

Interpersonal Communication Gus Dur as an Individual Actor in Hostage Negotiation

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the role of Gus Dur in hostage negotiation using interpersonal communication and negotiation theory and deductive-qualitative research approach. In 2005, armed groups calling themselves the Iraqi Mujahidin Army Faction kidnapped and held Indonesian citizens. They are Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto, who then worked as journalists for Metro TV Indonesia and were on duty to cover news in Iraq. In general, the discussion of hostage negotiations places the center of role state actors because of their resources, diplomatic relations between countries that must be maintained, the stability of national security, and citizens' security. However in some instances, an individual actor can also play a crucial role in dealing with this hostage crisis. That is by considering the personal abilities possessed by the individual. The role of the fourth former President of Republic Indonesia K.H Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is a clear example of the success of individual actors in negotiating the release of hostages which is determined by their interpersonal communication skills.

Keywords: Gus Dur, Interpersonal Communication, Negotiation, Hostage

1 Introduction

Communication is to diplomacy as blood is to the human body; whenever communication ceases, the body of international politics, the process of diplomacy is dead, and the result is violent conflict or a trophy [1]. Scholars of international relations share the same view regarding the important role of communication in diplomacy. In fact, in terms of communication, diplomacy is often defined as regulated process communication. Diplomacy is often too defined as the communication system of the international society [1]. Diplomatic activity is closely related to the meaning of a foreign relationship, then this activity is related to foreign policy so that this foreign policy theory can be applied in diplomatic activities [2].

Diplomacy has several patterns including bilateral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, association diplomacy, conference diplomacy, summit diplomacy, and personal diplomacy [3]. Personal diplomacy can be defined as diplomatic activities carried out by a chief of state with another chief of the state through informal dialogue, either through face-to-face or through communication media such as telephone [4]. Personal diplomacy in a sense is only carried out by state actors (diplomat in chief) but in practice, state actors can also choose other parties such as non-state actors, especially individual actors as representatives to carry out certain goals and tasks which in other literature are called special missions [5]. State actors need representatives because they cannot present themselves, or because of the lack of capabilities possessed by state actors [1].

Interpersonal communication can be interpreted as communication between people by face to face, allowing each participant in the communication to capture the reactions of others directly, either verbally or nonverbally [6]. Negotiation is generally recognized as the essence of diplomacy, as the ultimate form of diplomatic communication [1]. Negotiation is the process of using a strategy to determine the conditions that allow the conflicting parties to reach an agreement, mutually satisfying by maximizing the outcome of an agreement [7]. Meanwhile, hostage negotiation can be defined as a negotiation activity that carried out against terrorists or terrorist groups for the safe release of hostages [7].

One of the roles of non-state actors that need to be investigated further and has a historical record that needs to be discussed is the hostage case of two Indonesian citizens (WNI), they are Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto who were held hostage in Iraq in 2005 by the Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction [8]. From this case, Indonesia has recorded the history of the role of individual actors who were successful in the negotiation process for the release of the hostages, he is K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid or known as Gus Dur. Gus Dur is widely known by the public as a very influential figure because he is one of the leaders of an Islamic organization that has a very large number of followers in Indonesia, especially the *Nahdiyyin*.¹

Literature reviews in hostage negotiation have been widely discussed by researchers in multi-disciplines. In general, these studies can be divided into four different perspectives such as psychology, communication, and peace studies. In addition, there is a lot of discussions on the role of individual actors in argumentative academic works, which do not refer to analytical frameworks from certain theories or concepts.

The study group that uses a psychological point of view focuses on supporting factors in the hostage negotiations such as responses to cultural differences, the nature, and character of the negotiators. The study group from a communication perspective put forward the use of communication medium (*channels*) and the use of language techniques used by negotiators in the strive to free hostages. The study group that came from a peace perspective focused on various approaches in the effort to free hostages, such as using the six steps of crisis intervention, establishing relationships with the hostages, and seeing and positioning from the perspective of the terrorists themselves. The last study group in the form of an argumentative academic paper emphasizes the importance of controlling the media so that the negotiations that will be or are being carried out can run well then can obtain satisfactory results.

The researchers who use a psychological point of view in the study of hostage negotiations build several analytical frameworks, such as the role of psychological construct [9], the importance of persuasive arguments in negotiations [10], and prospect theory [11]. Through the analytical framework that they use, in general researchers of the hostage negotiation from a psychological perspective try to focus on the role of negotiators in the release of hostages, both negotiators from state actors and non-state actors. So, the focus of the study in this perspective is more on the individual abilities of the negotiators themselves. This is very important considering that the negotiator is the main bridge in the endeavour to free the hostages so that the operations carried out can run effectively without anyone being injured or killed. If the negotiator who bridges communication with the hostage-takers is incompetent or does not have more skills in the realm of negotiation, it will have an impact on the failure of the hostage operation. The main conclusion from the view of the psychological study above shows some of the advantages of this study. First, it focuses on the role of negotiators from state actors and non-state actors, as the frontline in the negotiation process. Second, the focus on cultural

¹ It is a term for people who follow an Indonesian Islamic religious organization called Nahdlatul Ulama, which is also one of the oldest and largest organizations in Indonesia.

response is also very important considering that hostage cases occur between countries that have many cultural differences so that the steps to be taken can be precise and fast.

However, the study of hostage negotiations that departs from the psychological perspective above also has several disadvantages. First, in general, this study does not emphasize the experience factor possessed by the individual (negotiator) which is still in the realm of the personality and character of the individual. Second, these studies have not addressed the realm of negotiator beliefs and are still at the stage of the response to the cultural differences. This is important to be elaborated more deeply because understanding the beliefs held by the hostage-takers can determine the effective steps that must be taken and through what approach should be used to free the hostages from the hands of terrorists (hostages).

The next perspective comes from communication studies by building several analytical frameworks such as Framing Theory [12], Interpersonal communication [7], and Interpersonal Deception Theory [13]. This perspective underlines the importance of communication elements such as media and language techniques as a bridge in releasing the victims from the hostage-takers. Therefore, the focus on this point of view is more on the linguistic tools and techniques used in conveying messages with the hostages. This focus is significant because basically, good communication is when the communicant (hostages) is able to receive and perceive the message conveyed by the communicator (negotiator) so that the negotiator's intentions regarding the release of the hostage can be accepted and responded well without any misunderstandings in the negotiation process. and the main objective of the negotiations for the release of the hostages was accomplished. Whether or not the communication medium that chosen, it does not only affect the success of the hostage negotiation but also influence the shape of public perceptions, especially if the case is being discussed by both the domestic and international public. The conclusions from several previous studies in hostage negotiations from the communication perspective above show several lessons that need to be underlined. First, the communication medium and language techniques used, which are important elements in the negotiation process, have an impact on the effectiveness of the negotiation (message conveyed by the negotiator). Second, public perception is an inseparable part of the hostage release process because it can affect public policy. Apart from these advantages, the shortcomings of previous studies that used from a communication perspective did not discuss aspects of communication skills as a requirement to become a reliable negotiator in the endeavour to free hostages and have not discussed how ideally the message should be conveyed in negotiating with the hostages.

The third category of the study group that discusses hostage negotiations uses the perspective of peace studies in analysing hostage release cases or issues. These studies build several analytical frameworks referring to the Terrorist Resource Allocation Model [14], Assemblage Thinking [15], Contending Model [16], Crisis Intervention Model [17], and the Democracy, Terrorism, and Hostage Release nexus [18]. Based on these studies, we can conclude that this perspective tries to eclectically combine several approaches to intervene in crisis situations, in order to establish communication so the exchange of information or messages can be carried out to lighten up the situation. Reviewers of the peace perspective also argue that countries with democratic governance systems are often the targets of hostages (terrorists). Based on the summary of some of these studies, we can note that establishing communication with the hostage-taker is an extremely basic step in the effort to free hostages and trying to understand a hostage situation from the hostage or terrorist perspective is an obligation. However, these studies from the peace perspective do not elaborate on successful examples of negotiators in the hostage negotiation, tend to be theoretical and abstract, then overgeneralize the argument that democracies are more often the targets of hostages.

The last perspective is shown up from academic writings or works in argumentative features without using certain theories or concepts as an analytical framework. This perspective brings the control of the media [19], the power of negotiation [20], and contemporary crisis negotiation protocols to obtain satisfactory results [21]. This argumentative study elaborates on: (1) regulation of mass media related to reporting on a hostage-taker, so that it does not pose a risk of failure and the ultimate goal through negotiation in the effort to release the hostage can be carried out successfully; (2) the need to increase the capacity of negotiators for the success of the hostage release operation; and (3) the need for communication lines between countries in handling hostage cases. Apart from this, these argumentative studies still have not elaborated the indicators that need to be standard in regulating or controlling the mass media related to hostage-taking cases, tending to emphasize the success of the hostage release operation, but not discussing the security aspects of the hostages.

The four categories of the previous study above show that negotiations for the release of hostages can be viewed from various study points of view. However, none of the four study groups above has discussed the direct linkage of individual actors in striving to negotiate the release of hostages. From the four study groups above, no one has specifically discussed the hostage-taking of Indonesian journalists abroad. Whereas individual actors have a role that needs to be discussed in this negotiation effort, especially if the parties faced have special sentiments towards a government or political actor. Therefore, in this study, the author wants to fill this gap by elevating the success of the role of individual actors as negotiators in the effort to free hostages. Precisely in the case of the hostage-taking of two Indonesian citizens named Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto, who were held hostage by the Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction in 2005. The author will use interpersonal communication theory as the main theory to explain why Gus Dur succeeded in freeing Meutya Hafid and Budiyanto through negotiation efforts.

2 Method

This study uses a qualitative research method with a deductive approach in order to answer the question of "Why was interpersonal communication Gus Dur's success in doing hostage negotiation to release the hostages of the Indonesian Metro TV journalists from the Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction in 2005?"

A qualitative research method is the way of collecting data and analytical techniques or strategi based on data none of the numbers [22]. This research method is closely related to the interpretation of quality or narrative that cannot be described with numbers or values. In the study of international relations, the instance of this research include the study of the tone of speech in the speech of state actors, the study of the level of a notification that has the nuances of hatred or racism [23]. Furthermore, this research article will use a deductive approach, which is an approach generated through the syllogism method. The syllogism method in its history was first introduced by the leading classical philosopher named Aristotle [24].

This approach contains two premises, namely major and minor. The major premise is a general statement then the minor premise is a more specific statement. Moreover from these statements is a final conclusion [24]. A deductive approach was taken with the aim of drawing conclusions from the research data that the authors found through the findings of data systematically, both general and specific data.

Denzin and Lincoln [25] define qualitative research as:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. It means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” [25].

3 Result

A negotiator (mediator) for the release of hostage is a communicator, and a capable communicator will send the message content effectively and efficiently. A negotiator is also an analyst who must be able to read the hostage situation and conditions, especially knowing the characteristics of the hostage-takers. It should be underlined again that the parties who are invited to communicate and negotiate in the hostage negotiations are members who carry out acts of terror so that high vigilance and caution are needed. Furthermore, they have different understandings and cultures. Understanding cultural differences in hostage negotiations is vital in order to be able to interpret each other without offending the cultural identity. Gus Dur implemented these approaches; therefore, Gus Dur could touch the emotional realm of his communication partner [26]. Gus Dur, through his skills and experience, was able to analyse quickly the background of the hostages, such as which group they came from, whose (political) supporters, and from what sector thought [26].

Therefore, the capability of interpersonal communication Gus Dur is an essential role in diplomacy and negotiation ultimately in the hostage negotiation of Indonesian journalists in 2005. This skill and ability he uses to interact with hostage-takers is called Iraqi Mujahideen Army Faction. His personal abilities consist of interpersonal communication skills, good leadership experience, as well as a broad understanding of relations in Iraq. With the various personal capabilities he has, Gus Dur tries to establish good communication with the hostage-taker through interpersonal communication so that the message conveyed can be effective. This ability is also supported by his personal identity, known as a Muslim scholar who is both humanist and humorous. In the international world, he is also known as a peace leader and strongly opposes Islamic fundamentalism.

4 Discussion

4.1 Interpersonal communication Gus Dur

Interpersonal communication has the power to change the attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of others for several reasons. First, negotiators (communicators) can immediately find out the full-frame of reference [27] from the communicant. Second, this communication takes place in a dialogical manner like a question-and-answer conversation. Third, interpersonal communication processes are face-to-face, so that they can directly know facial expressions, attitudes, and so on. The role of the negotiator in the negotiation process for the release of the hostages has a function as a conduit of information and an agent of change. Therefore, the negotiator must be able to dominate the hostage-taker so that the main goal to be achieved can be successful and satisfying.

The model uses in interpersonal communication and negotiation theory to analyze the role of Gus Dur as a negotiator is the dyadic hostage negotiation model written by Matusitz [7]. The negotiation model for the release of the dyadic hostages took place between Gus Dur as a negotiator and the Mujahideen Army Faction as hostage-takers. In order to better illustrate the dyadic hostage negotiation model for the release of the dyadic hostages, see the image below:

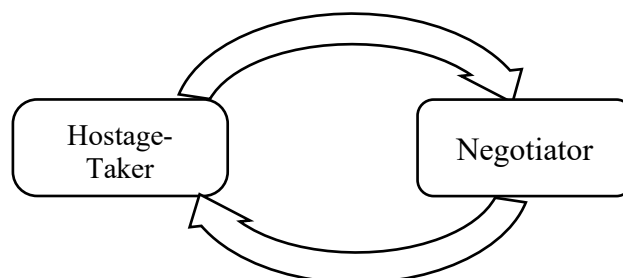


Fig. 1. Dyadic hostage negotiation [7]

From the figure of the dyadic hostage negotiation model above, it can be seen that the two parties are related to each other in the communication situation between the hostage-taker and the negotiator. The hostage-taker interacts and conveys information to the negotiator and the negotiator interacts with the hostage-taker. The hostage-taking party is the Iraqi Mujahideen Army. K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid or well-known as Gus Dur is the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia, who was democratically elected to replace President Bacharudin Jusuf Habibie through elections by members of the MPR in 1999. Gus Dur is known as a president who is both humanist and humorous [28]. His leadership and communication style are quite unique and can be said to be "eccentric" because it is extremely different from most leaders in countries around the world who seem formal.

His interpersonal communication is influenced by Gus Dur's educational background and family environment, which has a strong traditional Islamic boarding school scientific tradition. Gus Dur is the eldest son of six children from the couple K.H. Wahid Hasyim and Nyai Hj. Sholehah. Gus Dur is also the grandson of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, called *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), whereas his mother is the daughter of the founder of the Denanyar Islamic Boarding School in Jombang K.H. Bisri Syansuri. Even though he was born and grew up in a strong Islamic tradition, it did not boundaries to be open to various other scientific fields.

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 actors) as a negotiator in releasing of hostages abroad.

5 Conclusion

A negotiator is also a communicator and a reliable communicator will be able to transmit messages effectively. A negotiator must be able to send messages to the parties who are invited to negotiate because negotiations will run well if carried out by good negotiators. A negotiator is also an analyst who must read the hostage situation and conditions, especially knowing the characteristics of the hostage-takers. Communication skill is a thing that negotiators of hostage negotiation must-have, especially interpersonal communication and intercultural communication. With this ability, other personal abilities will be maximized to support the capability to transmit messages properly and effectively. It should be underlined again that the parties who are invited to communicate and negotiate in the hostage negotiations are members who carry out acts of terror so that high vigilance and caution are needed. They have different understandings and cultures. Understanding cultural differences in hostage negotiations is vital in order to be able to interpret each other without offending the cultural identity. Gus Dur implemented these approaches; therefore, Gus Dur could touch the emotional realm of his communication partner [26]. Gus Dur, through his skills and experience, was able to analyse quickly the background of the hostages, such as which group they came from, whose (political) supporters, and from what sector thought [26].

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