UAE, the Jewish lobby appears to be successful.

Against this background, especially when referring to the 2002 Arab Peace Proposal, it is natural that Palestinians are very disappointed with the move by the UAE to formalize its diplomatic relations with Israel. In terms of political strategy, apart from the interests of each Arab state, this seems to show the absence of solidarity from Arab countries to fully support the struggle for Palestinian independence. For Palestine, whose territory of sovereignty has been increasingly eroded by Israel's annexation, the presence and solidarity of neighboring Arab countries in supporting its struggle for independence is urgently needed. In facing Israel which has seized its sovereign territory, and no longer cares about the UNSC resolutions related to a peaceful Middle East solution, the only
Palestinian power is the full support of the international community to pressure Israel, especially from Middle East Arab countries. The existence of a peace agreement between the Arab state and Israel which is infiltrated by Israel's interests to control the Palestinian territories illegally can weaken the position and struggle of Palestine in gaining its independence. Within this framework of thinking, Palestine and the international community who fully support the struggle for Palestinian independence strongly criticize the agreement on normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel. Therefore, the Palestinian issue cannot be ruled out in the middle of the UAE and Israel agreement. The issue of Palestinian independence needs to be continuously voiced by the international community, including Indonesia, through various international forums. Parliaments, including the Indonesian Parliament, must be part of the international community that fights for Palestinian independence.

Closing

The interests of the US, UAE and Israel clearly motivate the agreement to normalize relations between the UAE and Israel. US interests are related to Trump’s plans to win back the US presidential election and his Middle East policies that are more pro-Israel. Meanwhile, economic interests have become a determining factor for the UAE and Israel to formalize their diplomatic relations.

For Palestinians, the agreement to normalize relations between the UAE and Israel can weaken the solidarity of support from Arab countries for the struggle for Palestinian independence. Therefore, the issue of Palestinian independence over its sovereign territory needs to be continuously voiced by the international community, including by Indonesia. Through the diplomatic role played by the Indonesian Parliament, Indonesia must continue to voice the issue of Palestinian independence based on relevant UN resolutions and other internationally agreed parameters.

REFERENCES


Drs. Simela Victor Muhamad, M.Si. is the Principal Expert Researcher on Strategic Political Issues, International and Domestic Problems at the Research Center-Expertise Agency (Puslit BKD) DPR RI. Active as a researcher at the DPR RI's BKD Research Center, in charge of providing substantive support for international relations issues to members of the DPR RI. Several scientific papers that have been published include: "Transnational Crimes of Smuggling Drugs to Indonesia: Problems and Handling Efforts" (part of the book Non-State Actors: Study of the Implications of Transnational Crime in Southeast Asia, Publisher Obor Foundation, Indonesia, 2017); "Korean Peninsula Security Issues and Parliamentary Peace Efforts," (article in Jurnal Politica Vol 7 No.1, May 2016); “The Role of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly in Supporting a Palestinian-Israeli Peaceful Solution” (article in Jurnal Politica, Vol. 8 No. 1, May 2017); "Indonesia and International Cooperation on Combating Terrorism in the Region” (part of the book International Cooperation Against Terrorism, Publisher Obor Foundation, Indonesia, 2018); and "Proxy War in Conflict in Lebanon” (part of the book Proxy War in the Middle East, Publisher Obor Foundation, Indonesia, 2019).