

# **Gus Dur and the Deliverance of Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto in 2005: the Role of Legitimacy Issues in Negotiating with Armed Group**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the role of an individual actor in hostage negotiation using legitimacy issues and a deductive-qualitative research approach. These research methods are closely related to the interpretation of quality or narrative, which cannot be described with numbers or values. A deductive approach was taken to conclude the research data that the authors found through the data findings. In this case, a negotiator (mediator) for releasing a hostage is a communicator, and a capable communicator will send the message effectively and efficiently. A negotiator is also an analyst who must read the hostage situation and conditions, especially knowing the characteristics of the hostage-takers. Specifically, legitimacy is one of the factors that a hostage release negotiator must own. Communication skills can support this factor. To achieve this, a negotiator ultimately should have the skills of interpersonal communication and intercultural communication. Gus Dur's legitimacy factor played an essential role in the diplomacy and negotiation process, especially in this hostage case. Therefore, this study explores why an individual actor successfully overcame this hostage crisis. The role of the former Indonesian President, K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), as a concrete example of the success of an individual actor in hostage negotiation, was determined by his legitimacy.

**Keywords:** Gus Dur; Hostage Negotiation; Individual Actor; Legitimacy; Negotiation

## **Abstrak**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran aktor individu dalam negosiasi pembebasan sandera dengan menggunakan isu legitimasi, serta metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan deduktif. Metode penelitian ini terkait erat dengan interpretasi kualitas atau narasi yang tidak dapat dijabarkan dengan angka atau nilai. Pendekatan deduktif diambil dengan tujuan untuk menarik kesimpulan dari data-data penelitian yang penulis temukan. Seorang negosiator (mediator) pembebasan sandera adalah komunikator, dan komunikator yang kapabel akan dapat mengirimkan pesan dengan efektif dan efisien. Seorang negosiator juga merupakan seorang analis yang harus dapat membaca situasi dan kondisi penyanderaan, terutama mengetahui karakteristik dari para penyandera itu sendiri. Legitimasi merupakan salah satu faktor yang harus dimiliki oleh seorang negosiator pembebasan sandera. Faktor ini

dapat ditunjang dengan kemampuan komunikasi. Untuk dapat mencapai hal tersebut maka seorang negosiator utamanya harus menguasai kemampuan komunikasi interpersonal dan komunikasi antar budaya. Legitimasi personal Gus Dur berperan penting dalam proses negosiasi pembebasan sandera khususnya dalam kasus penyanderaan ini. Oleh karena itu, kajian ini berusaha menjawab pertanyaan mengapa aktor individu berhasil dalam mengatasi krisis penyanderaan ini. Peran mantan Presiden RI ke-empat K.H Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) merupakan contoh kongkrit keberhasilan aktor individu dalam negosiasi pembebasan sandera yang ditentukan oleh isu legitimasi.

**Keywords:** Gus Dur; Negosiasi Penyanderaan; Aktor Perorangan; Legitimasi; Perundingan

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Negotiation is generally recognized as the core of diplomacy, the primary form of diplomatic communication (Jonsson & Hall, 2005). In fact, many scholars view diplomacy as negotiation, like Adam Watson, who has characterized diplomacy as a negotiation between political entities which acknowledge each other's independence (Jonsson & Hall, 2005). G.R Berridge also defined diplomacy as the conduct of international relations through negotiation, rather than force, propaganda, law resources, and other peaceful means (such as gathering information or other goodwill), which are directly or indirectly made to promote negotiation (Jonsson & Hall, 2005). In diplomacy, there is a study that discusses special missions. The special mission has a specific and temporary purpose, and it is led by particular representatives called unofficial envoys and official envoys (Berridge, 2015).

Negotiation itself can be defined as a process of using a strategy to determine the conditions that allow the conflicting parties to reach a mutual agreement and mutual

satisfaction by maximizing the results of an agreement (Matusitz, 2013). Meanwhile, hostage negotiation can be described as a negotiation activity against terrorist groups or armed groups for the safe release of the hostages (Matusitz, 2013). Moreover, the hostage-takers can be categorized into two groups: absolute and contingent terrorists. Terrorists or terrorist groups generally define themselves as a national liberation movement or resistance fighters against social, economic, religious, colonial oppression, or a combination of those aspects (Chaliand & Blin, 2007).

In addition, terrorists or terrorist groups are perpetrators who carry out acts of terrorism ideology. Hostage-taking is a part of a long-standing act of terror. Several decades ago, this action was considered common in South America and East Asia. Since 1967, kidnappings with political nuances and criminal abductions have significantly increased due to the massive news broadcasting. Regarding acts of international terrorism, 14.2% of them were acts of hostage-taking, 9.44% of kidnappings, 1.42% of aircraft hijackings,

and 0.46% of barricades and non-air piracies (Matusitz, 2013).

The role of an individual actor in overcoming crises, especially in the case of hostage negotiation, is important for further investigation. The individual actor is considered the essential determinant of successful handling in this hostage release situation. The characteristics possessed by the individual actor can be caused by the individual's ability, augmented by the formed impression as the result of social construction in the community. By bringing their identity, individual actors are deemed to be more easily accepted by the hostage-takers, impacting establishing good communication and interactions.

In Indonesia, one of the historical records relating to the roles of non-state actors needs to be investigated further in the case of the hostage-taking of two Indonesian citizens, Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto, who was held hostage in Iraq in 2005. From this case, Indonesia has made a historical record of the successful role of an individual actor in the hostage negotiation process. Abdurrahman Wahid, well-known as Gus Dur, the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia, is the individual actor who played the role of releasing those hostages. At that time, Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto were kidnapped and held hostage by the Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction (Shoelhi, 2009).

Furthermore, Indonesia's diplomacy and foreign policy have experienced many challenges related to many Indonesian citizens being held hostage abroad in the last two decades. Several hostage cases recorded by the mass media, such as the actions of the Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, reported that until 2019, more than 39 Indonesian citizens were kidnapped. In that case, as many victims had been held hostage by Abu Sayyaf, one

of them passed away while trying to escape (MediaIndonesia, 2019). In 2004, Indonesian migrant workers named Istiqomah Binti Misnad and Novitasari Binti Sugito were reported to have been taken hostage by the Iraqi Islamic Army (Detik, 2004). Then, on March 16, 2011, the public was shocked by the kidnapping of 20 ship-crew members of MV Sinar Kudus by Somali pirates (Liputan6, 2016). Several cases described above show that protection for Indonesian citizens abroad from hostage-taking is one of the big challenges in Indonesia's foreign policy and diplomacy.

Particularly, Gus Dur is widely known as the most influential figure because he was the leader of an Indonesian Islamic organization with many followers in Indonesia, especially the *Nahdiyyin*. Gus Dur is the first son of K.H. Wahid Hasyim and Nyai Hj. Sholehah. K.H. Wahid Hasyim himself is the son of a famous Islamic figure named K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia named Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), while Nyai Hj. Sholehah is the daughter of the founder of the boarding school Denanyar Jombang, K.H. Bisri Syansuri. Gus Dur, with his thoughts, is known to be close to various interfaith leaders. He was very concerned about tradition, tolerance, human rights, and democracy (Iskandar, 2010). The thoughts of Gus Dur had been constructed based on the scientific tradition of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) where he grew up. Gus Dur's thoughts even reached the international community's attention as the various awards received for his dedication to standing up for peace. Hence, there was nothing to worry about the proliferation of radical Islam in Indonesia.

Gus Dur strongly opposed Islamic fundamentalism's actions and thoughts,

which led to violence and harm among people. This character has triggered the change of Islam in Indonesia as moderate Islam differs from the practice of Islam in the Middle East. With the background of Gus Dur's identity and supported by the fact that he had lived in Iraq from 1966 to 1970 to study at the University of Baghdad, his strategy to release Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto from the hostage is unique, with the involvement of actor outside the government (individual actor) as a negotiator in releasing of hostages abroad.

The role of the negotiator in releasing hostages from the hostage-takers is like "the spearhead". The success or failure of the hostage release operation process is closely related to the various approaches, steps, and linguistic techniques in diplomacy and negotiation used by the negotiator. Involving an individual actor as a negotiator is a real step by considering the ability and influence of his/her identities, such as charismatic character, reputation, position, and recognized credibility. The case of an individual actor in the hostage negotiation that Gus Dur did needs to be investigated deeper on his role and influence in international relations. Therefore, the research question guiding this study is "What was the legitimacy factor for Gus Dur's success in negotiating the release of the hostages for the Indonesian Metro TV journalists from the Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction in 2005?" To answer this question, the authors used the concept of legitimacy issues to find out the process, linguistic techniques, and approaches taken by Gus Dur in hostage negotiation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers in multi-disciplines have widely discussed literature reviews on

hostage negotiation. These studies can be divided into four different perspectives: studies of psychology, communication, peace studies, and argumentative academic works. However, many discussions on the role of individual actors in argumentative academic works did not refer to analytical frameworks from certain theories or concepts. The first perspective comes from the psychological view, which builds several analytical frameworks, such as the role of the psychological construct (Grubb & Brown, 2012), the importance of persuasive arguments in negotiation (Giebels & Taylor, 2009), and the prospect theory (McDermott, 1992). Scholars of this perspective focus on the role of negotiators, both negotiators from state actors and non-state actors. Therefore, this current study focuses on the individual abilities of the negotiators themselves.

The next perspective originates from communication studies by building several analytical frameworks, such as framing theory (Foy, 2015), interpersonal communication (Matusitz, 2013), and interpersonal deception theory (Nichols, 2014). This perspective underlines the importance of communication elements, such as media and language techniques. The third perspective is derived from peace studies that build several analytical frameworks referring to the terrorist resource allocation model (Gaibuloev & Sandler, 2009), assemblage thinking (Richmond, 2019), contending model (Borowsky, 2011), crisis intervention model (Greenstone, 2003), and the democracy, terrorism, and hostage release nexus (Lee, 2013). This perspective tries to eclectically combine several approaches to intervene in crises to establish communication, so the exchange of information or messages can be carried out

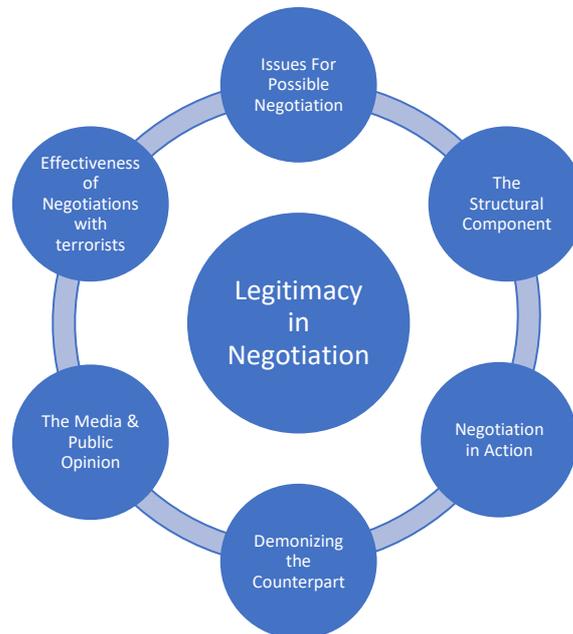
to lighten up the situation. The last perspective is shown from academic writings or works in argumentative features without using specific theories or concepts as an analytical framework. This perspective brings the control of the media (Helberg, 1999), the power of negotiation (Cronin, 2015), and contemporary crisis negotiation protocols to obtain satisfactory results (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2011).

The four studies on the hostage negotiation indicate that strategies for releasing the held hostages can be viewed from various perspectives. However, none of them has discussed the direct linkage of individual actors to negotiate in releasing the hostages. Therefore, the authors attempt to fulfill this gap by highlighting the achievement of individual actors as a negotiator in releasing the hostages. In particular, the hostage-taking case of two

Indonesian journalists, Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto, and Gus Dur, as individual actors in hostage negotiation brings interest to be analyzed with the deductive-qualitative method.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Negotiating with hostage-takers brings a humanitarian mission to save human lives. To avoid failure in negotiation, it is necessary to use legitimation strategies for better readiness and well-planned negotiation. Faure (2008) explained six analysis units in legitimacy issues: (1) issues for possible negotiation, (2) the structural component, (3) negotiation in action, (4) demonizing the counterpart, (5) the media and public opinion, and (6) effectiveness of negotiations with terrorists.



**Figure 1. Negotiation Legitimacy Components (Faure, 2008)**

The analytical framework above was applied in this study using qualitative research methods and a deductive approach to answer why Gus Dur succeeded in freeing the hostages.

Generally, the qualitative research method collects data and analytical techniques or strategi based on none of the numbers (Lamont, 2015). This research method is closely related to the

interpretation of quality or narrative, which cannot be described with numbers or values. In the study of international relations, the instances of this research include the study on the tone of speech in the speech of state actors and the study on the level of a notification that has the nuances of hatred or racism (Spray & Roselle, 2012). Furthermore, this research article used a deductive approach generated through the syllogism method. The syllogism method in its history was first introduced by the leading classical philosopher named Aristotle (Suaedi, 2016). This approach contains two premises: major and minor. The major premise is a general statement, while the minor premise is a more specific statement; then, from these two statements, a conclusion is drawn (Suaedi, 2016).

A deductive approach was taken to conclude the research data that the authors found systematically, both general and specific data. Furthermore, this approach was intended to conclude empirical data from the hostage negotiations, which were then analyzed with a structured statement system and find valid comparisons between the conclusions themselves.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A negotiator (mediator) for releasing a hostage is a communicator, and a capable communicator will send the message effectively and efficiently. A negotiator is also an analyst who must read the hostage situation and conditions, especially knowing the characteristics of the hostage-takers, so that the following steps and approaches will be chosen are right on target. Several steps and approaches are chosen, such as a cultural approach, considering the cultural differences

between the negotiator and the hostage-taker. Another approach is the human touch approach, which puts forward emotional feelings from heart to heart by showing sympathy and empathy. Understanding cultural differences in hostage negotiations is vital to interpret each other without offending the cultural identity, considering that cultural identity is quite sensitive. In this case, Gus Dur implemented these approaches; therefore, Gus Dur could touch the emotional realm of his communication partner (Alngatawi, 2022).

Negotiations for the release of hostages also will run well if carried out by a good negotiator or communicator. Related to that, legitimacy is one of the factors that a hostage release negotiator must own. This strategy includes issues for possible negotiation, the structural component, negotiation in action, demonizing the counterpart, the media and public opinion, and the effectiveness of negotiations with terrorists. These strategies Gus Dur used to read the situation, analyze in-depth the strengths and weaknesses of the hostage-taker and other potential factors that could affect the success of the hostage release negotiations and map the identities of the hostage-taker. Through his skills and experience, Gus Dur could quickly analyze the background of the hostages, such as which group they came from, whose (political) supporters, and what sector thought (Alngatawi, 2022). This initial step is vital as it opens the way for communication with the hostages and what actions should be taken in dealing with the hostages. Then, what is no less important is the influential figure who has close ties to this group of hostages so that negotiations can be carried out immediately to free the hostages.

Communication skills can support this factor, which is the ability to convey a message correctly and adequately. To achieve this, a negotiator ultimately should have the skills of interpersonal communication and intercultural communication. Other personal abilities, such as high intellectual ability and leadership experience, can be used accurately with this ability. A negotiator also needs particular attention since the hostage-takers are the members who carried out the act of terror. They have different understandings and cultures, so they need high vigilance and caution to be safe to realize the primary goal of releasing the hostages.

Moreover, Gus Dur's legitimacy played an essential role in the diplomatic and negotiation processes, especially in the hostage negotiation case of two Indonesian citizens kidnapped in Iraq in 2005. He used this ability to interact directly with the hostages, the Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction. His abilities consisted of legitimacy factors, experience in leading the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, and the President of Republic Indonesia, accompanied by broad cognitive capabilities for relations between countries. With various personal abilities possessed by Gus Dur, he tried to legitimize the hostages before negotiating. His legitimacy abilities were used as the first step to establishing good relations with the hostages to realize an effective interaction and communication in the hostage negotiations. Besides a legitimacy factor, Gus Dur has personally been known as an Indonesian Muslim figure who has both a humanist and humorous nature (Perpusnas, 2021). He is also known as a peace leader in international relations because he loved inter-religious and intercultural harmony.

## Discussion

### Gus Dur's Legitimacy in Hostage Negotiation

The first component used to analyze Gus Dur's legitimacy in the negotiation process for the release of Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto was the possible negotiation issue. It was an issue that Gus Dur used to demonstrate legitimacy in negotiating. Considering that Iraq is one of the Islamic countries in the Middle East mainland, the issue of brotherhood among Muslims could be an issue that Gus Dur raised in his negotiations with the Mujahideen Army Faction (Nu. Or, 2005). Furthermore, this group adheres to the *Sunni* school of thought, where this ideology is the thought adopted by the majority of Muslims in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia. This fact is supported by the fact that the victims being held hostage are Muslim. They were only in charge of covering the news and had nothing to do with the political turmoil that was going on in Iraq at that time. Diplomatically, a good relationship between Indonesia and Iraq has existed for quite a long time, since 1950. This good relationship was later marked by having representative offices of embassies in each country in 1961 (AntaraNews, 2011).

After determining the issues used in the negotiations, the structural component became Gus Dur's legitimacy. The structural component in the hostage-taking of Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto is called the structural component of kidnapping. It is referred to as a structural component of kidnapping since it refers to (1) the actions taken by the kidnapper in a country that no longer has control over its territory; (2) the security authorities did not know where the hostages were being held; (3) the communication channel with the Mujahideen Army Faction was fewest.

Hostage takers very rarely targeted the indigenous Iraqis, and most of them held hostage victims were foreigners.

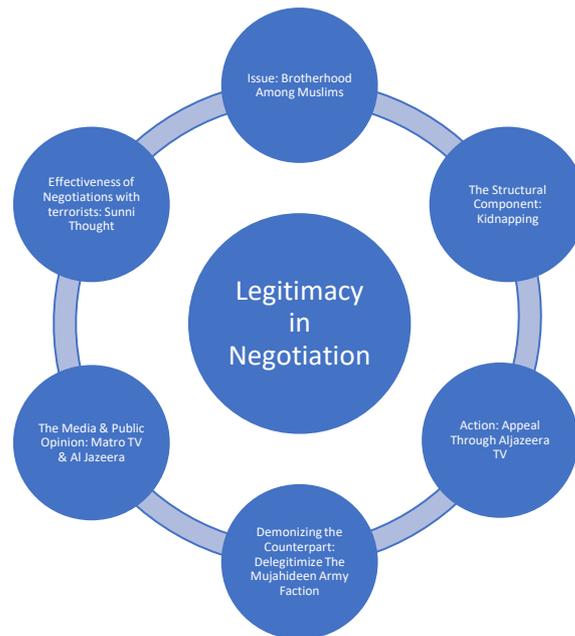
The third component of legitimacy was a negotiation in action. Gus Dur carried out three negotiation steps, called pre-negotiation, forming a formula for an agreement and refining each issue for discussion. Gus Dur appealed to Al Jazeera TV using the Arabic language in the pre-negotiation process. Furthermore, at the step of forming the formula for the agreement, Gus Dur made contact with the community and religious leaders and state leaders in the Middle East. The last step was finalizing the problem for discussion, and the step taken by Gus Dur was to go to Iraq via Amman, Jordan, based on the advice of his colleagues who were there.

Further, the demonization of the opponent used by Gus Dur in his legitimacy was attempted to delegitimize the Mujahideen Army Faction. This effort was carried out by massive dissemination of information that the Mujahideen Army Faction was a group that carried out violent actions. They have committed acts that violate Islamic teachings; it is kidnapping with a specific purpose. As a born and educated person in the scientific tradition of Islamic boarding schools and the teachings of the religion *Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'ah*, which holds the principles of

moderate Islam, Gus Dur did not agree with Islamic fundamentalism. He preferred to teach and practice Islamic thought with a humanist approach rather than violence, leading to threats.

The media and public opinion in hostage-taking cases can also be mentioned as factors that must be considered. Reminding the impact of media and public opinion can determine the release of hostages or even the killing of hostages. The media that influenced Gus Dur's legitimacy in hostage negotiations were Metro TV and TV Al Jazeera. The thing to consider is that Metro TV is the television station where Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto worked. Emotionally, this television station tried as intensely as possible to report the progress of its two held hostage employees. TV Al Jazeera also needs special attention, considering that this television station is based in Doha, Qatar, one of the media that first reported the hostage-taking of Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto (Maktub, 2022).

Lastly, negotiating with Mujahideen Army Faction was the most effective option compared to other alternatives. Considering that the school of thought sector adopted was *Sunni*, which has the same understanding as most Muslims in Indonesia, Islamic traditions can understand each other culturally.



**Figure 2. Negotiation Legitimacy Components Found in This Study (Faure, 2008)**

The election of Gus Dur as a negotiator for the release of the hostages in the Iraqi hostage case was the right step. Apart from the factors that the authors have mentioned above, Gus Dur also had solid personal abilities that could support the legitimacy of the hostages. Moreover, Gus Dur had been formed both in Indonesia and internationally as a figure of tolerance, humanism, and humor. As the internationally recognized leader of one of Indonesia's largest and oldest Islamic organizations, Gus Dur established good relations with heads of state, international NGOs, and world religious and political figures, enabling Gus Dur to play a more strategic and dynamic role in social relations. At the same time, it brought significant changes to the NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*) organization in the eyes of the world. He also could be a spokesman for NU in international forums, such as cultural diplomacy in the association of relations between countries (Iskandar, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Gus Dur's legitimacy factor played an essential role in the diplomacy and negotiation process, especially the negotiation for releasing hostages in the hostage case of two Indonesian citizens in Iraq in 2005. He used this factor to read the situation and analyze in-depth the strengths and weaknesses of the hostage-taker and other potential factors that could affect the success of the hostage release negotiations. These potential factors comprised the media and public opinion, demonization, and the cultural and emotional characterization of the hostages. These abilities were supported by experience in leading the organization Nahdlatul Ulama and the President of the Republic of Indonesia, accompanied by broad cognitive capabilities for relations between countries.

With various personal abilities possessed by Gus Dur, he tried to legitimize the hostages before negotiating. The legitimacy factor that he had was used as a first step to finding out the background of the hostages, which was then used to

establish good relationships so that the goal of realizing effective interaction and communication in the hostage release negotiations could be achieved. Also, Gus Dur's ability to legitimize personally has been known as an Indonesian Muslim figure with a humanist and humorous nature. He is also known as a peace leader in international relations since he loved inter-religious and inter-cultural harmony.

In this case, a hostage release negotiator is a communicator, and a reliable communicator will deliver the message content effectively and efficiently. A negotiator is also an analyst who must read the hostage situation and conditions, especially knowing the hostage takers' characteristics so that the steps and approaches to be chosen are right on target. The steps and approaches chosen include culture, considering the cultural differences between the negotiator and the hostage-taker. Understanding cultural differences in hostage release negotiations is vital to interpreting each other's intentions and goals without offending cultural identity, taking into account that cultural identity is quite a sensitive matter. In addition, the legitimacy factor is one of the factors that a hostage release negotiator must own. This factor can be supported by having communication skills, called the ability to send a message correctly and adequately.

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