



The Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) and the Legacy of Kartosoewiryo: A Historical and Contemporary Political Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The proclamation of the Islamic State of Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia, NII) by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewiryo marked a pivotal moment in Indonesia's political and religious landscape. This study delves into the historical development of NII, the ideological underpinnings of Kartosoewiryo's movement, and the contemporary political ramifications of his legacy. It investigates the extent to which Kartosoewiryo's vision continues to resonate within modern Islamist movements in Indonesia and how the historical narrative of NII has been reinterpreted in contemporary political discourse. Employing a historical-political analysis, this study draws upon primary and secondary sources, including archival records, academic studies, and contemporary reports. The findings reveal that although Kartosoewiryo's aspiration for an Islamic state was ultimately dismantled, his ideological influence persists through various Islamist movements, shaping ongoing debates on Islam and governance in Indonesia. This study contends that Kartosoewiryo's legacy is not merely a historical artifact but remains an active site of ideological contestation in Indonesia's contemporary political arena. Understanding this legacy offers crucial insights into the evolution of political Islam in Indonesia and the persistent complexities surrounding the relationship between religion and the state.

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INTRODUCTION

Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewiryo (SM. Kartosoewiryo) was born into an environment strongly influenced by modernist Islamic thought. He became involved with *Sarekat Islam* (SI) and later played an active role in the *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (PSII), a political party advocating for Islam as the foundation of the nation's governance and societal structure. The influence of his mentor, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, significantly shaped his worldview, particularly in understanding Islam not merely as a personal faith but as a comprehensive socio-economic and political system (Amoretti, 2012). Kartosoewiryo's ideological framework further developed within the broader context of Indonesia's nationalist movements, which were, at the time, dominated by competing ideologies such as secular nationalism, communism, and Islamism.

Following Indonesia's declaration of independence on August 17, 1945, the newly established nation faced significant challenges in determining its governmental structure. The ideological contestation between secular nationalists, Islamists, and communists intensified. Amid this debate, Kartosoewiryo and his followers firmly believed that Islam should serve as the foundational basis of the state. However, the rejection of the *Jakarta Charter*—specifically, the removal of the seven words mandating the implementation of Islamic law for Muslims—led him to perceive this as a betrayal of the Islamic struggle (Zuhdi & Syaquillah, 2020).

Kartosoewiryo's disillusionment with Sukarno's government deepened as he saw the state embracing a secular framework that, in his view, disregarded the aspirations of the Muslim population. For him, this was a fundamental breach of the commitment made by Muslim leaders who had fought for independence. Convinced that constitutional means would not allow for Islam to become the basis of the state, he sought alternative pathways to realize his vision—one of which was through the establishment of the Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*, NII) (Rahim, 2006). Initially, Kartosoewiryo was actively engaged in Indonesia's armed resistance against Dutch colonial forces, particularly in the guerrilla warfare in West Java. However, when the *Renville Agreement* (1948) forced Indonesian military units to withdraw from West Java, he rejected the agreement and instead consolidated his base in the region. As the Republic of Indonesia, in his view, continued to drift away from Islamic values, his struggle evolved from Indonesian nationalism to Islamic nationalism (Fealy, 2017).



On August 7, 1949, Kartosoewiryo officially declared the establishment of the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) in Tasikmalaya. This proclamation marked an open rebellion against the Republic of Indonesia, which he deemed unrepresentative of the Muslim populace. Through NII, Kartosoewiryo sought to establish a state governed by Islamic law (*sharia*) and modeled on the concept of the caliphate (Hefner, [2013](#)). While his ideological foundation was firmly rooted in Islam, his decisions were also shaped by the post-colonial political context. For some, NII symbolized resistance against an un-Islamic state system, while others viewed it as a political rebellion that instrumentalized Islam as a mobilizing force for power (Fogg, [2014](#)).

The Indonesian government under Sukarno responded decisively to this insurgency. Large-scale military operations were launched to dismantle NII, which was perceived as a serious threat to national unity, particularly due to its structured government, military (*Tentara Islam Indonesia*), and widespread influence among Muslims in West Java and surrounding regions (Formichi, [2010](#)). Counterinsurgency campaigns, notably *Operasi Pagar Betis*, systematically restricted NII's operational capacity and targeted its leadership. After years of guerrilla warfare, Kartosoewiryo was ultimately captured by Indonesian forces in 1962 in Mount Geber, West Java. He was tried and sentenced to death in the same year. His execution marked the end of NII as an armed movement, though its ideological legacy continues to manifest in various forms (Formichi, [2012b](#)).

Although NII was dismantled, Kartosoewiryo's ideas remain a subject of discourse in both Islamic and political historiography in Indonesia. His vision of Islamic nationalism continues to influence Islamist groups advocating for *sharia* implementation within the state system. The broader debate on the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia remains deeply intertwined with his ideological struggle (Ilham, [2023](#)). In the decades following his death, various radical Islamic groups have drawn inspiration from Kartosoewiryo's thoughts, albeit adopting different strategies and structures. Some factions have even revived the NII name, though most have remained underground movements without significant military strength (Rianto, [2020](#)).

From a historical perspective, Kartosoewiryo's struggle to establish NII cannot be viewed in black and white. While it was strongly driven by Islamic ideology, it was equally shaped by post-colonial political factors. He embodied the tension between Islam and secular nationalism in Indonesia's historical trajectory. For Kartosoewiryo, Islam was not merely a faith but a comprehensive system of governance. However, the political reality of his time offered no constitutional pathway for his ideas to be realized, ultimately compelling him to resort to armed resistance—an approach that placed him in direct confrontation with the Indonesian government (Grainger, [2015](#)).

Kartosoewiryo's struggle also serves as a reflection of the complexities surrounding the Islam-state relationship in Indonesia. Since the country's independence, the debate over the ideological foundation of the state has never been entirely resolved. While *Pancasila* remains the official state ideology, efforts to promote Islam as the state's foundation persist in various forms. Some Islamist factions continue to seek the revival of Kartosoewiryo's ideals through political and socio-religious movements. This phenomenon underscores the ongoing tension between Islam and secular nationalism in Indonesia's political landscape (Elson & Formichi, [2011](#)).

In a broader context, Kartosoewiryo's movement provides significant insights into how ideology evolves in periods of political uncertainty. Initially, he was part of the nationalist movement fighting for Indonesia's independence. However, when he felt that Islam's role was being sidelined in the new state framework, he chose a different path. This illustrates that ideology does not exist in isolation but is shaped by the surrounding political and social conditions. In Kartosoewiryo's case, his vision of Islamic nationalism emerged as a response to dissatisfaction with a state system that he believed failed to represent Muslim aspirations (Azra, [2014](#)).

Ultimately, the historical trajectory of Kartosoewiryo and NII offers profound insights into the intricate interplay between Islam, politics, and nationalism in Indonesia. His ideas remain relevant in contemporary political and religious discourse, serving as both an inspiration for Islamist groups and a cautionary example of radicalism's potential consequences. While his movement has long been suppressed, his ideological legacy endures, continuing to be a subject of study—especially in understanding how Islam can play a role in modern political systems without resorting to conflict and violence (Formichi, [2012a](#)).

Moreover, Kartosoewiryo's struggle and the establishment of NII cannot be separated from the broader global geopolitical context of the time. In the aftermath of World War II, the world entered the Cold War era, marked by ideological competition between the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. Newly independent nations,

including Indonesia, faced substantial challenges in defining their political and ideological direction. Within Indonesia, ideological competition between secular nationalism, communism, and Islamism intensified, and Kartosoewiryo sought to capitalize on this moment by presenting the Islamic State as an alternative. He believed that by institutionalizing *sharia* as the foundation of governance, Indonesia could achieve stability and dignity amidst rapid global changes. However, his radical approach ultimately isolated him from mainstream national politics and positioned him as an enemy of the state (Ridlo, [2019](#)).

The legacy of NII remains palpable today. Although militarily defeated, Kartosoewiryo's ideology continues to influence various Islamist movements. Some extremist factions claim to be successors of NII, attempting to implement its ideology within modern contexts. Even in Indonesia's post-reform era, some radical organizations have drawn ideological parallels with Kartosoewiryo's vision, highlighting the persistent presence of Islamic political thought within Indonesia's broader political dynamics, albeit in varying forms and approaches.

This study addresses two primary research questions concerning the historical and contemporary political dimensions of NII and Kartosoewiryo's ideological legacy. First, it examines the continuity of his ideology and its impact on Islamic movements in Indonesia. Although NII was disbanded decades ago, his ideas and struggle continue to serve as references for various radical Islamic groups. Second, this study explores whether Kartosoewiryo's quest to establish NII was purely religiously motivated or if it was also shaped by political ambition. By analyzing historical factors and political dynamics, this research seeks to uncover the deeper motivations behind Kartosoewiryo's struggle.

METHODS

This study employs a historical method with a qualitative approach to analyze the thoughts and struggle of Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewiryo in establishing the Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*, NII). This method was chosen because the research focuses on past events, particularly within the context of post-colonial Islamic political history in Indonesia. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of Kartosoewiryo's ideological framework and the dynamics of the NII movement, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of the social, political, and ideological factors underlying his struggle (Abdurrahman, [2011](#)).

To obtain authentic data, this study relies on various primary sources. Official government documents, including military archives, intelligence reports, and official statements concerning military operations against NII, serve as key materials in assessing the state's response to this movement (Kuntowijoyo, [1994](#)). Additionally, Kartosoewiryo's own writings—such as speeches, manifestos, and articles—are examined to gain direct insight into his vision of Islamic nationalism and the ideal state structure he sought to establish. Contemporary newspapers and magazines are also referenced to understand media perspectives of the time and societal reactions to the NII's development.

Beyond primary sources, this study integrates secondary references to enrich the analysis. Academic books and journal articles, both from domestic and international scholars, provide a broader contextual understanding of Indonesia's Islamic political history and Kartosoewiryo's movement. Biographical studies of Kartosoewiryo are also a crucial component, offering insights into the personal and intellectual dimensions that shaped his formulation of Islamic nationalism.

Once data collection is completed, a critical analysis of various sources is conducted, considering the political and social context of the time. This approach aims to identify Kartosoewiryo's primary motives in founding the NII, assess whether his struggle was primarily driven by ideological conviction or political ambition, and evaluate the relevance of his ideas in contemporary Islamic political discourse in Indonesia. The analysis considers multiple factors, including internal dynamics within NII, the Indonesian government's response, and the broader geopolitical conditions that influenced the movement's trajectory.

To further enrich perspectives and strengthen findings, this study incorporates interviews with historians and scholars specializing in Islamic political studies and modern Indonesian history. These interviews provide broader interpretations of Kartosoewiryo's influence and the dynamics of Islamic movements in post-colonial Indonesia. Expert insights offer an additional layer of analysis, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the NII movement and its impact on Indonesia's Islamic political landscape.

Data validation is conducted through triangulation by cross-referencing various sources to ensure a more objective analysis and minimize interpretative bias. Through this method, the study aims to construct a more accurate portrayal of Kartosoewiryo's role in Indonesia's Islamic political history and how his ideas evolved within different social and political contexts.

By employing this research methodology, the study aspires to provide a deeper understanding of how Islamic nationalism developed in the post-colonial context and how the NII's struggle contributed to the broader dynamics of political Islam in Indonesia. Beyond that, this study seeks to trace the ideological legacy of Kartosoewiryo and examine how his thoughts continue to shape contemporary Islamic political discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brief Biography

Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewiryo was born on January 7, 1905, in Cepu, a small town in Central Java. His father, Marijan Kartosoewiryo, was a low-ranking employee in the colonial administration. Due to his father's position, at the age of eight, Kartosoewiryo was able to enroll in *Inlandsche School der Tweede Klasse* (ISTK), a school designated for indigenous (*Bumiputera*) students. Four years later, his academic aptitude enabled him to enter *Europeesche Lagere School* (ELS) in Bojonegoro, an institution primarily reserved for Europeans (Watson, 2014).

Kartosoewiryo's experience at ELS was a crucial formative phase in shaping his intellectual outlook for several reasons. First, Bojonegoro served as the administrative center of the Bojonegoro Residency, overseeing both Bojonegoro and Tuban. Under Dutch colonial rule, Bojonegoro was developed into a hub for governance and plantation industries, including tobacco, corn, sugarcane, and kapok, alongside its petroleum industry. These economic developments attracted foreign investors, leading to a significant European presence in Bojonegoro, comprising both entrepreneurs and government officials. Second, the establishment of ELS in 1900 was part of a broader effort to cultivate a skilled workforce for administrative and corporate positions, recruiting both Europeans and indigenous students. This European-style secondary education system played a pivotal role in producing an intellectual elite that would later drive Indonesia's nationalist movement against colonial rule. Moreover, the school's presence was expected to contribute to the socio-economic and political transformation of Bojonegoro (Fealy, 2017).

Kartosoewiryo's opportunity to attend such an institution was a direct consequence of the colonial government's Ethical Policy, which aimed to provide limited education for indigenous elites. This policy led to the emergence of a new class of intellectuals among the *Bumiputera*. However, there is little documentation regarding the Islamic traditions in Kartosoewiryo's family. There is no record of him attending a *pesantren* or receiving traditional Islamic education, such as nightly Qur'anic recitation. Based on his educational trajectory, it appears that his family leaned toward the modernist vision promoted by the colonial administration. Kartosoewiryo's engagement with Islam began during his schooling in Bojonegoro, where he encountered Notodiharjo, a religious teacher at the school and a proponent of Muhammadiyah's modernist Islamic thought. It was Notodiharjo who introduced Kartosoewiryo to the ideas of modernist Islam (Hefner, 2013).

Political Activism

By 1927, Kartosoewiryo's political activities had intensified, leading to his expulsion from *Nederlands Indische Artsen School* (the Dutch Indies Medical School). During this period, in Surabaya, he was introduced to H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, a prominent leader of *Sarekat Islam*. Kartosoewiryo even lived in Tjokroaminoto's house—where he joined other young revolutionaries such as Sukarno and Semaun—becoming both a student and Tjokroaminoto's personal secretary. Tjokroaminoto profoundly influenced his political and ideological development, shaping him into a figure with both strong Islamic convictions and acute political awareness (Suryana, 2015).

Despite his intelligence and training in medicine, Kartosoewiryo was deeply concerned with the plight of the colonial subjects. As editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Fadjar Asia* in 1929, he authored numerous articles criticizing the socio-political injustices faced by laborers. He witnessed firsthand the brutal conditions of forced labor and the vulnerability of women under the plantation system. His writings also targeted the Javanese aristocracy, including the Sultan of Solo, for their collaboration with Dutch authorities. Rejecting the nationalist rhetoric defined by racial and social class distinctions, his articles revealed a radical political stance. He urged workers to take action to improve their

living conditions without relying on external sympathy. Moreover, he frequently criticized nationalist leaders, arguing that their vision was insufficiently transformative.

Kartosoewiryo's initial ideological inclinations leaned toward socialism, influenced by his leftist-leaning uncle, Mas Marco Kartodikromo. This perspective informed his analytical approach to social structures (Fogg, [2014](#)). However, over time, he came to believe that Islam provided a more comprehensive framework for both political analysis and the struggle for independence. He remained loyal to Tjokroaminoto as his political mentor and continued his activism through *Jong Islamieten Bond* (Young Muslims League) and *Sarekat Islam*. He later became active in *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (PSII), which had evolved from *Sarekat Islam* (1905) into *Partai Sarekat Islam* (1923) to counter the rise of communism, particularly the influence of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In 1929, the party rebranded itself as PSII, marking a strategic shift from an internationalist Islamic agenda to a more localized focus on Indonesia's political landscape (Ilham, [2023](#)).

PSII was a major political force, respected for its distinguished leadership, including figures such as Haji Agus Salim, Abdul Muis, Arudji Kartawinata, Mohammad Roem, Abu Hanifah, Anwar Tjokroaminoto, and Harsono Tjokroaminoto. Kartosoewiryo held a strategic position in the party, serving as vice chairman while also shaping its ideological and strategic direction. In 1936, he authored *Sikap Hijrah*, a handbook on Islamic political organization and party development, which later became the guiding document for PSII's movement and objectives (Rianto, [2020](#)).

Kartosoewiryo viewed PSII as an entity independent of colonial structures. He advocated for a *hijrah* political strategy—one that rejected any form of cooperation with the Dutch and instead promoted uncompromising resistance through *jihad*. He based his political actions on his own interpretation of the Qur'an and remained steadfast in his convictions despite challenges from within the party, opposition from nationalist leaders, and pressure from the colonial government (Hamayotsu, [2015](#)).

PSII's influence waned after 1934 due to intensified repression by the Dutch colonial government against pro-republican factions, including both secular nationalists and Islamic movements. The death of Tjokroaminoto further destabilized the party, leading to internal divisions. The situation deteriorated further when Japan occupied Indonesia, banning political activities and attempting to control the Islamic movement by establishing Masyumi as a state-sanctioned Islamic organization (Azra, [2014](#)).

During Indonesia's war for independence (1945–1949), Kartosoewiryo actively supported Islamic militias engaged in guerrilla warfare. However, his stance often conflicted with the central government, particularly when he opposed the decision to relocate the Siliwangi Division to Central Java as part of the *long march* ordered by the government. This relocation was a consequence of the *Renville Agreement*, which severely restricted the Republic's territorial sovereignty. Kartosoewiryo also rejected a ministerial position offered by Amir Sjarifuddin, then the Prime Minister. His deepening ideological commitment to Islamic governance, combined with growing tensions with nationalist and communist factions, ultimately led him to proclaim the establishment of *Darul Islam*—the Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia*, NII) in 1949. He declared himself *Imam* (leader) of the Islamic State, solidifying his vision of an Islamic polity distinct from the Republic of Indonesia.

Islamic Nationalism, Hijrah, and Jihad

A critical inquiry into Kartosoewiryo's ideological foundation raises several fundamental questions: Why did he adopt Islam as the path for his struggle? What were the origins of his Islamic thought? And how did he conceptualize *Islamic Nationalism* and *Darul Islam*? Kartosoewiryo is often characterized as a figure who was uncompromising, non-cooperative, and unequivocal in his pursuit of his vision. However, unlike many other leaders of the Islamic movement, he lacked a formal religious education. His educational background was largely secular and general rather than rooted in traditional Islamic scholarship.

Kartosoewiryo's engagement with Islam began through his involvement in *Jong Islamieten Bond* (JIB), the student wing of *Sarekat Islam*, and his close interactions with H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto in *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (PSII), as well as with other Islamic leaders within the party. *Sarekat Islam* itself was a modern political organization dominated by reformist thinkers who advocated a return to the purity of Islam based on the Qur'an and *Hadith*. However, Kartosoewiryo is not known to have possessed proficiency in Arabic, unlike the traditional *santri* who studied at

pesantren or madrasas. He read the Qur'an through Dutch translations and lacked direct access to classical Arabic texts, which are typically used for in-depth Islamic studies (Soebardi, [1983](#)).

As an elite figure within PSII in Jakarta, Kartosoewiryo frequently engaged with regional party leaders. However, internal conflicts within PSII were inevitable, culminating in his dismissal by Abikusno after he unilaterally issued the party's manifesto, *Sikap Hijrah*, without consulting the party's chairman, Abi Kusno. Following his expulsion, Kartosoewiryo, along with his loyalists, including Kyai Yusuf Taziri, established the PSII Rescue Committee (*Komite Penyelamatan PSII*) and relocated the movement to Malangbong. Some accounts suggest that Kartosoewiryo's presence in the *Priangan* region was due to health reasons, which eventually led him to settle in Malangbong, a small area between Tasikmalaya and Garut. There, he founded *Institut Suffah*, an institution dedicated to promoting his political mission, strengthening Islamic identity, and developing military training as part of the independence struggle (Suryana, [2019](#)).

During his time in Malangbong, Kartosoewiryo also married Umi Kalsum, the daughter of a prominent PSII figure in the area. It was in this environment that he rigorously deepened his Islamic knowledge under the guidance of several *kyai*, including Kyai Yusuf Taziri, Kyai Ardiwisastra (his father-in-law), Kyai Mustafa Kamil, Kyai Ramli, Kyai Abdul Kudus Gozali Tusi, and Kyai Oni. The Islamic teachings he absorbed in Malangbong were deeply rooted in traditional mystical Islam, reflecting the agrarian village context of Indonesian Islam. His exposure to Islamic modernism in JIB, *Sarekat Islam*, and PSII, combined with his immersion in the mystical Islam of PSII Malangbong, ultimately enriched his Islamic worldview. This synthesis of experiences helps explain why he firmly believed in Islam as the ultimate path for struggle and why he envisioned *Darul Islam*, the Islamic State of Indonesia (Hefner, [2013](#)).

Understanding Kartosoewiryo's concept of *Islamic Nationalism* or *Darul Islam* requires situating it within the ideological landscape of the time, a period when Indonesia was searching for an ideal formula to establish a sovereign state. Three primary visions of the nation emerged: (1) The Islamic State of Indonesia (Darul Islam) – Advocated by Kartosoewiryo and his followers, this model proposed a state governed entirely by Islamic principles; (2) The Pancasila-Based Republic as Outlined in the 1945 Constitution – A secular but inclusive vision of the state, which became the official ideology of Indonesia; (3) The Jakarta Charter Model – An early compromise between Islamist and secular nationalist factions, which initially mandated that Muslims adhere to *sharia* but was later amended to remove this requirement (Rahim, [2006](#)).

Kartosoewiryo's nationalist ideology was uniquely shaped by Islamic teachings, particularly his interpretation of the Qur'an, *Hadith*, and the life of Prophet Muhammad. He firmly believed that Indonesia, as a nation predominantly inhabited by Muslims, had a historical and sociological imperative to establish an Islamic state. He saw the Muslim community suffering under colonial discrimination, not only from Dutch policies but also from secular nationalists who, in his view, undermined Islamic aspirations. In one of his writings, he asserted:

"Our religion must advance, rise, and be honored! That is our ultimate aspiration. We live upon Islam, and we shall die upon Islam. This is our guiding principle."

Kartosoewiryo was also highly critical of nationalist factions that marginalized Islam, particularly secular nationalists and communists. At the age of 24, while serving as editor of *Fadjar Asia*, he wrote:

"Our nationalism is none other than Islamic nationalism—free from selfish desires, boundless, unconfined by territorial limitations, deeply connected to Islamic unity. Our nationalism is not based on the beauty of 'Mother' or 'Goddess' Indonesia. In short, our nationalism is one that exists solely for the sake of Allah. Therefore, our nationalism is Nationalism *Lillahi Ta'ala*."

In this context, Kartosoewiryo explicitly rejected the Western European model of nationalism, which he saw as chauvinistic and tribalistic, driven by narrow territorial and ethnic imaginations. Instead, he envisioned nationalism as fundamentally theocentric, devoid of material or economic motivations. His concept of *Nationalism Lillahi Ta'ala* was a direct response to the structure of colonial society, which he classified into three groups (Waluyo et al., [2021](#)): (1) The Dutch East Indies Society – A colonial structure designed to perpetuate Dutch rule through hierarchical class divisions; (2) The Indonesian National Society – A nascent national identity lacking clear legal or governmental structures and impoverished in many aspects; (3) The Islamic Society or Darul Islam – Similar in its socio-economic struggles to the broader Indonesian nationalist society but distinguished by its commitment to Islamic law.

Each of these societal structures had distinct objectives. The Dutch colonial elite sought to consolidate their rule, the Indonesian nationalist movement aspired to build an independent nation, while the Islamic society aimed to establish *Darul Islam*, a state where Muslims could fully implement Islamic law at both personal and societal levels. Kartosoewiryo believed that by dedicating themselves to Allah and implementing *sharia* comprehensively, Muslims would be elevated in dignity and status. Conversely, any nation that turned away from divine law, he argued, would inevitably decline (Siswandi & Salim, [2017](#)).

Kartosoewiryo conceptualized the condition of Indonesian Muslims under Dutch rule as analogous to the *Meccan period* of early Islam, when Prophet Muhammad and his follower's endured oppression and persecution. He saw this period as one of hardship, marked by humiliation, torture, and existential threats. Just as the Prophet and his companions eventually migrated (*hijrah*) to Medina to establish an Islamic state, Kartosoewiryo advocated for a similar strategy. He frequently cited Qur'anic verses to justify this position, including:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ

"Indeed, those who have believed and emigrated and fought in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives are greater in rank in the sight of Allah. And it is they who will attain success." (At-Taubah: 20).

For Kartosoewiryo, *Hijrah* was a key political strategy. He envisioned an independent land—*Darul Islam*—as a modern Medina, where Islamic teachings could flourish without fear of persecution. In his vision, an independent Indonesia must resemble Medina, governed under Islamic law rather than secular nationalism. Following *Hijrah*, Kartosoewiryo's next principle was *Jihad*. He called for total commitment to the struggle for Islamic Nationalism and *Darul Islam*, advocating for jihad in various forms, including intellectual, economic, political, social, and cultural efforts, culminating in armed resistance. For Kartosoewiryo, the use of military force was not merely a choice but an obligation—an integral aspect of the broader jihad necessary to realize the vision of an Islamic state.

The Concept of the Islamic State of Indonesia

A comparative examination of the intellectual discourse among Muslim thinkers across different parts of the world in the early 20th century reveals significant debates concerning the format of a sovereign state and the role of religion within it. These discussions were deeply intertwined with the prevailing political reality, as many Muslim-majority regions were under colonial rule. Although the Ottoman Caliphate still existed at the time, it was on the brink of collapse. In 1924, the Ottoman Caliphate, which had once dominated two-thirds of the world, was officially abolished by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, marking the end of an era and the beginning of a modern, secular Turkey (Othman, [2006](#)).

The discourse on state formation among Muslim intellectuals at the time generally revolved around two dominant conceptual frameworks. The first was *Pan-Islamism*, which advocated for the reunification of the Muslim ummah to re-establish the Islamic Caliphate as a global Islamic sovereign entity. This vision, championed by figures such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida, sought to restore the historical grandeur of Islam by reviving the Caliphate as a unifying institution for all Muslims. The second framework was *Western Nationalism*, which suggested that Muslim societies should model their struggles for independence after the modern Western concept of the nation-state. One of the key proponents of this idea was the Egyptian scholar Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966), who, in his seminal work *Al-Islam wa Usul al-Ahkam: Bahth fi al-Khilafah wa al-Hukumah fi al-Islam* (Islam and the Foundations of Governance: A Study on the Caliphate and Government in Islam), argued that Islam was primarily a moral religion. He contended that the Prophet Muhammad's primary mission was to deliver ethical teachings, and at no point did he prescribe a specific system of government or a political framework that Muslims were obliged to follow. Consequently, the push to establish a political system such as the Caliphate or *Imamah* was not a religious necessity but rather a cultural construct shaped by historical and political interests. According to Raziq, these governance structures were purely worldly constructs with no intrinsic connection to Islamic doctrine (Trihartono & Viartasiwi, [2015](#)).

Kartosoewiryo's ideological position diverged sharply from both of these dominant frameworks. Unlike Pan-Islamists, he did not entirely subscribe to the idea of a transnational Islamic polity. Similarly, he was critical of Western nationalism, which he perceived as fundamentally secular and detached from Islamic values. Instead, he proposed a unique synthesis: *Islamic Nationalism*, or *Darul Islam*. This concept was not merely theoretical; Kartosoewiryo successfully institutionalized it by proclaiming the *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic State of Indonesia, NII). He was the first to coin the term *Negara Islam Indonesia*, a notion absent from political discourse in the 1930s. As noted by

Muhammad Natsir, prior to Kartosoewiryo, discussions had only revolved around the idea of a state “based on Islam” rather than an explicitly Islamic state (Suwirta & Adam, [2012](#)).

The Islamic State of Indonesia (*Darul Islam* or NII) was officially declared in 1949, approximately four years after Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed Indonesia’s independence. NII established its own symbols of statehood, including a national flag—a red-and-white banner featuring a crescent moon—and a foundational legal code known as *Kanun Asasi*, which functioned as its constitution. The movement also organized its own military force, the *Tentara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic Army of Indonesia). Kartosoewiryo positioned himself as the *Imam* of the Islamic State of Indonesia, referring to its capital as *Madinah Indonesia*, located in the *Priangan* region of West Java. Kartosoewiryo’s vision of an Islamic state reflected a fundamental departure from both the Pan-Islamist ideal of a global caliphate and the Western nationalist model of a secular nation-state. His ideological framework sought to reconcile the idea of a modern state with Islamic governance, establishing a state that, in his view, was rooted in both religious legitimacy and political sovereignty.

The Motive Behind the Establishment of the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII)

Why did Kartosoewiryo declare the *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic State of Indonesia, NII), and what factors influenced this decision? Was this proclamation purely driven by Islamic ideological motives, or were there additional political, social, and economic factors that played a role? Moreover, how did Indonesia’s early post-independence socio-political landscape contribute to the formation of NII? These questions are critical for a comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons behind NII’s establishment.

Van Dijk’s study on Kartosoewiryo and the *Darul Islam* movement concludes that Islam was not the sole ideological foundation of the movement. Instead, NII functioned more as an armed rebellion shaped by various socio-political factors, with Islam being employed as a symbol and justification for the struggle. Van Dijk argues that Kartosoewiryo himself did not possess a deep understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, given his largely secular educational background and his inclination towards *Sufistic* Islam, which is generally more apolitical than formalist Islamic thought. Moreover, Islam as a political ideology traditionally opposes the concept of a nation-state, as the idea of *Ittihad al-Ukhuwwa al-Islamiyya* (Islamic brotherhood unity) prioritizes global Muslim solidarity over territorially defined political entities (Dimiyati et al., [2023](#)).

Van Dijk further asserts that the declaration of NII was not solely the result of ideological disputes over the formation of the post-independence Indonesian state but was also influenced by a range of other factors, including internal conflicts within the *Tentara Rakyat* (People’s Army), shifts in power at the central government level, gradual agrarian transformations, and socio-economic dynamics in rural areas. The *Darul Islam* (DI) movement emerged as a consequence of frustrations among regional military commanders who opposed the formation of a national army, as well as widespread dissatisfaction among rural populations regarding agrarian reforms and the centralization of political power in Jakarta. Van Dijk highlights the importance of agrarian reform and social struggles in analyzing the movement. Kartosoewiryo’s background, which was more closely connected to rural agrarian communities, made him less aligned with the nationalist state-building vision advocated by *Sarekat Islam* (SI). Consequently, the NII proclamation was not entirely driven by religious conviction or Kartosoewiryo’s interactions with SI and *Masyumi*, but rather by the broader socio-political conditions of the time (Jafar et al., [2019](#)).

Van Dijk provides a detailed account of the *Darul Islam* uprisings across various regions of Indonesia. In Central Java, the rebellion was considered an extension of the movement in West Java; in South Sulawesi, it developed as a struggle led by dissatisfied guerrilla fighters; in South Kalimantan, resistance emerged from groups who felt marginalized, whereas in Aceh, the rebellion was primarily driven by Islamic scholars. Van Dijk emphasizes how the *Darul Islam* rebels launched social revolutions against local elites while demonstrating unwavering dedication to the project of establishing an Islamic state. Among all the *Darul Islam* uprisings of the 1950s, Aceh was the only province where the primary motivation for rebellion against the Republic was explicitly religious. The movement’s context reflects the ongoing tensions between regional and national politics, as well as the complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, and historical grievances (Nugroho, [2020](#)).

Contrary to Van Dijk, Formichi argues that the primary driving force behind NII was religious conviction rather than political frustration or personal ambition. According to Formichi, the establishment of NII was not an expression of resentment toward the government but rather a political manifestation of Islamic beliefs. This is evident in the

continued resonance of Kartosoewiryo's ideas and the persistent support for his ideology, even after his execution and the suppression of NII by the state. Formichi traces Kartosoewiryo's political thought back to the 1930s, noting that it had already diverged significantly—not only from secular nationalists and communists but also from Islamic leaders in *PSII* and later in *Masyumi*. Even after the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia (RI) and the defeat of *Masyumi* figures in the Constitutional Assembly, which ultimately endorsed *Pancasila* as the state ideology, Kartosoewiryo remained committed to his mission to establish NII. However, the timing of NII's declaration was arguably premature, as both secular and Islamic factions, despite their ideological differences, were still focused on resisting their common enemies—the returning Dutch, Japanese, British, and Allied forces (Rahman, [2020](#)).

Although Indonesia had gained de facto independence, the newly formed government remained fragile, with a parliament that functioned merely as an advisory body. Sukarno and other national leaders lacked a fully developed bureaucratic and military apparatus, leaving administrative control largely in the hands of the Japanese, who, under an agreement with the Allies, were responsible for maintaining law and order until Allied forces arrived in Indonesia. Following Japan's withdrawal, various conflicts erupted across Indonesia, including tensions between the populace and traditional elites who had previously been supported by the Dutch. One notable example was the *Social Revolution of 1946* in East Sumatra, where the people revolted against sultans perceived as colonial collaborators. Similar unrest occurred in Java, where Republican forces attacked royal palaces, accusing sultans of reluctance to integrate into the newly proclaimed Indonesian state and preferring to remain under Dutch rule (Ahmad, [2017](#)).

The *Renville Agreement* of 1948 was the decisive turning point that led Kartosoewiryo to declare NII. The agreement, negotiated aboard the USS *Renville* between December 8, 1947, and January 17, 1948, delineated territorial boundaries between Dutch- and Republic-controlled areas using the *Van Mook Line*. The agreement forced the Indonesian National Army (TNI) to withdraw from West and East Java, which led to the *Siliwangi Division's Long March*, as troops moved from West Java to Central Java and Yogyakarta. Kartosoewiryo and his followers, particularly the *Hizbullah* and *Sabilillah* militias, rejected this arrangement, as it effectively handed West Java back to Dutch control. This fueled resentment, and Kartosoewiryo, along with his militant supporters, declared armed opposition against the Republic of Indonesia by forming the *Tentara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic Army of Indonesia, TII) (Rahim, [2006](#)).

On August 7, 1949, Kartosoewiryo formally proclaimed the Islamic State of Indonesia (*Negara Islam Indonesia, NII*) in a location he referred to as *Madinah Indonesia*. His objective was to establish a state governed by Islamic law, supported by a military force known as the *Tentara Islam Indonesia* (TII) or the *Armed Forces of the Islamic State of Indonesia* (APNII). Kartosoewiryo framed NII as *Al-Jumhuriyah Al-Indonesiah*, a legitimate Islamic republic arising from oppression, injustice, and broken promises by secular nationalist leaders. However, the Indonesian government viewed his actions as an attempt to secede from the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia. The NII proclamation was as follows:

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,

Asyhadu an la ilaha illa Allah, wa asyhadu anna Muhammadar Rasulallah.

We, the Muslim people of Indonesia, hereby declare the establishment of the Islamic State of Indonesia.

Thus, the laws that shall govern this Islamic State of Indonesia are Islamic laws.

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar

Madinah Indonesia, 12 Shawwal 1368 H

August 7, 1949

On behalf of the Muslim people of Indonesia,

Imam of the Islamic State of Indonesia

Sekarmaji Marijan Kartosoewiryo

The Proclamation of the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) marked a pivotal shift in the Indonesian struggle, transforming the war against the Dutch into a civil war between the Republic of Indonesia and the self-proclaimed Islamic State. In historical narratives, this event is often referred to as the *Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia* (DI/TII) rebellion. The conflict endured for an extended period, involving DI/TII forces, civilians, and the *Tentara Republik Indonesia* (TRI), later the Indonesian National Army (TNI), leading to widespread devastation and a significant toll on the development of West Java. According to official reports, the number of casualties—comprising those killed, severely wounded, and abducted—reached 22,895, while material losses were estimated at 650 million rupiah at the time.

Van Dijk delves deeper into the underlying causes that led to the emergence of similar movements in South Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, Aceh, and Central Java. Across these regions, the *Darul Islam/TII* movement was driven by distinct local grievances. In South Sulawesi, the rebellion was fueled by Kahar Muzakkar's profound dissatisfaction with the government's policy of consolidating central authority across the provinces. Muzakkar perceived Jakarta's efforts as undermining local autonomy and diminishing the influence of regional military commanders.

In South Kalimantan, the rebellion stemmed from a sense of marginalization among the local population, as the region was incorporated into the United States of Indonesia (RIS) rather than the Republic of Indonesia. The situation was further exacerbated by military appointments, in which key positions were assigned to individuals perceived as collaborators with the Dutch or outsiders with no local ties. This fueled resentment, ultimately leading Ibnu Hajar, a former officer of the Fourth Division of the Indonesian People's Army (ALRI), to launch an armed rebellion against the central government.

Each of these rebellions, despite their localized motivations, was unified by a broader ideological framework that sought to challenge the Republic of Indonesia's political structure and governance. The DI/TII movement, while initially rooted in opposition to colonial rule, gradually evolved into a more complex conflict that reflected deep-seated tensions between central and regional authorities, ideological divides between secular nationalism and Islamic governance, and lingering dissatisfaction over Indonesia's post-independence political landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Sekarmaji Marijan Kartosoewiryo's struggle to establish the *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic State of Indonesia, NII) was a manifestation of *Islamic nationalism*, which he perceived as a solution to the ideological ambiguity of post-colonial Indonesia. His disillusionment with the secularization of the state and the failure of the *Jakarta Charter* fueled his decision to proclaim NII as a direct challenge to the government. Beyond ideological motives, the movement was also shaped by the political instability of the post-independence era, ideological rivalries, and public dissatisfaction with state policies. Kartosoewiryo capitalized on these conditions to mobilize support from Islamic groups that felt marginalized within the national political framework.

However, NII faced formidable challenges, both from internal divisions and external pressures. The movement struggled to establish a stable governance structure, while the Indonesian government's military strategies gradually weakened its influence. Ultimately, Kartosoewiryo was captured and executed in 1962, marking the formal collapse of NII as an armed movement. Yet, despite its military failure, the ideology he championed has persisted in various forms in modern times. His struggle was not merely a political ambition, but rather a critical chapter in the ongoing Islam-state discourse in Indonesia. Even today, certain Islamic political groups continue to reference NII's ideology, albeit through different approaches. Consequently, the historical tension between Islam and the state, as exemplified by the NII movement, remains highly relevant in understanding the evolving dynamics of political Islam in Indonesia.

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