



Islam and Global Geopolitics: Synergy of Religion and Strategy in the New World Order

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Abstract

This study investigates the conceptual and historical framework of Islamic geopolitics and its relevance to contemporary global dynamics. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and library research method, the research explores how Islamic teachings rooted in justice, unity, and divine revelation offer an alternative paradigm to the secular, material-driven geopolitical models dominant in international relations. Drawing from classical Islamic sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and works of scholars like Al-Mawardi and Ibn Khaldun, the study identifies foundational principles of Islamic geopolitics. It also examines the historical evolution of Islamic political structures from the prophetic era to the caliphates, followed by the disruptive impact of European colonialism. In the modern context, the study analyzes the strategic roles of Muslim-majority countries and the obstacles to building a cohesive Islamic geopolitical bloc, including ideological fragmentation, external influence, and identity crises. The findings suggest that revitalizing Islamic geopolitical thought grounded in ethical, inclusive, and civilizational principles can contribute significantly to shaping a more just and balanced global order.

INTRODUCTION

Geopolitics is a field of strategic study that discusses how geographic location, natural resources, and other geostrategic factors influence political policies and the dynamics of power of a country or political entity in the international arena. This term was originally developed in the tradition of Western thought as a framework for understanding and regulating relations between countries, often in the framework of economic competition, military dominance, and the expansion of ideological influence (Rahmat & Marut, 2023). Thinkers such as Halford Mackinder and Nicholas Spykman place geopolitics in the framework of territorial supremacy and control over the world's "heartland" as the main requirement for global power.

However, the dominance of this Western geopolitical narrative tends to be secular, exploitative, and pragmatic. It ignores the moral and spiritual dimensions in international relations. Meanwhile, in the Islamic treasury, geopolitics does not stand solely on the basis of materialistic interests, but is also guided by transcendental values such as justice (al-'adl), welfare (al-maslahah), and human brotherhood (ukhuwah insaniyah) which are the characteristics of the Islamic paradigm (Sihombing, 2023).

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Islam as a comprehensive religion not only regulates the vertical relationship between humans and God, but also the social, economic, and political relations of humanity as a whole. Since the time of the prophethood, the Prophet Muhammad SAW has demonstrated high geopolitical skills in building the governance of the Medina community through the Medina Charter, the first constitutional document in history that regulates the rights and obligations between plural communities (Dirhamzah, 2019). The Prophet Muhammad also established diplomatic relations with the great kingdoms of that time, such as Persia, Byzantium, and Egypt, showing that Islam has realized the importance of cross-border diplomacy and strategy since the beginning of its development.

Furthermore, the classical concepts of Islamic geopolitics such as *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* reflect the division of the world based on the validity of sharia, not merely on geographical boundaries or nationalistic interests. In practice, the Islamic caliphate from the era of the Khulafaur Rasyidin to the Abbasids succeeded in building an empire that was not only strong militarily and economically, but also superior in science, governance, and ethics of international relations.

Unfortunately, the glory did not last long. Internal fragmentation, sectarian conflict, corruption of power, and the systematic entry of European colonialism caused the collapse of the geopolitical structure of the Islamic world. Colonization of Muslim territories not only divided Islamic nations physically, but also created an identity crisis, political stagnation, and dependence on an international system controlled by non-Muslim superpowers.

Entering the 21st century, the global geopolitical landscape is increasingly complex and dynamic. Globalization, the information technology revolution, the environmental crisis, and global economic disruption have formed a new field that demands adaptive strategies. Muslim countries have great capital geographically, demographically, and economically: Indonesia as the largest Muslim country, Turkey with its regional power, Saudi Arabia as the ruler of the two holy cities and energy, Iran with its ideological influence, and Pakistan as an Islamic nuclear power. However, the reality shows that this potential has not been able to be consolidated into an effective collective geopolitical power (Mukri & Waspiah, 2023).

Ideological fragmentation, sectarian rivalry, and the intervention of global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China in the domestic and regional affairs of Muslim countries have worsened the situation (Vinata, 2022). Ironically, the issue of Palestine, which should be a symbol of the unity of Muslims, has instead become an arena for tug-of-war of interests that is detrimental to the geopolitical solidarity of Islam itself.

This phenomenon indicates a gap in contemporary geopolitical studies. Although there has been a lot of literature discussing geopolitics from a Western perspective, very few studies have highlighted the concept of geopolitics from an Islamic perspective in a comprehensive and systematic manner (Alverdian, 2022). The majority of studies still focus on energy geopolitics, sectarian conflicts, or the dynamics of the Middle East region without exploring the epistemological roots of how Islam views the world, power, and international relations. This is where the research gap that this article seeks to fill lies.

In addition, the novelty of this article lies in its attempt to combine historical-conceptual approaches in examining the development of Islamic geopolitics since the era of the prophethood, caliphate, colonialism, to the post-colonial world order. This article does not merely repeat the narrative of classical Islamic history, but also reinterprets this legacy in the context of contemporary geopolitics. This approach is expected to contribute to the development of a more inclusive geopolitical theory based on universal Islamic values.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method. This approach was chosen because the topic being studied is conceptual and historical-

reflective, which emphasizes more on textual review and exploration of ideas than on collecting empirical data in the field. The type of data in this study is qualitative, obtained from library studies (Albi Anggito & Johan, 2018). The data is classified into two main categories, namely: Primary sources, namely authoritative literature from classical Islamic treasures that have a significant influence on the formation of the Islamic geopolitical paradigm. This source includes normative texts such as the Qur'an and hadith, the works of Islamic political thinkers such as Al-Mawardi in Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah and Ibn Khaldun in Muqaddimah. While secondary sources, namely supporting literature in the form of scientific books, academic journal articles, dissertations or theses, and international policy reports, contemporary studies discussing Islamic geopolitics, colonialism, international relations of the Muslim world, and the relevance of Islamic thought in today's global dynamics.

The data collection technique is carried out through literature searches that are relevant to the research topic. This process includes searching, selecting, and critically reviewing various documents, both classical and modern, that contain geopolitical concepts and practices in Islam.

Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method, which is a systematic technique for identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the meanings contained in the text. The stages of analysis are as follows (Gunawan, 2013):

1. Theme Identification

Classifying literature based on key issues in Islamic geopolitics, such as the concept of power and legitimacy, territorial division (dar al-Islam and dar al-harb), religious authority, and socio-political order based on Islamic values.

2. Relational Analysis

Examining the relationship between geopolitical concepts in Islamic tradition and contemporary geopolitical dynamics. For example, how the principles of Islamic justice and brotherhood are applied or ignored in the diplomacy and foreign policy of modern Muslim countries.

3. Historical and Contextual Interpretation

Reconstructing the development and transformation of Islamic geopolitical thought in various historical eras from the time of the prophethood and caliphate, the era of colonialism, to the modern post-colonial era. This analysis also considers external influences such as colonialism, globalization, and the rivalry of the world's great powers in reshaping Islamic geopolitical discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After going through a literature review and analysis of various historical and contemporary sources, it was found that the relationship between Islam and geopolitics is complex, dynamic, and multidimensional. Islam as a religion and value system not only influences individual aspects, but also shapes patterns of social interaction, governance of power, and the worldview of its people towards global political structures. In this context, Islamic geopolitics cannot be understood solely as territorial expansion, but as a form of articulation of the values of justice, order, and the mission of civilization in the context of power. Therefore, the discussion in this article will be divided into several main aspects, starting from conceptual understanding to the geopolitical challenges of the Islamic world in the modern era.

Basic Concepts of Geopolitics in Islam

Geopolitics in Islam is not a foreign concept born from the influence of modern thought alone, but has become an integral part of the strategy of Islamic da'wah and governance since the time of the prophethood. Unlike conventional Western geopolitical approaches based on territorial power, military balance, and secular national interests, Islamic geopolitics is based on normative values derived from divine revelation and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In the Islamic view, territory (mintaqah), power (sulthah), and

people (ummah) are not merely administrative and political entities, but also spiritual instruments to uphold maqashid al-syari'ah (the goals of sharia) such as justice, unity, and public welfare.

The classical concept that is often used as a reference in Islamic geopolitics is the division of the world into dar al-Islam (Islamic territory) and dar al-harb (non-Islamic territory). Although this division has a legal dimension, it also represents a geopolitical perspective in Islam that is based on the application of sharia values, not just military control of territory. In this context, territory is considered as a space for civilizational missions and moral responsibilities, not as an object of exploitation. In fact, in classical fiqh literature, there are also the terms dar al-'ahd (territory of agreement) and dar al-da'wah (territory of da'wah), which show the flexibility of Islam's perspective on relations between countries and religious differences.

The Prophet Muhammad himself became the main model of how Islamic geopolitics was built on the principle of integration between revelation and strategy. Agreements such as the Medina Charter demonstrate efforts to build a socio-political order that respects diversity, while guaranteeing justice and security for all communities, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Sending letters to the Roman emperor, Persia, and other regional leaders demonstrates active and visionary Islamic diplomacy. These steps were not aggressive, but rather based on peaceful invitations (da'wah), exchange of political messages, and negotiation of civilizations.

In addition to the diplomatic approach, Islam also recognizes the concept of power as a tool to uphold justice and maintain the existence of the people. However, power in Islam is not identical to violence. The Qur'anic worldview emphasizes that power must be used proportionally and only within the framework of maintaining values, not for aggressive expansion. The principle of *la ikraha fi al-din* (there is no coercion in religion) is the main basis that Islam rejects expansion based on coercion, and emphasizes more on social transformation through preaching and moral example.

Islamic geopolitics also cannot be separated from the cosmopolitan view inherent in Islamic teachings itself. The concept of ummah describes spiritual and political ties that transcend national and ethnic boundaries. This is different from modern nationalism that prioritizes national identity. The solidarity of Muslims is built on the basis of faith, not on the basis of racial or national similarities. Therefore, in the context of geopolitics, Muslims have the potential to form a global power bloc that is based on shared values and interests of the community, although its realization is often hampered by political differences and sectarian rivalries.

In the contemporary context, understanding the concept of Islamic geopolitics in depth is crucial to building a global strategy for the people that is not trapped in fanaticism or an exclusive approach. Islamic geopolitics can be an alternative narrative to the world that is currently dominated by pragmatic interests and the hegemony of great powers. It offers a model of international relations that is more ethical, civilized, and oriented towards universal justice.

History of the Development of Islamic Geopolitics

The development of Islamic geopolitics cannot be separated from the dynamics of the history of the power of Muslims since the death of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The transformation from a religious community to a transnational political entity shows that Islam has had a strong geopolitical foundation from the beginning. The Caliphate as a form of Islamic government has played an important role in shaping regional and global power structures for more than a millennium. As explained by (Roisuddin et al., 2024), Islam since its inception has not only been present as a personal religion, but as an active political and social force in shaping the world order.

During the era of the Khulafaur Rasyidin, especially under the leadership of Umar bin Khattab, the strategy of Islamic expansion was carried out with a proportional diplomatic, administrative, and military approach. Umar not only expanded the territory of Islam, but also built a well-established government and financial structure in the conquered areas,

including a land distribution system, tax collection (kharaq), and administration based on social justice. (Khasanah & Paryanto, 2023) emphasized that the initial success of the caliphate was due to the flexibility of Islam in adjusting its universal values to local political structures.

During the Umayyad Caliphate, expansion took place very widely, covering areas from Spain to India. This dynasty formed a strong bureaucratic and military structure to support transregional power. (Permana, 2020) noted that Umayyad power was not only based on the power of arms, but also because of its ability to form an Islamic political identity that united various ethnic and tribal groups.

The Abbasid Caliphate, which replaced the Umayyads, shifted the center of power to Baghdad and became a symbol of the progress of Islamic civilization. Under the Abbasids, Islam experienced extraordinary intellectual and cultural glory. (M. Abdur Wahid, 2019) also notes that scientific and cultural progress was not always accompanied by political stability. Gradually, the Abbasid territory experienced fragmentation, and the central political power weakened due to the emergence of local dynasties and external interventions such as the Mongol attacks.

In the midst of the collapse of the Abbasids, Islamic power still persisted in the form of large kingdoms such as the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals. Among them, the Ottoman Empire occupied the most central geopolitical position. As the only Islamic power recognized by the Western world as a caliphate, the Ottomans led the Islamic world from the 15th century to the early 20th century. According to (Rasyid, 2008), the Ottoman government structure displayed an adaptive form of classical Islamic power that combined sharia and modern administration in a multi-ethnic imperial system.

The collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had a major impact on Islamic geopolitics. This event became a symbol of the loss of religious-political authority of Muslims on a global scale. Furthermore, Muslim regions in the Middle East and North Africa were divided based on the interests of European colonial powers, such as Britain and France. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 became clear evidence of the geopolitical manipulation of the Islamic world by the West. In the view of (Marwah, 2012), this agreement was not only a form of betrayal of the promise of independence, but also the beginning of the ongoing fragmentation of Islamic political identity.

The impact of colonialism was not only physical and administrative, but also damaged the structure of Islamic authority and solidarity. Islamic language, culture, and education were displaced by the secular colonial system. (Mudzakkir, 2016) calls this phenomenon “systematic de-Islamization,” where the geopolitical structure of Islam was replaced by modern nationalism oriented towards the nation-state rather than the solidarity of the people (ummah).

This history shows that although Islam has a strong and extensive geopolitical heritage, internal dynamics and external interventions have led to the collapse of a system that once united regions from Morocco to Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the legacy of Islamic political thought and the collective consciousness of the ummah remain a potential for reformulating the strategic position of the Islamic world in the ever-changing global geopolitics.

Colonialism and the Geopolitical Identity Crisis of Islam

Colonialism was a major factor that reshaped the geopolitical face of the Islamic world in the 19th and 20th centuries. Not only territorially and politically, colonialism also shook the ideological and epistemological foundations of Muslims, causing an identity crisis that continues to this day. In many cases, the structure of the caliphate or local Islamic kingdom was destroyed and replaced by a modern nation-state system built on secular and nationalistic values, far from the principle of the ummah that had united the Islamic world (Murniati, 2015).

According to (Mudzakkir, 2016), colonialism not only damaged the political power of Islam, but also created a change in the geopolitical orientation of Muslims. The people who used to have a collective consciousness as part of the global Islamic community are now

scattered in narrow national interests. Colonial projects, such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, divided the Islamic world geographically and psychologically, leaving a legacy of unresolved border and identity conflicts.

In the Nusantara region, the colonialism project carried out by the Dutch formed a dualism of legal and educational systems. While customary and Islamic law were weakened, Western law was institutionalized. This accelerated the process of secularization and internal fragmentation of Muslims. (Mukri & Waspiah, 2023) said that colonialism also marginalized the ulama as moral-political authorities, replaced by colonial bureaucracy and secular educated elites who were trained to support the colonial system.

The colonial legacy also greatly influenced the structure of education. The pesantren and madrasah systems that were previously the center of Islamic discourse production were replaced by modern Western-style schools. As a result, many post-colonial generations experienced a historical disconnection from Islamic intellectual and political traditions. This triggered an identity crisis among the people, where Islamic values were seen as backward and not in accordance with the development of the times (Permana, 2020).

Furthermore, according to (Murniati, 2015), efforts to reconstruct post-colonial Islamic geopolitics were realized through the establishment of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). However, the grand vision of building Muslim solidarity faces major challenges from within, such as ideological differences between Muslim countries, as well as from outside, namely the intervention of global powers. The OIC itself is often considered weak in responding to strategic issues such as Palestine, the Yemeni conflict, and the Syrian crisis.

Nationalism as a colonial legacy is often at odds with Islamic solidarity. On the one hand, Muslim countries try to maintain national sovereignty, but on the other hand, they often fail to build collective agreements in facing global challenges. This gives rise to what (Khasanah & Paryanto, 2023) calls “geopolitical fragmentation of Muslims” a condition in which Muslim countries are trapped in the logic of their respective national interests and lose a shared geopolitical vision that is just, inclusive, and based on Islamic values.

This situation is exacerbated by the entry of foreign ideologies, including liberalism, secularism, and extremism, which clash with each other within the Muslim community itself. On the one hand, extreme movements such as ISIS emerged as a harsh response to the legacy of colonialism and global domination, but their approach has instead created a cycle of violence and worsened Islam's image internationally. On the other hand, some Muslim countries have adopted the Western secular model too much and abandoned Islamic values that should have been the basis for their geopolitics.

Thus, the geopolitical identity crisis of the Islamic world is the result of a combination of colonial trauma, the dominance of foreign ideologies, internal fragmentation, and the failure of Muslim elites to build alternative geopolitical narratives that are contextual and solution-oriented. Therefore, efforts are needed to decolonize Islamic thought and reconstruct Islamic geopolitics that do not only rely on the rhetoric of solidarity, but also on concrete strategies based on justice, inclusivity, and the principles of maqashid sharia.

Geopolitical Development of Islamic Countries in the Modern Era

Entering the modern era, the geopolitical dynamics of Islamic countries have undergone a transformation along with changes in the global power structure and the increasing complexity of international relations. Although the colonial legacy still overshadows the political identity and state structure in the Muslim world, several Islamic countries have shown efforts to reorganize their strategic role in global geopolitics. This change is triggered by various factors such as globalization, the rise of Islamic populism, regional conflicts, technological developments, and increasing awareness of the people towards the importance of transnational solidarity.

Countries such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia occupy important positions in the contemporary Islamic geopolitical map. Turkey, for example, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has demonstrated a new geopolitical orientation called

“Neo-Ottomanism,” an attempt to restore the historical and political influence of Islam in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Middle East (Murniati, 2015). Iran, on the other hand, projects its power through Shiite political and militia networks in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, with the narrative of the Islamic revolution as its ideological foundation.

Saudi Arabia, as the custodian of the two holy cities and an oil-rich country, plays a strong geopolitical role through energy diplomacy and strategic alliances with the West, although it is often criticized for its conservative policies that often contradict the democratic aspirations of the people. Meanwhile, Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, takes a different approach by emphasizing moderate Islamic diplomacy, tolerance, and a role as a bridge between the Islamic world and the west. (Hefner, 2007) assesses that Indonesia has great potential to become a peaceful and inclusive Islamic geopolitical actor, due to its success in managing internal diversity and national political stability.

However, reality shows that the geopolitical solidarity of the Islamic world has not been realized consistently and concretely. Most Muslim countries are still trapped in narrow national interests, sectarian rivalries, and the influence of superpowers such as the United States, Russia, and China. The Syrian conflict, the Yemeni war, the Libyan crisis, and the normalization of relations between several Arab countries and Israel without a just settlement for Palestine are clear evidence that the collective Islamic geopolitical vision is not yet mature.

Furthermore, differences in political ideology, whether in the form of secularism, absolute monarchy, theocracy, or Islamic democracy, hinder the creation of a common strategy. According to (Alverdian, 2022), as long as Muslim countries still prioritize pragmatic power orientation over religious values, the Islamic geopolitical project will only be rhetoric without a basis.

The presence of organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is expected to be a forum to unite the political voices of Muslims. However, in practice, the OIC is often considered passive and unable to provide a firm response to global strategic issues, especially those related to violations of the rights of Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Rohingya, and Uighurs (Vinata, 2022). This shows that the existence of formal institutions alone is not enough without a strong shared geopolitical vision.

Amidst these challenges, opportunities remain open. Global issues such as the energy crisis, climate change, digital technology, and sharia economics are strategic areas that can encourage collaboration between Muslim countries. Indonesia, Malaysia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, for example, have begun to collaborate in the halal economic sector, global Islamic education, and cultural exchange. (Mukri & Waspiah, 2023) emphasized that opportunities to form a contemporary Islamic geopolitical bloc remain, as long as they are built on the principles of justice, mutual respect for sovereignty, and the long-term vision of the ummah.

The reconstruction of Islamic geopolitics in the modern era demands a rational, inclusive, and adaptive approach. Muslims must not only overcome internal divisions, but also need to build a new narrative that is competitive and constructive in facing global hegemony. For this reason, political education of the people, strengthening geopolitical literacy, and consolidating the Muslim elite are important agendas that cannot be postponed.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that Islam has a unique geopolitical construction, which is fundamentally different from the Western geopolitical paradigm. Geopolitics in the Islamic tradition is not merely interpreted as an effort to expand territory or dominate power, but rather as a means to realize a civilization mission based on transcendental values such as justice, human brotherhood, and the common good. Since the time of the prophethood to the caliphate, Islam has demonstrated a mature geopolitical awareness through diplomacy, management of power, and development of inclusive governance. However, the glory of Islamic geopolitics experienced a drastic decline due to internal fragmentation and external

intervention, especially during the colonial era. The Western colonial project not only physically destroyed the Islamic political structure, but also created a crisis of the geopolitical identity of the people that continues to this day. The dominance of Western narratives in the global order has also weakened the political bargaining position of Muslim countries, which until now still face a dilemma between maintaining national sovereignty and building collective solidarity.

In the modern era, the opportunity to reconstruct Islamic geopolitics is still wide open. Muslim countries have great potential geographically, economically, and demographically, but challenges such as sectarian rivalry, ideological fragmentation, and the influence of global powers are still the main obstacles to the consolidation of the geopolitical power of Muslims. Collective efforts such as through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have not shown adequate effectiveness in responding to the strategic crises of the Muslim world, including the issues of Palestine, Rohingya, and others. Therefore, a contextual, rational, and inclusive Islamic geopolitical paradigm is needed one that not only prioritizes the rhetoric of unity, but also a concrete and sustainable strategy. This paradigm must be able to respond to global challenges through a just, peaceful approach based on the values of maqashid sharia. Political education of the people, strengthening geopolitical literacy, and consolidation of the Muslim elite are important prerequisites in rebuilding the strategic position of the Islamic world in the changing global order.

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