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Da'wah Resurgence And Political Islam In Malaysia

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Abstract

Islamic da'wah in Malaysia has given and is still giving a gigantic impact on the country in many aspects of life, especially politics. Through library research and observation, this study tries to address the relationship between Islamic da'wah and politics in general terms before examining it in some details in regard with Malaysia itself. It further attempts to discover the reasons behind the Islamic da'wah resurgence and its impact on Malaysia's politics. The study suggests that by Islamic da'wah resurgence, Islam has become pivotal to the politics in Malaysia basically when the government co-opted Islamism which resulted it to become the instrument of Islamisation and the advancement of the religion has since been used as the modus Vivendi for many da'wah groups and individuals.

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Keywords: Da'wah, resurgence

The term 'da'wah resurgence' does not mean any different to the term of 'Islamic resurgence' which is used widely when considering *al-sahwah* or the resurgence of political Islam, except that it refers to *al-da'wah* as being the reason, in many cases, behind the resurgence itself, especially what this paper is going to discuss. *Al-da'wah* is an important concept in Islam that implies an obligation of all Muslims to undertake the duty of conveying the messages of Islam into all mankind. The duty is summoned by Islam for the Muslims to call people to worship Allah as the God, the 'only' God (Surat al-Nahl: 36) and establish Islam as the way of life (Ali Imran: 85). According to Abdullah Muhammad Zin 1990), *al-da'wah* entails some other terms in Islam such as encouraging people to establish Islam such as *jihad* in the way of Allah, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, warning the bad news and announce the good news which are stated clearly in the *Quran* and *Hadith*, two most important books of Islam. Malaysia in particular, experienced the transformation of da'wah into Islamic resurgence which is sometimes

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referred as political Islam.

Islamic da'wah resurgence is suggested as being an attempt to retrieve or to revamp a type of Islamicly ruled state which at some point had been demolished since the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate. The Islamists believe that Islam possesses a specific theory on politics and the states. Perhaps, the dogma that Islam is both 'a religion and a state' or '*din wa dawlah*' as suggested by Al-Mawdudi (1997) is a widely held opinion amongst Muslims. In fact, the major *raison d'être* for a 'rebellion' in Muslim world is due to the embracement of secular value by states rulers who are seemed to ignore the *Shariah*.

DA'WAH AND MUSLIM POLITICS

While politics can be defined as the process by which groups of people make decision and also the science of government, a number of Muslim scholars, traditionally and contemporarily, have written on the theory of *as-siyasah ash-shar'iyah* or what the writer would translate as Islamic politics. Khallaf (1998) defines it as 'to administrate the general of an Islamic state in terms what can bring goodness and prevent badness in accordance to Islam'. In addition, the prominent Muslim scholar and ideologue, Yousuf Al-Qaradhawi (2007) argues that even the word *siyasah* (politics) is not mentioned in the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, many verses indicate towards it by using words such as *al-mulk* (the reign) and *al-hukm* (the rule).

It was apparent that a wave of political frustration was growing between the ruling Muslim elites and Islamist activists who doubt the powers of the former. The latter demand a state and society wherein social values and principles adhere solely to the tenets of Islam, including bureaucracy. Muslims in general began to question their religious identity *vis-à-vis* the secular nation-state system, especially within the contemporary, globalised community. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emerge of what so called 'authoritarianism crisis' in the Muslim world which stretch from Indonesia to Morocco, Islamist activists have actively engaged in da'wah and political arena by adapting democracy as a viable alternative to have their voiced heard as well as to gain power. Muslim politics, as Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (1996: 5) termed it can be defined as "the competition and contest over both the interpretation of symbols and control of the institutions".

The battle, by no other means, is entirely a fight between Muslim rulers and Islamists who generally want to live more Islamic than what they get in their countries. Neither patriotism nor nationalism encouraged to this antagonism, rather the utopian portion of 'Islamic state' is the *raison d'être* behind this vendetta. Therefore, 'political Islam' as explained by Nazih Ayubi (1991), is a kind of protest movement against 'un-Islamic' states.

Political Islam sometimes referred to as 'Islamic fundamentalism', as pointed out by Esposito (1997: 1), is a global and diverse phenomenon. While some Islamic resistances are clearly engaging in arm movements and reject the existing politics to achieve power, there are many others that take peaceful steps by embracing a democratic system and participating in elections to win parliament and to serve in cabinet positions.

Though it was suggested that most Muslim countries, following their independences, turned to their western allies for development model, 'Islam' has proven to be a major force in the public life of many Muslim societies since late 1960s or early 70s in social, economics and politics. Islam has therefore been the source of political development and symbol of political legitimacy in global scope. In addition, Muslim governments too have appealed to Islam to keep them in authority and to gain popular support. The Muslim *ummah* embraced both 'church' and state, and looking to the early and past Islamic community as an example. (Derek Hopwood: 1971)

Islamic da'wah movements represent modern Islamic resurgence by driving dynamics and effective social services by running charity organisations around the globe. From Indonesia to Morocco, Islamic da'wah groups in Muslim countries have increasingly clashed with their own governments. They gain support through the label and under the banner of 'Islam' and also by rising global political issues concerning Islam, and issues concerning corruption and social illness within their countries (Nasr: 2001 and Esposito: 1997). Politics in the Muslim world in recent years has indicated a growing rebellion of Muslim societies towards the West as well as towards their own rulers. Muslim countries in the post-independence period were abandoning Islam *en masse* and this was considered by Muslim revivalists or Islamists as the impact and legacy of western colonial rules. (Babaer: 1993)

ISLAM, DA'WAH AND POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, the status of Malay is synonymous to Islam. For the Malays the concept of being Malay is not solely to do with ethnicity. Today, the term is fairly understood by the populace. However, the picture is not clear as the Federal Constitution defines 'Malay' as one who professes the religion of Islam, speaks the Malay language habitually and conforms to its customs. Technically means that anyone can be Malay if the conditions above are

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