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## **Balancing International Recognition and Domestic Pressure: A Two-Level Games Analysis of Indonesia's Board Of Peace (BOP) Policy 2026**

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### ***Abstract***

*This article trying to analyzes the conditions under which Indonesia's two negotiating tables became irreconcilable in the Board of Peace (BoP) episode of 2026 and what this incompatibility reveals about the structural limits of Indonesia's contemporary foreign policy. Using Putnam's two-level games framework (1988), updated for the digital age by Bjola and Manor (2018) and complemented by Fearon's (1994) audience costs theory, this study maps how two simultaneous win-sets the international level (L1), where the BoP offered Indonesia recognition as a global peacemaker, and the domestic level (L2), where Indonesia's Muslim-majority public created a win-set fundamentally incompatible with any arrangement perceived as supporting Israel—were managed, negotiated, and ultimately could not be satisfied simultaneously. The article argues that Indonesia's choice to contribute troops rather than pay the USD 1 billion membership fee was a rational two-level negotiation solution. However, the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran on February 28, 2026 rendered both win-sets irreconcilable overnight, making suspension the only remaining rational move. The case further exposes a structural weakness: a personalized foreign policy architecture without adequate institutional vetting mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** Board of Peace, two-level games, Indonesian foreign policy, audience costs, peacekeeping

### ***Abstrak***

Artikel ini mencoba menganalisis kondisi di mana dua meja negosiasi Indonesia menjadi tidak dapat dipuaskan secara bersamaan dalam episode Board of Peace (BoP) tahun 2026 serta apa yang diungkapkan ketidakcocokan tersebut tentang batas-batas struktural kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia kontemporer. Dengan

menggunakan kerangka two-level games Putnam (1988) yang diperbarui untuk era digital oleh Bjola dan Manor (2018) dan dilengkapi teori audience costs Fearon (1994), studi ini memetakan bagaimana dua win-set yang berjalan paralel di level internasional (L1) dan level domestik (L2), dikelola, dinegosiasikan, dan pada akhirnya tidak dapat dipuaskan bersamaan. Artikel berargumen bahwa pilihan berkontribusi pasukan ketimbang membayar USD 1 miliar merupakan solusi negosiasi two-level yang rasional. Namun, serangan AS-Israel ke Iran pada 28 Februari 2026 membuat kedua win-set mendadak tidak kompatibel, menjadikan suspensi sebagai satu-satunya langkah rasional yang tersisa.

**Kata kunci:** Board of Peace, two-level games, kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia, audience costs, peacekeeping

## **Introduction**

On January 22, 2026, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, the President of Indonesia signed the Board of Peace (BoP) charter alongside President Donald Trump, a Gaza peace forum bringing together eight Muslim-majority nations under the auspices of U.S. diplomacy. Three weeks later, the Minister Secretary of State announced that Indonesia was preparing to deploy 8,000 Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) personnel to Gaza, the largest troop commitment in Indonesia's history of participation in multinational peacekeeping operations. Yet on March 6, 2026, just seven weeks after joining, Indonesia officially suspended all discussions related to the BoP (CNN Indonesia, 2026; Tempo.co, 2026).

Within those seven weeks, Indonesia made a sequence of decisions rarely seen in diplomacy: joining, making a major commitment, then suspending everything, without formally ending its membership, without setting a timeline, and with narratives that shifted between the president and his ministers (Ndolu, 2026; Redaksi Kompas, 2026). The core question this article seeks to answer is: when and why did Indonesia's two negotiating tables, the international table demanding presence at the BoP, and the domestic table rejecting any form of association with Israel, become

irreconcilable? And what does this process reveal about the structural limits of Indonesia's diplomacy?

This article trying to argues that the BoP case is a textbook example of what Robert Putnam (1988) termed a condition in which Level I and Level II win-sets become incompatible, two tables that ultimately cannot be satisfied simultaneously. The government was playing at two negotiating tables simultaneously: the international table (Level I), occupied by Trump's pressure, Indonesia's aspirations as a global peacemaker, and Middle Eastern geopolitical calculations; and the domestic table (Level II), occupied by Indonesian Muslim public sentiment, MUI fatwas on boycotting Israeli products, mobilization of Islamic civil society organizations, and historical sensitivities regarding Indonesia's position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For the first few weeks, the government managed to keep both tables viable through a series of framing maneuvers, most notably the choice to contribute troops rather than pay USD 1 billion. However, when the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran on February 28, 2026 abruptly altered the geopolitical configuration, no position could satisfy both tables simultaneously, and suspension became the only available response.

To appreciate why the BoP episode generated such acute tension, it must be situated within the longer trajectory of Indonesian foreign policy. Since the Cold War, Indonesia has anchored its international conduct in the doctrine of *bebas-aktif* (free and active), a principle that simultaneously rejects formal alignment with any major power bloc and asserts an active role in shaping global order. On the question of Palestine specifically, successive Indonesian governments have treated support for Palestinian statehood not merely as a foreign policy preference but as a constitutional and identitarian commitment, rooted in the anti-colonial spirit of the 1945 Constitution's preamble. This historical anchoring means that any policy perceived as compromising the Palestinian cause does not merely attract ordinary political disagreement; it touches a foundational element of national self-conception. The BoP's association with the United States and, by extension, with Israel, therefore activated a uniquely sensitive register of domestic politics, one in which the Level II win-set is bounded not only by interest but by identity. The contemporary administration's broader posture, characterized by some observers as a shift toward a more transactional and personalized diplomacy, further sharpened

the gap between Level I ambition and Level II constraint (Putra, 2025; Laksmana, 2025).

This study's urgency rests on three grounds. First, the BoP case is one of the most dynamic and well-documented foreign policy episodes in Indonesia's recent decade, offering rich empirical material for academic analysis. Second, the article aims to supplement Indonesian IR scholarship by analyzing this case through a systematic two-level games framework, integrating Fearon's (1994) audience costs theory to explain how the domestic public's capacity to impose political costs on inconsistent leaders shaped the government's strategic calculus. Third, the case exposes a broader structural tension between active diplomacy aspirations at Level I and the domestic constraints shaping the Level II win-set, a tension that, as this article will argue, is becoming a defining feature of foreign policymaking for digitally connected middle powers in the Global South.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### ***a. Two-Level Games: Putnam's Framework (1988)***

Putnam (1988, p. 434) argued that international negotiations fundamentally occur on two boards simultaneously: Level

I encompasses bargaining between national negotiators and international counterparts, while Level II encompasses domestic discussions about whether an agreement can be ratified. The key concept in this framework is the win-set, the set of all Level I agreements that would likely gain ratification at Level II. A large win-set increases the probability of reaching a Level I agreement but also weakens the negotiator's bargaining position by signaling broad domestic tolerance. Conversely, a narrow Level II win-set can serve as both a source of strength and a constraint: it limits the agreements a negotiator can accept, yet paradoxically strengthens their hand by allowing them to credibly claim that domestic ratification is impossible beyond a certain threshold.

Three factors determine the size of the Level II win-set, according to Putnam (1988, pp. 442–444). The first is the distribution of power, preferences, and possible coalitions among domestic constituents. When domestic groups hold intense and homogeneous preferences on an issue, the win-set narrows because few international agreements can satisfy them. The second is the nature of domestic political institutions and ratification procedures, whether formal (parliamentary votes, referenda) or informal (the tacit consent of influential societal groups). The

third is the strategy and rhetoric of the negotiators themselves, who can deliberately expand or contract the perceived win-set through framing. In the context of Indonesia and the BoP, all three factors operated simultaneously: the strongly pro-Palestine preferences of Indonesia's Muslim public formed a narrow and homogeneous win-set on any issue touching Israel; informal ratification procedures included the tacit 'approval' of major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, whose fatwas and public statements function as de facto veto points; and the government's tactics shifted from broad commitments toward increasingly constrained framing as Level II pressure mounted. Two further concepts from Putnam's framework are essential to this analysis. The first is involuntary defection, the inability of a chief negotiator to deliver domestic ratification of an agreement they have signed at Level I, not because they choose to renege, but because domestic constituents refuse to comply. Indonesia's suspension of the BoP exemplifies this dynamic: the government did not voluntarily abandon its international commitment but was structurally unable to sustain it against domestic opposition. The second is reverberation, the process by

which international pressures ‘reverberate’ within domestic politics, altering the domestic win-set itself. In the BoP case, reverberation worked in reverse: rather than international pressure expanding the domestic win-set, the externally-driven escalation of the Iran conflict contracted the Level II win-set to the point of collapse. These two concepts allow the present analysis to move beyond a static mapping of win-sets toward a dynamic account of how they shifted over seven weeks.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of Putnam’s framework, which scholars have debated extensively since its introduction. Critics have noted that the model can be difficult to operationalize, since win-sets are rarely directly observable and must be inferred from behavior, a critique this article addresses by triangulating multiple independent sources and by tracing the sequence of decisions over time rather than relying on a single snapshot. Others have observed that the original framework underspecifies the role of non-state actors and transnational forces. The present analysis responds to this by incorporating the digital dimension, where civil society organizations, online publics, and religious authorities act as autonomous shapers of the Level II win-set rather than passive constituents. By combining Putnam’s

structural logic with audience costs theory and digital diplomacy scholarship, this article seeks to mitigate the framework’s classic weaknesses while preserving its central analytical power.

### ***b. Audience Costs and Digital Acceleration***

Fearon (1994) enriched the logic of domestic constraint by introducing the concept of audience costs: leaders who are perceived as inconsistent or as backing down from international commitments bear tangible domestic political costs. In democracies, these costs are structurally higher because the public possesses both the information and the institutional means to punish leaders (Fearon, 1994, p. 581; Tomz, 2007). The BoP case illustrates this mechanism in reverse: by joining a forum perceived as associated with Israel, the Indonesian government incurred audience costs that escalated rapidly as the public confrontation intensified, ultimately making any position short of suspension politically untenable at Level II. The digital age, as Bjola and Manor (2018) demonstrated, has compounded this dynamic. Their concept of Domestic Digital Diplomacy, the use of social media by governments to build domestic support for foreign policy, highlights that digitalization has complicated two-level

games by democratizing access to foreign policy decisions and accelerating Level I–Level II interaction. In the BoP case, the Davos announcement on January 22 went viral on Twitter/X and TikTok Indonesia within less than two hours. Baum and Potter (2019) further argue that the fragmented and siloed nature of contemporary digital media erodes public constraint by inclining citizens toward reflexive support or opposition, while simultaneously making it harder for governments to manage audience perceptions across both levels.

#### ***c. Operational Code and Win-Set Boundaries***

Putra (2025) analyzed Indonesia's foreign policy through the Operational Code approach, finding that the leader's instrumental beliefs were shaped by 'anti-oppression norms, fear of colonialism, military background, and appetite to secure economic interests' (Isbah & Wibawanto, 2021). This operational code shaped the definition of the Level I win-set: the BoP was viewed as a stage for actively championing Palestine. Yet simultaneously, this same code constrained the Level II win-set: joining a Trump-led forum—one consistently supportive of Israeli policies—created a cognitive dissonance that could not be resolved through narrative reframing alone.

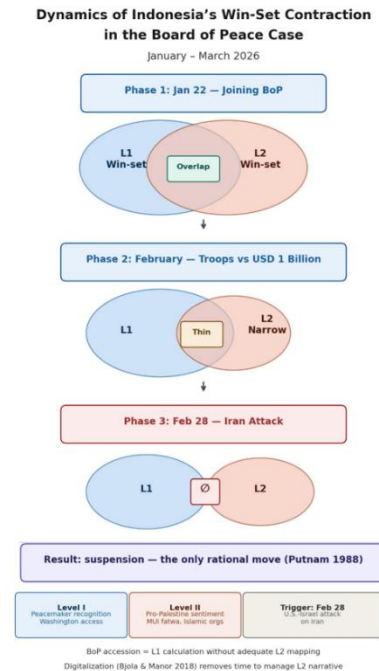
#### ***d. An Integrated Framework: Foreign Policy Analysis Meets Digital Public Opinion***

The three theoretical strands employed in this article, two-level games, audience costs, and digital diplomacy, are not merely juxtaposed but mutually reinforcing. Two-level games provides the structural architecture: the metaphor of a leader negotiating simultaneously at an international and a domestic table. Audience costs theory supplies the micro-level mechanism that animates the domestic table, explaining why and how constituents punish perceived inconsistency. Digital diplomacy scholarship, in turn, specifies the contemporary medium through which audience costs are now generated and transmitted, compressing the timescale of the domestic game from weeks to hours. Read together, they yield a proposition central to this article: in the digital era, the Level II win-set is no longer a relatively stable parameter that negotiators can map in advance, but a volatile and rapidly shifting boundary that can collapse faster than diplomatic machinery can respond. This integration also speaks to a broader debate in Foreign Policy Analysis concerning the relative weight of structure versus agency. A purely structural reading would treat Indonesia's suspension as the inevitable product of incompatible win-sets. A purely

agency-centered reading would emphasize the choices of individual decision-makers, the president, the ministers and their miscalculations. The framework advanced here suggests that both operate simultaneously: structural constraints set the boundaries of the possible, while agency determines how skillfully or clumsily actors navigate within those boundaries. The contradictions between presidential and ministerial statements, examined later, illustrate precisely where agency failures amplified structural constraints. This dual sensitivity is what makes the two-level games framework, suitably updated, particularly well-suited to explaining the BoP episode.

The interplay between the two win-sets over these seven weeks is best understood as a progressive contraction of their zone of overlap, which Figure 1 visualizes across three distinct phases.

**Figure 1. Dynamics of Indonesia's Win-Set Contraction in the Board of Peace Case (January–March 2026)**



Source: Compiled by authors based on Putnam's (1988) two-level games framework.

As Figure 1 shows, in Phase 1 (January 22), when Indonesia joined the BoP, the Level I and Level II win-sets still contained an overlap area, meaning a range of positions could theoretically satisfy both tables. In Phase 2 (February), as the USD 1 billion controversy emerged alongside contradictions between presidential and ministerial statements, this overlap thinned significantly; the 'troops not money' framing decelerated the contraction but did not halt it. In Phase 3 (February 28), the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran eliminated all

remaining overlap, producing an empty set in which no position could satisfy both tables simultaneously. At this juncture, suspension became the only rational response remaining within Putnam's (1988, p. 438) logic. This progressive collapse demonstrates that the suspension was not a diplomatic failure in the conventional sense, but a structurally determined outcome a claim the following analysis substantiates by examining each table in turn, beginning with the methods used to reconstruct the episode.

### Research Method

This article employs a qualitative research method using a single case study approach to examine Indonesia's involvement in the Board of Peace from January to March 2026. The case selection rests on three considerations: the high density of events within a short timeframe (seven weeks from joining to suspension); the dynamic variation within a single episode (joining, negotiating the form of participation, suspending) that enables direct testing of two-level games mechanisms; and the availability of relatively comprehensive documentation from multiple independent sources.

Data sources consist of three layers. First, primary documents comprising official statements by the Indonesian

government through various media. Second, coverage from national media outlets (Kompas, Tempo, Antara, CNBC Indonesia) and international outlets (Reuters, Al Jazeera, Middle East Monitor, DW). Third, secondary data comprising the ISEAS State of Southeast Asia Survey (2024), peacekeeping contribution data from Statista (2026), and the Edelman Trust Barometer Indonesia (2025). The analysis proceeded by mapping each event onto Putnam's two-level games structure, identifying whether each decision responded to Level I or Level II pressure, and how changes in external conditions altered the boundaries of both win-sets. A limitation of this article is the absence of access to internal government documents and interviews with policymakers; the analysis is therefore inferential, based on observable behavior.

### Discussion

#### *a. The International Table (Level I): Why Did Indonesia Join the BoP?*

To understand why Indonesia joined the BoP, one must first understand what the BoP offered at Level I. First, the BoP provided Indonesia with formal legitimacy as a recognized actor in the Gaza peace process, something Indonesia had long sought but struggled to achieve through conventional multilateral channels.

Second, joining a Trump-architected forum opened a direct diplomatic channel to Washington at a time when Indonesia was negotiating U.S. trade tariffs reaching 32 percent. Third, as identified by Putra (2025), there existed an ‘appetite to secure economic interests’ that viewed the BoP as a means to enhance Indonesia’s overall bargaining position vis-à-vis the United States.

The geopolitical context is also relevant. Anwar (2023, p. 355) described Indonesia as operating under a ‘hedging plus’ approach, engaging all sides to maximize benefits while mitigating risks. Kuik (2021) conceptualized this posture as a small-state strategy of maintaining strategic ambiguity to preserve room for maneuver between competing great powers. Joining the BoP was consistent with hedging plus logic: Indonesia did not close any channel, including the Washington channel, while simultaneously maintaining its strategic partnership with Russia and its BRICS membership. However, Laksmana (2025, p. 62) noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the current administration, ‘dominated by loyalists,’ produced foreign policy designs that reflected the president’s personal preferences rather than mature institutional calculations, reinforcing the argument that the decision to join the BoP was a Level I

decision made before the Level II win-set had been adequately mapped.

There is a deeper logic to why the Level I incentives proved so compelling. For a middle power seeking recognition, an invitation to co-found a high-profile peace initiative alongside the United States represents a rare form of symbolic capital, the kind of visible, status-conferring role that ordinary multilateral diplomacy seldom provides. The timing amplified this appeal: with bilateral trade negotiations under strain and tariffs threatening key export sectors, a direct and personal channel to the U.S. presidency carried tangible economic value beyond its diplomatic symbolism. From the perspective of the chief negotiator, the BoP thus promised to serve multiple Level I objectives at once, status, access, and leverage. This convergence of incentives helps explain why the decision to join was made swiftly and at the highest level, with limited consultation. Yet it is precisely this kind of top-heavy, opportunity-driven decision-making that two-level games theory warns against: by privileging the international table, the negotiator risks committing to positions that the domestic table cannot ratify, setting the stage for the involuntary defection that followed.

*b. The Domestic Table (Level II): Why Troops, Not Money?*

Indonesia's Level II win-set for any case involving Israel was extraordinarily narrow. The ISEAS State of Southeast Asia Survey (2024) demonstrated that Indonesian public opinion on the Gaza conflict was the most consistently pro-Palestine among ASEAN nations. Husna et al. (2025) documented how the MUI fatwa on boycotting Israeli products created 'social pressures encouraging boycott conformity' that had become institutionalized in everyday consumer behavior. Rachmadhani (2025) reinforced this finding by demonstrating that the MUI fatwa possessed a robust Islamic legal foundation through the I'Tibār Al-Maālāt approach. Aswar (2026) showed that Indonesia's political opportunity structure post-2023 was highly conducive to public mobilization on Gaza, Islamic organizations, social media, and student groups all constituted active actors at Level II.

Under these conditions of an extremely narrow Level II win-set, paying USD 1 billion to the Trump-led BoP would have been immediately interpreted as 'paying for normalization.' This fell entirely outside any conceivable Level II win-set. The 'troops not money' choice was a classic two-level games negotiation

solution: an attempt to expand the Level II win-set by reframing from 'financial contribution to a pro-Israel forum' to 'contribution of neutral peacekeeping forces.' The emphasis on 'medical and engineering' roles, rather than combat, constituted an additional framing layer. In audience costs terms (Fearon, 1994), this reframing reduced the political cost of the BoP association by obscuring the degree to which the commitment could be construed as backing a pro-Israel agenda.

The choice of troops over money also carried a symbolic logic that resonated with the domestic audience's moral framework. Peacekeeping contributions occupy a revered place in Indonesian strategic culture: the Garuda Contingent, deployed under United Nations auspices since 1957, is a recurring source of national pride and a concrete expression of the constitutional mandate to participate in maintaining world order. By framing the BoP contribution as a continuation of this honored peacekeeping tradition, rather than as endorsement of a contested diplomatic forum, the government attempted to fold a politically risky commitment into an existing and broadly legitimate national narrative. This reframing illustrates a subtle point in two-level games theory: negotiators do not merely accept the domestic win-set as given but actively work

to reshape its boundaries through strategic communication. For a time, this framing succeeded in keeping the domestic table viable. Its ultimate failure stemmed not from the framing itself, which was skillful, but from an exogenous shock that no rhetorical strategy could absorb, the subject of the analysis that follows.

The scale of this commitment relative to Indonesia's actual capacity is striking, and it is worth quantifying before turning to the external shock that followed. Table 1 sets out the relevant figures, and Figure 2 renders the same gap visually.

**Table 1. Indonesia's Peacekeeping Capacity: Actual Deployment vs. BoP Commitment**

| Dimension                                 | Data                 | Source                          | Analytical Implication                                   |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Actual UN mission contribution (Feb 2025) | <b>~3,400 troops</b> | Statista, 2026                  | Verified baseline of peacekeeping capacity               |
| BoP troop commitment                      | <b>8,000 troops</b>  | Min. Sec. of State, 10 Feb 2026 | 135% larger than total current UN deployment             |
| Gap: commitment vs. actual                | <b>+4,600 troops</b> | Authors' calculation            | BoP commitment exceeds realistic capacity—L1 preceded L2 |

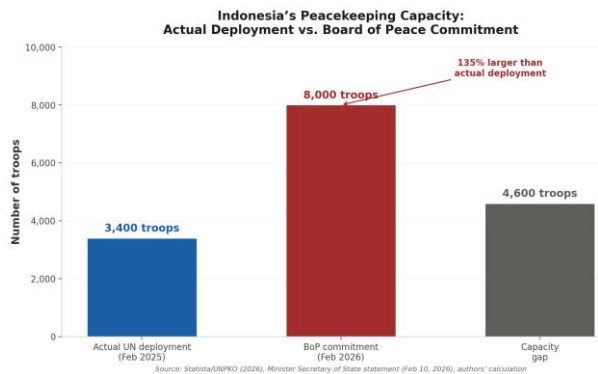
*Source:* Statista (2026), Minister Secretary of State's statement (February 10, 2026), authors' calculation.

The same disparity is presented graphically in Figure 2, where the height of

each bar makes the magnitude of the gap immediately apparent.

Together, Table 1 and Figure 2 reveal the depth of the mismatch. At the time of the announcement, data from Statista (2026) indicates that Indonesia had approximately 3,400 personnel deployed in active UN missions. The BoP commitment of 8,000 troops alone represented 135 percent more than Indonesia's entire current peacekeeping contribution, a gap of 4,600 personnel. This disparity constitutes a classic indicator of what Putnam (1988) described as a decision in which the Level I negotiator makes promises beyond the ratification capacity of Level II. The commitment was made primarily on the basis of Level I calculations, diplomatic impression management vis-à-vis Trump, rather than on a realistic assessment of institutional capacity. This finding reinforces Laksmana's (2025) argument that Indonesia's current foreign policy tends toward what Utama (2025) characterized as 'visibility without vision.'

**Figure 2. Peacekeeping Capacity Gap:  
Actual Deployment vs. Board of Peace  
Commitment**



Source: Statista/UNPKO (2026), Minister Secretary of State's statement (February 10, 2026), authors' calculation.

**c. Presidential–Ministerial Contradictions: Bureaucratic Politics within Two-Level Games**

Putnam (1988, p. 456) acknowledged that the ‘chief negotiator’ does not always exercise full control over the domestic actors who help shape Level II. The BoP case demonstrated this mechanism with striking clarity. When the Minister Secretary of State and other officials signaled that Indonesia was evaluating permanent membership options requiring USD 1 billion, they effectively tightened the Level II win-set from within. The president’s subsequent statement in late February asserting ‘I never said I was willing to pay USD 1 billion’ was not merely a clarification it was a maneuver to

restore the Level II win-set that had been inadvertently narrowed by his own ministers. In Fearon’s (1994) terms, the ministerial signals raised the audience costs of BoP membership by shifting the public’s perception of the commitment from ambiguous participation to explicit financial endorsement.

Laksmana (2025) described the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the current administration as ‘lethargic’ and ‘dominated by loyalists,’ meaning the foreign policy vetting capacity was severely diminished. Nastitie (2025) documented that ‘political communication blunders from high-ranking officials occur almost every two days’ during the administration’s first year. This pattern is consistent with Allison and Halperin’s (1972) bureaucratic politics model: when foreign policy architecture is personalized around the presidential figure without strong coordination mechanisms, sub-games among state actors become uncoordinated and produce contradictions that damage the win-sets of both levels.

**d. Win-Set Incompatibility and Suspension: When Both Tables Cannot Be Satisfied**

The U.S.-Israel attack on Iran on February 28, 2026 dramatically and suddenly altered the entire win-set

configuration. At Level I, remaining in the BoP after the attack, while Indonesia had just signed a defense agreement with Russia three weeks earlier (Kremlin, 2025), would send a highly problematic signal. At Level II, association with a forum now directly connected to a military attack on a Muslim country completely closed the win-set that had been painstakingly kept open through ‘peacekeeping troops’ framing. The audience costs of continued membership became, in Fearon’s (1994) terms, absolute: no reframing could reduce the domestic political price of association with the BoP after the Iran attack.

Within the logic of Putnam’s (1988, p. 438) two-level games, suspension is the rational response when the Level I and Level II win-sets become an empty set. The ‘on hold’ declared by the Minister Secretary of State on March 17 was not a diplomatic failure in the conventional sense; it was an expression of an involuntary defection imposed by external environmental change beyond the negotiator’s control. As Bjola and Manor (2018, p. 18) observed, in the digital age, such environmental shifts afford governments no time to manage perceptions, public reaction at Level II had already crystallized before the government could formulate an official response.

#### ***e. Alternative Scenarios: Why Suspension Was the Most Probable Outcome***

To strengthen the analytical claim that suspension was structurally determined rather than contingent, it is useful to consider several alternative courses of action Indonesia could have taken, and to explain through the two-level games logic why each was less viable than the path actually chosen. The first alternative would have been for Indonesia to refuse BoP membership from the outset. While this would have preserved the Level II win-set intact, it was improbable given the strength of Level I incentives identified earlier: the appetite for global peacemaker recognition, the direct channel to Washington amid tariff negotiations, and the operational code’s framing of the BoP as a stage to champion Palestine (Putra, 2025). For a leader whose foreign policy is personalized and oriented toward visibility (Utama, 2025), declining a high-profile invitation alongside Trump would have foregone substantial Level I gains.

The second alternative would have been to pay the USD 1 billion membership fee. This option was the least viable, because it would have placed Indonesia’s position entirely outside any conceivable Level II win-set. As demonstrated by the intensity of public mobilization (Aswar,

2026) and the institutionalized boycott norms backed by MUI fatwas (Husna et al., 2025; Rachmadhani, 2025), a direct financial transfer to a Trump-led forum would have been read unambiguously as ‘paying for normalization’, generating audience costs (Fearon, 1994) far exceeding any Level I benefit.

The third alternative is the most analytically interesting: had the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran not occurred, Indonesia might have sustained its ambiguous middle position for a considerably longer period. Under this counterfactual, the ‘troops not money’ framing could have continued to hold the two win-sets in fragile overlap. This scenario underscores the central role of external shock: the suspension was triggered not by domestic pressure alone, which the government had been managing, but by an exogenous geopolitical event that collapsed the remaining overlap.

A final pair of alternatives concerns the response at the moment of crisis itself, once membership was already in place: formal withdrawal and a quiet downgrading of commitment without suspension. Each can be assessed through the same win-set logic. Formal withdrawal would have decisively satisfied Level II, but at a disproportionate Level I cost: it would have permanently closed the international win-

set, burning the diplomatic channel to Washington that Indonesia had joined the BoP to secure, with no prospect of reopening it. Suspension achieved the same domestic relief while preserving strategic ambiguity, keeping the Level I option alive for a future in which conditions might change. Downgrading commitment without suspending sits at the opposite extreme: it would have been too weak to satisfy Level II, because after the Iran attack any continued association with the forum had become politically toxic, and a merely reduced commitment would still have read as endorsement. Suspension thus emerges not as the only conceivable move but as the optimal point between two unviable extremes less destructive of Level I than formal withdrawal, yet more credible at Level II than downgrading. This is precisely why the government converged on it.

Taken together, these scenarios confirm that suspension was the most probable outcome once the external environment shifted, while demonstrating that it was selected from a genuine range of options rather than by default.

#### ***f. Comparative Perspective: Indonesia Among the BoP’s Muslim-Majority Members***

Indonesia's trajectory becomes more analytically meaningful when placed alongside the other Muslim-majority states that joined the BoP. Although a full comparative study lies beyond the scope of this single case analysis, a brief juxtaposition illuminates why the two-level games dynamic was especially acute in the Indonesian case. The BoP's membership spanned states with markedly different domestic configurations: some were monarchies or semi-authoritarian systems in which the ratification constraint of Level II is comparatively weak, since rulers face limited electoral accountability and can suppress or disregard public dissent; others were states with closer pre-existing diplomatic ties to the United States, which lowered the audience costs of association. In Fearon's framework, states with weaker domestic audiences, those less able to generate credible costs for their leaders, enjoy greater latitude to sustain controversial international commitments.

Indonesia sat at the opposite end of this spectrum. As the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, it combined an intensely engaged public, a vibrant and pluralistic civil society, influential religious authorities, and competitive electoral politics, precisely the conditions under which Level II audience costs are maximized. The very features that make

Indonesia a consolidated democracy also made its Level II win-set the narrowest and least pliable among the BoP's members on any issue touching Israel. This comparison reinforces a central theoretical claim: the structural incompatibility that produced Indonesia's suspension was not an idiosyncratic failure of Indonesian diplomacy but a predictable consequence of attempting to reconcile a maximalist Level I commitment with one of the most constraining Level II environments in the entire forum. Where authoritarian members could absorb the same external shock with minimal domestic reverberation, Indonesia's democratic openness transmitted that shock directly and forcefully into its foreign policy, leaving suspension as the only viable response. The comparison thus suggests that democratic middle powers face a distinctive and under-theorized vulnerability in high-visibility multilateral commitments, a vulnerability that intensifies as digital media accelerate the domestic transmission of audience costs.

***g. Implications: Visibility without Vision and the Limits of Diplomatic Architecture***

Utama (2025) from the Lowy Institute characterized Indonesia's first-year diplomacy as 'visibility without vision.' The BoP case is the sharpest

illustration of this diagnosis. Indonesia joined a forum whose Level II win-set was extremely narrow, without adequate calculation of how to maintain that position if the environment changed. Priamarizki (2024, p. 21) demonstrated that ‘domestic agendas, including the interests and aspirations of Indonesian politicians as well as public opinion, have led to variations in the country’s hedging behaviours.’ The Level II win-set formed by Indonesian Muslim public sentiment did not merely constrain choices at Level I, it actively forced a diplomatic posture shift when the domestic pressure threshold was breached.

This pattern is likely to recur. As long as Indonesia’s foreign policy architecture remains personalized and lacks robust vetting mechanisms, Level I decisions that disregard Level II win-set calculations will continue to produce volatility that damages Indonesia’s credibility. The oligarchic dynamics within Indonesia’s political system (Winters, 2023) further compound this vulnerability, as patronage networks incentivize loyalty over institutional competence in foreign policy appointments, precisely the ‘loyalist-dominated’ pattern Laksmana (2025) identified.

Having traced the dynamics of each phase analytically, it is useful to consolidate

the entire episode in a single overview. Table 2 presents the full chronology of events mapped onto the two-level games framework, while Figure 3 traces the corresponding trajectory of pressure at both levels.

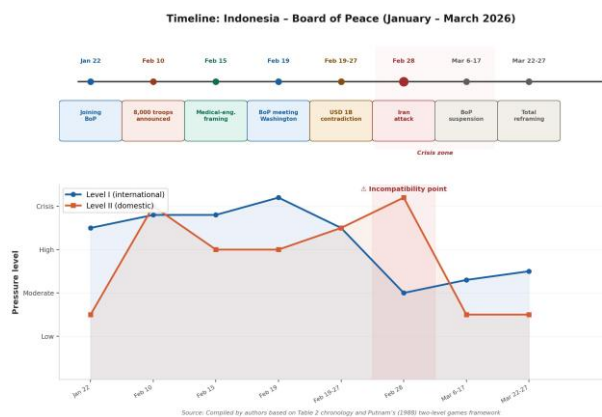
**Table 2. Chronology of Indonesia–  
Board of Peace within the Two-Level  
Games Framework (January–March  
2026)**

| Date      | No. | Key Event                                                                   | Pressure               | Two-Level Games Note                                                    |
|-----------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 22 Jan    | 1   | Signing of BoP charter in Davos with Trump                                  | L1 High / L2 Low       | L2 win-set unidentified. Top-down decision without public consultation. |
| 10 Feb    | 2   | Announcement of 8,000 TNI troops for Gaza                                   | L1 High / L2 Surging   | Muslim public protests erupt. ‘Troops not money’ framing begins.        |
| 15 Feb    | 3   | TNI: 1,000 by April; 8,000 by June. Medical & engineering focus.            | L1 High / L2 Moderate  | Medical-engineering framing expands L2 win-set.                         |
| 19 Feb    | 4   | President attends BoP inaugural meeting, Washington D.C.                    | L1 Peak / L2 Moderate  | ‘Troops not USD 1 billion’ = two-level games solution.                  |
| 19–27 Feb | 5   | President: ‘I never said I was willing to pay USD 1 billion.’               | L1 Mod. / L2+L1        | Bureaucratic politics: president and ministers on different boards.     |
| 28 Feb    | 6   | U.S. and Israel attack Iran. Massive geostrategic escalation.               | L1 Crisis / L2 Crisis  | Win-sets irreconcilable. Suspension = only rational move.               |
| 6–17 Mar  | 7   | MoFA suspends all BoP discussions. ‘Everything is on hold.’                 | L1 On Hold / L2 Relief | Suspension satisfies L2 but damages L1 credibility.                     |
| 22–27 Mar | 8   | President: ‘Indonesia ready to leave BoP if it does not benefit Palestine.’ | L2 Reinforced          | Reframing: ‘BoP member’ → ‘conditional pro-Palestine contributor.’      |

*Source:* Reuters, Middle East Monitor, Antara News, CNBC Indonesia, Tempo.co, CNN Indonesia (2026). Compiled by authors.

The pressure dynamics implied by this chronology are plotted in Figure 3, which tracks the intensity of Level I and Level II pressure across the eight key events.

**Figure 3. Timeline of Eight Key Events with Level I and Level II Pressure Indicators (January–March 2026)**



*Source:* Compiled by authors based on Table 2 chronology and Putnam's (1988) two-level games framework.

The two pressure lines in Figure 3, blue for Level I (international) and red for Level II (domestic), reveal a telling pattern. Level I pressure remained relatively stable-high throughout the period, while Level II pressure fluctuated sharply and peaked at two critical moments: the 8,000 troops announcement (February 10) and the Iran attack (February 28). The crisis zone on February 28 marks the point at which both pressure lines reached their peaks simultaneously, producing the empty set

condition. This visual pattern reinforces the analytical finding that the suspension decision was not a diplomatic failure, but a rational response to structural incompatibility. Crucially, the speed with which Level II pressure surged on both occasions—within hours rather than days, underscores Bjola and Manor's (2018) argument that digital-age two-level games afford governments almost no time to manage narratives before domestic audiences have already formed their judgments.

## Conclusion

This article try to demonstrated that the Board of Peace case constitutes an empirical demonstration of the most central concept in Putnam's (1988) two-level games: the condition in which two negotiating tables can no longer be satisfied simultaneously. Over seven weeks between January and March 2026, Indonesia managed, with considerable difficulty, to keep both win-sets viable through a series of framing maneuvers, the most concrete being the choice to contribute troops rather than pay USD 1 billion. When the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran on February 28 dramatically altered the geopolitical configuration, no position remained that could satisfy both tables, and suspension became the only rationally available move.

Three substantive findings merit emphasis. First, the contradiction between presidential and ministerial statements regarding the USD 1 billion was not a communication anomaly, it was a symptom of a personalized foreign policy architecture lacking adequate institutional vetting mechanisms, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Second, the commitment of 8,000 troops exceeding 135 percent of Indonesia's entire current peacekeeping deployment (Figure 2) demonstrates that the BoP accession decision was dominated by Level I calculations without realistic Level II capacity assessment, the audience costs of this overcommitment (Fearon, 1994) became apparent only after domestic backlash materialized. Third, digitalization, as theorized by Bjola and Manor (2018) and Baum and Potter (2019), has transformed the speed of Level II pressure (Figure 3), rendering gradual narrative management impossible in an era of real-time information.

Beyond its empirical findings, this study carries a broader theoretical implication for the two-level games literature. Putnam's original framework was developed primarily with reference to established Western democracies negotiating economic and security agreements in a pre-digital era. The BoP case suggests that the framework retains

considerable explanatory power when extended to a digitally connected democratic middle power in the Global South, but only when supplemented with audience costs theory and an account of digital acceleration. The Indonesian experience indicates that for such states, the Level II win-set is becoming both narrower and more volatile: narrower because identity-laden issues mobilize intense and homogeneous public preferences, and more volatile because digital media compress the time available for narrative management. This points toward a research agenda on what might be termed 'compressed two-level games,' in which the classic sequential logic of international bargaining followed by domestic ratification collapses into a near-simultaneous and continuously contested process.

This study is not without limitations. As a single case study, its findings are analytically rather than statistically generalizable; the mechanisms identified here require testing against other cases before firm cross-national conclusions can be drawn. The absence of access to internal government deliberations means that the reconstruction of decision-making remains inferential, based on observable behavior and public statements. The comparative observations regarding other BoP members are necessarily

preliminary and would benefit from dedicated country-level analysis. Finally, because the BoP episode was still unfolding at the time of writing, this analysis represents a snapshot that future developments may complicate or enrich. These limitations, however, also delineate a productive agenda for subsequent research.

The BoP case ultimately opens an important research agenda for Indonesian foreign policy scholarship and for the study of middle-power diplomacy more broadly. How will Indonesia's Level II win-set evolve in the context of intensifying great power competition and a Palestinian question that shows no sign of resolution? To what extent will diplomatic personalization continue to weaken institutional vetting capacity, and what reforms might strengthen it? And how can democratic middle powers design coordination mechanisms capable of maintaining coherence between Level I ambitions and Level II realities in an era of real-time public scrutiny? These questions transcend the BoP case and touch upon the core challenge of Indonesian foreign policy going forward, while also providing fertile ground for further investigation by scholars, particularly in the field of International Relations.

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