

# **Islam in Southeast Asia: Analysing Recent Developments**

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## AN ISLAMACIST'S VIEW OF AN ISLAMIC STATE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY

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## **About the Speaker**

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## **THE RECENT RESURGENCE OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN INDONESIA**

I must confess when I received this invitation to speak, I did not read the topic assigned to me all that carefully. Yesterday after I read the title again, I hope I am not going to disappoint all of you here, because if you really look for signs of a political resurgence of Islam in Indonesia, it is very difficult to find them.

Of course, there has always been a substantial Islamic presence in Indonesian politics since the 1950s. In a country where 87% of the population are followers of Islam, it is hardly surprising that Muslims have always played, and will continue to play, a prominent role in domestic politics. But it is important to be clear about what we mean by the term “political Islam”. When we speak of political Islam, we are not talking about Muslims being involved in politics, but Muslim politicians whose political agenda is inspired by distinctively Islamic concerns. When we look at the political parties in Indonesia, they themselves distinguish between what they call “inclusive” and “exclusive” parties. An inclusive party would be a party which includes both Muslims and non-Muslims. Non-Muslims, for instance, can also be members of parties such as Megawati’s PDI-P (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* or the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle), or Gus Dur’s PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* or National Awakening Party); GOLKAR is another inclusive party as one does not have to be a Muslim to be a member of GOLKAR. But the PPP, headed by the present Vice President, Hamzah Haz, is an exclusive party, an Islamic party, with only Muslim members. The Crescent and Star Party (PBB), a much smaller party, is another solely Islamic party; the Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan*) is another example. Amien Rais’ PAN (*Partai Amanat Nasional*) used to be inclusive although it now has “exclusivists” within it. This distinction is not a hundred per cent clear and straightforward, but basically one can distinguish between

parties that have an explicitly Islamic agenda and those who have a much broader agenda.

So is there an Islamic resurgence in Indonesia?

Assuming there is, you would expect to see the rising influence of these exclusivist parties. On the contrary, in the 1999 election, the first genuinely free election in Indonesia since 1955, the three main exclusivist parties only managed to garner 14% of the combined votes. Of course, there are numerous exclusive parties who obtained, say, 0.02% of the election votes and if you add in a few of the more “exclusive-minded” people within Amien Rais’ PAN, maybe the figure would go up to about 20%. What this means is that 80% of Indonesians voted against political parties with exclusively Islamic agendas. So, you can see there is not much of a resurgence there. Incidentally, it is some of the smaller exclusivist parties that are calling for the reintroduction of the so-called “Jakarta Charter”<sup>1</sup> into the Constitution. The Jakarta Charter provides the basis for the implementation of Islamic (*shari’ah*) law. But as I said, 80% of Indonesians are not voting for such parties. There is absolutely no chance that Islamic law will be implemented in Indonesia.

These days, there are very few things that you can say with certainty in Indonesia, and very few predictions you can make with certainty. But I will say with absolute confidence that Indonesia will not, in our lifetime, adopt Islamic law. That is one of the few certainties in Indonesian politics. What we are witnessing is hardly resurgence. In fact, the 20% figure obtained by the exclusive Muslim parties and the exclusivist elements within PAN is close to the figure that the Masyumi party, the old Islamic party of the 1950s, gathered in the 1955 election. There is a remarkable continuity there. Of course, Islamic parties are also concerned with issues that are not distinctively Islamic. They are concerned with issues of economic recovery, maintenance of national unity, democratization, management of ethnic conflicts and others. All these issues are also concerns for the exclusive parties just as they are for other parties.

In the last few months, there has been an impression that Islam is on the rise again in Indonesia and this could be partly attributed to the emergence of radical Islamic groups which had been very prominent in protesting against the American bombing of Afghanistan. But these developments have to be seen in perspective. The

televised images of demonstrations in front of the American Embassy seem to suggest that there is a mass movement going on in the streets. The main group organizing these demonstrations in Jakarta is the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defense Front or FPI) whose past activities include raids on bars and brothels and anti-alcohol drives. They have been in the forefront in organizing demonstrations against the American Embassy. The normal number mobilized by the FPI in front of the American Embassy has been about 1,000 out of the 10 million in Jakarta's environs. It is also the FPI that has been advocating "sweeping" foreigners out of Indonesia; Americans and citizens of allied countries such as Australia were to be "swept" as a form of protest against American policies regarding Afghanistan.

Despite all these talk and reports of "sweeping", the total number of foreigners swept out of Indonesia by the FPI is precisely zero. There may be some foreigners who left Indonesia because they were afraid of being "swept", so there is an intimidatory effect. But no one was actually "swept" despite reports about this movement. The biggest protest in Jakarta was organized by the Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan*) which is one of the ideologically radical Islamic parties in Indonesia. They had about 10,000 demonstrators during that protest. But we must remember that the Justice Party only managed to obtain 1% of the total vote in the 1999 election. To me, the Justice Party's demonstration was a completely orderly, non-violent, very disciplined demonstration. It is in fact a perfect example of democracy. If a radical Islamic party wishes to organize a rally in front of the American Embassy to protest about a certain policy, I do not think we should be worried about that, as it was a non-violent protest.

An American newspaper reported about an Islamic uprising in Jakarta on the basis of this demonstration. I just cannot see any Islamic uprising in Jakarta from the events in the last couple of months. There has also been speculation about a possible al-Qaeda presence in Indonesia. To a large degree, I believe this information came from the American Embassy in Jakarta. I think we need to distinguish between an al-Qaeda presence and al-Qaeda influence in Indonesian political and other organizations. If you are talking about an al-Qaeda presence in Indonesia, we read that al-Qaeda is supposed to be present in 60 countries throughout the world. Even in the United States itself, the American intelligence agencies were not aware of the



presence of terrorists who attacked the World Trade Centre, so I have no way of knowing whether there is a small cell of twenty al-Qaeda members somewhere in Indonesia. There could very well be. If there were, I suspect that their targets would be more American than Indonesian. I can understand Americans' anxieties but we have to distinguish between this and the unproven assertion that the al-Qaeda organization has great influence among Indonesian Muslims.

Americans have been saying that al-Qaeda has influenced several Indonesian organizations, and again I suspect they usually quote American intelligence sources. Let me give you an example. A well written article in the New York Times reported in early October that: "Armed Islamic fundamentalist groups [in Indonesia] have received money, men and arms from the bin Laden group and its allies". And this particular article mentioned two organizations, in particular FPI and the *Laskar Jihad* (Jihad Force). In fact there are dozens of small splinter groups in Indonesia. The article citing American intelligence sources mentioned by name FPI plus the Laskar Jihad. I have personally been to the FPI headquarters in Jakarta and have spoken to the leader of the FPI and some of his followers. My conclusion from those discussions, and from observing the way the headquarters was run, is that if the al-Qaeda organization is financing the FPI, they are wasting their money. It is a quite unsophisticated grassroots organization. Their preferred weapon is a big stick which they use to smash up bars and bottles of beer and so on, chasing and intimidating customers from massage parlours. There are no airline pilots among the members of the FPI.

The Laskar Jihad is, however, a different organization, far more sophisticated with elaborate organization. The Laskar Jihad is an organization that was formed early last year with the aim to train and send Muslims from Java to other parts of Indonesia, particularly to fight against Christians in Maluku. It was formed specifically for that purpose. American reports suggested that Osama bin Laden supplied arms to a radical fundamental group in Indonesia (i.e. Laskar Jihad), but in reality, the arms that the Laskar Jihad managed to get hold of in Maluku were arms from the Indonesian Armed Forces. They do not have to turn to bin Laden to get those arms. To be accurate, I should say rather that elements within the Indonesian Armed Forces supplied these arms. Sometimes I think those arms are directly sold,

not because of ideologically sympathy but because of economics, that is, poorly paid soldiers selling arms and munitions.

It has been reported in the international press that planeloads of Afghans and Arabs have been flown into Maluku to back up and reinforce the Laskar Jihad's struggle against Christians there. Last week, I was in Maluku and I was particularly interested in verifying this because I doubted the reports. I could find no one in Maluku who believed there were hundreds of Afghans or Arabs in Maluku. Of course, it was possible that a few come in, a dozen or so, but there is definitely no massive influx of Arabs, Afghans and Pakistanis into Maluku.

In the case of the Laskar Jihad, another point that has often been overlooked by the international media is that there is a fundamental ideological difference between the leaders of the Laskar Jihad and Osama bin Laden. The Laskar Jihad people regard Saudi Arabia as a model Islamic state implementing Islamic law. Yet Osama bin Laden is considered as a rebel against the Saudi Arabian state. The Laskar Jihad has been dismissive and condemnatory of Osama bin Laden. It is hard to imagine that there is a close working relationship between them. As I said, there are also dozens of Laskar Jihad type organizations in small towns throughout Indonesia but there are arguably more of the Pembela Islam type, the unsophisticated, grassroots organizations.

Let me just conclude with a few general comments about Islamic conflicts or violence involving Muslims in Indonesia because this is also perceived to be a sign of rising Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia. There are three places where there is major conflict involving armed Muslims in Indonesia. One is in Aceh. But we must bear in mind that the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM) is basically fighting for independence, not for an Islamic state. If one looks at the religious outlook of the GAM leaders compared with the religious outlook of other Achenese, there is no sharp dividing line. One cannot say that GAM is fundamentalist, while the others are not. They are just Achenese — some want independence, some do not. The struggle in Aceh by GAM is not a case of resurgence of Islam, it is essentially a case of discontentment with Jakarta's dominance. It is not a resurgence — the desire and struggle for independence has been going on for many years in Aceh. In Maluku, there is fighting between Muslims

and Christians. The origins of the conflicts are very complex — it is not a clear-cut case of Islam versus Christianity by any means. It is really between two communities that have been identified in religious terms. But the Ambonese Muslims are not particularly fundamentalist — it is essentially a communal conflict between communities identified in terms of religion. The Laskar Jihad has inserted itself into the Maluku conflict so there appears to be a fundamentalist element there, but as far as the Ambonese themselves are concerned, they are not particularly fundamentalist in their religious orientation.

Finally there is also a similar conflict going on between the Christians and Muslims in South Sulawesi. But the core of the problem there is not Christians and Muslims, but indigenous people versus transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia; indigenous people happened to be Christians, the outsiders happened to be Muslims. It is more an ethnic rather than a religious conflict. Again, the Laskar Jihad is inserting itself into that and introducing a much stronger Islamic element. Again, it is a case of communal conflict running out of control in Indonesia rather than an upsurge of Islamism.

In conclusion, if one wants to explain Islamic violence in Indonesia (and there is certainly an increase in violence), I think the focus should not be so much on Islamic groups but on the general breakdown of law and order, and authority, in Indonesia which affects Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and any one else in Indonesia. It is this general breakdown that has allowed the emergence of violence rather than a particular Islamic sort of uprising.

## NOTES

1. At the early stages of formulation of the 1945 Constitution, Muslim leaders wanted to introduce the Jakarta Charter, a seven word statement that stipulated that Muslims should follow the Islamic law, into the Constitution. But this stipulation was dropped due to opposition from Christian and other secular nationalist leaders.



### **About the Speaker**

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## **AN ISLAMACIST'S VIEW OF AN ISLAMIC STATE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY**

Among established observers of post-colonial Malaysia, it has been customary to label Malaysia's politics as being dominated by its multi-racial and communal character. Presenting Malaysia as a typical example of a plural society prone to democratic instability, political scientists specializing in ethnic politics have regularly come up with proposed solutions to control or regulate ethnic conflict (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, Lijphart 1977). Ethnicity was the sole moving force of Malaysian politics.

Such discourse was dominant in the 1960s and most of the 1970s, when the significance of Islam as a mobilizing factor in Malaysian politics was taken for granted by academics and politicians alike. Thus we read the oft-repeated quotations of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister: "Unless we are prepared to drown every non-Malay, we can never think of an Islamic Administration" (*Straits Times* 1.5.59, as quoted in von der Mehden 1963: 611) and "this country is not an Islamic state as it is generally understood, we merely provide that Islam shall be the official religion of the State" (quoted in Ahmad Ibrahim 1985: 217). Similar sentiments were echoed within the bureaucratic elite. For instance, Malaysia's first Lord Chief Justice, Mohamed Suffian Hashim, once wrote: "For many generations, the various ethnic groups in Malaya have lived in peace and harmony and there was no overwhelming desire that the newly independent state should be an Islamic state" (1962: 9).

Among academic observers, Rosenthal lauded the separation of religion and state as anchored in the Federal Constitution, arguing that "amid the strains and stresses inherent in such a mixed population, an Islamic state based on an Islamic ideology would not be the most appropriate institution" (1965: 287-288). In his

observations, Means (1969: 282-283; 1978: 387; 1982: 487) repeatedly postulated a decline of Islam's role in the political development of Malaysia, claiming its eventual eclipse at the hands of secular, pragmatic and rationalist Muslims.

Malaysia's strong multiracial character lends it a unique place in the Islamicist scheme of reconciling the implementation of an Islamic political order with the inherent tensions of a plural, multi-faith, multi-cultural society. Malaysia represents a test case *par excellence* of the Islamicist claim of the viability of an Islamic state peacefully and justly incorporating non-Muslim minorities into its polity. Islamic theoreticians are fond of referring to historical examples to justify such a claim (cf. Al-Qaradawi 1985), but these provide no guarantee or evidence that such a scenario may be repeated in a modern setting. Opponents argue that an Islamic state is inherently incompatible with a plural society (cf. Vatikiotis 1987: chapter 5)

Given the coterminous relationship between race and religion in Malaysia, the formal recognition of religious boundaries among Malaysians and the turbulent character of race relations, the prevailing situation does not look too promising for the Islamicist. To lay non-Muslims, no significant difference exists between an Islamic state and a state under Malay domination, with all the corresponding fear regarding discrimination, redistribution of wealth, and so on. To them, whether a state is labelled Islamic or not does not matter as much as whether their political, economic and social rights are secure under such an entity. The issue of the feasibility of an Islamic state harmoniously accommodating a multi-racial society, with its inherent strains and problems, has become polemical since the onset of Islamic resurgence in the 1970s. Malay-Muslim society has been broadly polarised between Islamicists, namely, those harbouring ambitions and attempting to "Islamise" the conduct and operations of the state, and the majority of moderate Malay-Muslims who regard the present developments as not necessarily un-Islamic. The Islamicists may be fewer in number, but they make up a significant proportion of the new middle class consisting of the intellectual, administrative and commercial elites. These elites are the products of the affirmative actions under the New Economic Policy (NEP) which began in 1971. The governing elite found itself caught between the imperative of ensuring the continued support of moderate Malay-Muslims and stemming the rising influence of Islamicists. The latter's position as potential competitors for influence of the masses

was becoming increasingly evident. The governing elites thus resorted to a “carrot and stick” policy: they combined coercive methods such as detention without trial and banning of publications with more accommodative measures such as Islamization and co-optation of Islamicists (Hussin Mutalib 1990: 134-150). While Islamicists were bent upon creating an Islamic state in the doctrinal sense (however vague their idea of it may be), the governing elite tried to convince the Malay-Muslim masses that the state in which they were living was already progressing towards an Islamic state, or at the very least, it was not un-Islamic.

This discourse reached new heights when Prime Minister Mahathir declared on 29 September 2001 that Malaysia had already acquired the status of an Islamic state. This declaration was made on the basis that significant elements of the country’s legal and administrative system had Islamic foundations (statement by Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, *Utusan Malaysia* 1.10.01). The rising prominence of Islam in the economic, educational and constitutional spheres were also taken into account (statement by Dr Ismail Ibrahim, director of the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), *Utusan Malaysia* 4.10.01; statement by Nakhaie Ahmad, head of the Malaysian *Dakwah* Foundation, *Utusan Malaysia* 1.10.01). This unequivocal decision was made after an “Islamic State Discussion” (*Muzakarah Daulah Islamiah*) on 3.8.01. Chaired by Dr Abdul Hamid Othman (the Religious Advisor to the Prime Minister), this gathering of seventy religious scholars, notables and academics, decided, on the basis of their scholarly opinions, that Malaysia qualified as an Islamic state since the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates (statement by Abdul Kader Talip, Grand *Imam* of the Putrajaya mosque, *Utusan Malaysia* 5.8.01; statement by Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman, *Utusan Malaysia* 1.10.01). By doing so, the governing elite outmaneuvered the Islamicists. Apart from claiming that Malaysia’s “Islamic state” status did not measure up to the requirements as rigidly specified by the Scriptures, the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), the primary target of the move, was unable to retort effectively (statement by Nik Aziz Nik Mat, PAS Chief Minister of Kelantan, *Utusan Malaysia* 1.10.01; statement by Haji Hadi Awang, PAS Chief Minister of Terengganu, 4.10.01). PAS, the chief protagonist of the “Islamic state” crusade, had neither an operational blueprint of an Islamic state nor a model Islamic state, despite controlling the two east coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu



(Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1999). PAS could only demand that the Prime Minister promulgate Malaysia's Islamic state status in Parliament so as to initiate a debate (statement by Fadzil Noor, PAS President, *Utusan Malaysia* 1.10.01). Having won the war of words, the governing elite did not feel obliged to respond. Earlier, PAS' unequivocal insistence on pursuing their Islamic state agenda, had led to the break-up of the opposition alliance — the *Barisan Alternatif* (BA), when the Democratic Action Party (DAP), disappointed with PAS' rigidity, withdrew from the coalition (*Mingguan Malaysia* 23.9.01, *Utusan Malaysia* 25.9.01).

This latest episode exposed major weaknesses in the Islamicists' struggle for an Islamic state. Glaring discrepancies exist between theory and practice, between the lofty ideals of an Islamic state and the on-going endeavour of practising those ideals within a multi-racial society. The minority ethnic groups could not see a living example of Islamicists co-existing harmoniously with them on equal terms. Whenever cooperation is cemented, it is always short-lived as a result of non-Muslims feeling pressured to abide by conditions stipulated by their Muslim partners, usually on terms they consider rigid. Doctrinal rigidity is given priority over winning the hearts and friendship of non-Muslims, at least as a launching pad to enlighten them on the beauty of Islamic tolerance.

Such an imbroglio, characterized by ephemeral Muslim/non-Muslim cooperation, is typical of initiatives led by "top to bottom" Islamicists. By "top to bottom Islamicists", I mean Islamicists who believe in wresting political power, above anything else, as a pre-requisite of establishing an Islamic state. They are convinced that any changes in society have to be initiated from above. As such, the Islamization process is also to be effected from the state and filters down to the wider society. In Malaysia, this trend is represented by PAS. The break-up of the *Barisan Alternatif* was not the first abortive attempt at a united multi-racial opposition front. Having rallied around a particular issue, in this instance the dismissal of and injustice meted out to the disgraced former Deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim, the nature of the cooperation would easily alter with a change in political variables. PAS does not see itself obliged to propagate effectively its message of an Islamic state to its non-Muslim coalition partners, rather it places the onus on the non-Muslims to learn and convince themselves of the relevance of an Islamic state. Perhaps PAS itself is

unclear of the form of the Islamic state it desires, and this is evident from the different measures proposed and pursued in Kelantan and Terengganu. PAS also created an unfair burden on its non-Muslim coalition partners as they had to explain to their party rank-and-file the applicability of an Islamic state (statement by Nik Aziz, *Berita Harian* 24.9.01). PAS' repeated failure to propagate effectively its message stems from its explicit and uncompromising status as a political party, thus neglecting *dakwah* or missionary aspects of Islam. This lack of communication with its non-Muslim partners begs the question: If PAS were to come to power, how could they communicate effectively and amicably with the non-Muslim masses?

Unfortunately, such rigidity has become a major trait of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia since PAS established itself as its prime voice, immediately after the Anwar Ibrahim affair, i.e. his dismissal, conviction and imprisonment, of 1998-1999 (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 2000: 44). PAS-led *reformasi* has seen a change in Islamic activism from *dakwah* to politics. The middle ground of Islamic activism, consisting of members of the rival Islamic groups, for example the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) and the Society of Islamic Reform (JIM), have espoused political causes more openly. Former ABIM and JIM members struggled to win over influence in the new National Justice Party (KeADILan) after being effectively declared as *persona non grata* in UMNO (United Malays National Organisation). They tried to infiltrate UMNO for years, causing intra-party rifts, resignations and incumbents' refusal to stand for re-election. There was widespread unease of Islamicists' attempt to hijack KeADILan from the hands of its former UMNO and NGO elements who are much better poised to assert KeADILan's multi-racial character (Baharom Mahusin, 'Keadilan di ambang kehancuran' [KeADILan on the brink of disaster], *Mingguan Malaysia* 21.10.01; 'Seorang lagi pemimpin Keadilan letak jawatan' [Another KeADILan leader resigns], *Berita Harian* 27.10.01). This latest manoeuvre ended in the dismal failure by ABIM-orientated Islamicists to grab top posts in KeADILan (statement by Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman, ABIM President, *Berita Minggu* 25.11.01; 'Keadilan lupa jasa pemimpin ABIM' [KeADILan forgets ABIM leaders], *Utusan Malaysia* 26.11.01).

The disappearance of the middle ground, i.e. the ground between *dakwah* and explicit political activity, leaves much to be desired as far as a fair understanding of

an Islamic state in a multi-racial society is concerned. The shift towards militancy, as exemplified by the Al-Mau'nah arms heist-cum-rebellion of July 2000 and the emergence of revolutionary cells operated by a hitherto obscure group, Mujahidin Group of Malaysia (KMM) — sensationalized by the media as the Militant Group of Malaysia — is indicative of the increasingly intolerant atmosphere within political Islamism, and this augurs ill for future race relations in Malaysia.

The gist of my argument is this: in a heavily multiracial society such as Malaysia, the viability and relevance of an Islamic state depends on the degree to which non-Muslims understand, appreciate and are willing to abide by the political arrangements made in such a state. Bearing in mind the fragility of race relations in Malaysia and the significant numbers of the non-Muslim minority, any attempt to impose an Islamic state on non-Muslims without their consent is bound to fail in the long term. The problem facing the Islamicists is that they have failed to produce a doctrinal Islamic state either on paper or as a living model, so that they are not capable of demonstrating an exemplary conduct of Muslim/non-Muslim relations.

Notwithstanding the gloomy prospects of an Islamic state materializing from these conventional political Islamicists, non-Muslims could be heartened by the exemplary “bottom to top” Islamic community established by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, the former leader of the now disbanded Darul Arqam movement. In 1997, with a group of one thousand former Darul Arqam members, Ustaz Ashaari formed a private limited company, Rufaqa' Corporation. The corporation is based in Bandar Country Homes, Rawang, in the Gombak district adjacent to Kuala Lumpur. Emulating his success at Darul Arqam (before the state clampdown in 1994), Ustaz Ashaari, in his capacity as Executive Chairman of Rufaqa' Corporation, initiated several successful economic projects which made headlines in the national media ('Rufaqa' terkenal di seberang laut (Rufaqa' famous overseas), *Utusan Malaysia* 8.2.00; 'Former Al-Arqam redefines itself', *New Sunday Times* 30.4.00; *Nanyang Siang Pau* 24.8.01). Despite the economic uncertainty, Rufaqa managed to build up an enterprise boasting 250 business networks and 40 different types of businesses (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 2001: 11-16, 26-27, 34-44; website [www.rufaqa.com](http://www.rufaqa.com)). But more significantly, Rufaqa' combined a strict adherence to Islamic principles and a harmonious relationship with the wider community of Bandar Country Homes, sixty

percent of whom are non-Muslims (mainly Chinese). Although still lacking a theoretical model of an Islamic state, Ustaz Ashaari's exemplary Islamic society raises hopes that it is possible to cultivate cordial Muslim/non-Muslim relations, provided the form of Islamicity implemented involves non-militant Sufism and economic activism, rather than political communalism. This suffices as a miniature Islamic state, albeit under a gagged leadership: Ustaz Ashaari is still being bound by a "restriction order" of the Internal Security Act (ISA) since October 1994.

The following observation made early this year by Lim Kwee Eng, the former President of Bandar Country Homes' Residents' Association reflects the success achieved by Ustaz Ashaari's model society:

"Islamic-oriented business here has attracted many visitors who wish to know further about it. It is not an exaggeration to say that Bandar Country Homes has achieved fame via Ashaari's businesses. In terms of human relations, Rufaqa' workers can be made an example by the local community because they exhibit highly regarded morals and respect for others. They also give assistance and cooperation in ensuring that the local community's plans are successful. The products they sell are undeniably cheaper than other goods sold here. They also have a clinic and a maternity hospital which are not too particular about prices in order to perform social obligations. Malays in Country Homes should be proud in having an entrepreneur who has successfully raised Islamic economic development in tune with the sophistication of the times. Generally, all residents of Country Homes are fond of Ashaari and his workers. He is said to be generous and helpful to the surrounding community. Personally, I have never heard them (Rufaqa') discuss politics. They are better than the political people of PAS, KEADILAN or UMNO because they speak less but rather conduct enterprises and provide occupation for locals."

(*Buletin Utama* 29.4.01-5.5.01)

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### **About the Speaker**

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## **DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN MINDANAO**

The focus of this presentation will be on the political struggle of the Filipino Muslims who felt oppressed at the hands of a Christian-dominated government and marginalized in the Philippine body politic. They aimed either to establish a secular national state or an Islamic state. Described in 1903 as the Moro province by the colonial administration of the United States and by the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) in the 1976 Tripoli agreement as the *Bangsamoro* (or Philippine Muslims<sup>1</sup>) homeland, these four provinces came to be known today as the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

There are thirteen known ethno-linguistic groups in these provinces. The three largest and politically dominant are the Maguindanaon (people of the flooded plains) of the Cotabato provinces (Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North and South Cotabato); the Maranaw (people of the lake) of the two Lanao provinces; and the Tausug (people of the current) of the Sulu archipelago. There are about 5 to 7 million Muslims in the Philippines, and this is only an approximate number because the population census tends not to report the entirety of the Muslim populations who live further afield.

This paper will examine the internal and external dynamics of the *Bangsamoro* struggle. The first factor that affects the struggle of the Muslims is the ethnic factionalism or fragmentation among the groups themselves. Most are familiar with the MNLF, founded by and led by Nur Misuari. MNLF is the original underground political front of the Muslim separatist rebellion. Misuari is the signatory to the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, the first peace agreement signed between the Muslim separatists and the Philippine government. Until recently the MNLF was the only separatist group with which the Philippine government was willing to



negotiate in any substantive way. Within the MNLF grouping, however, there are many other factions. One of which is the Islamic Command Center (ICC), a breakaway faction from the MNLF. Other breakaway factions include the MNLF-Reformist Group under Dimas Pundato, the Bangsamoro Liberation Organisation (BMLO), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) headed by Hashim Salamat. These groups emerged after the breakdown of the MNLF. There is also the very famous (or infamous) Abu Sayyaf ('father of the sword') faction that has resorted to kidnappings and killings. This group is of relatively recent origin, appearing only in 1995 and is centred on the island of Basilan. It was headed by the Abduragak Abubakar Janjalani who was killed in an encounter with the Philippines Armed Forces in December 1998; There is another newly emerging group, "Pentagon", which operates in Central Mindanao. All these groups are vying to establish political power in the region.

However, the main group that is currently negotiating with the Philippines Government is the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and they have been in negotiation since August 2001. A cease-fire agreement has been signed and a more substantive agreement is expected.

Within this context, it is important to examine government attempts to manage the conflict or its policies in these areas. From the start of the war in 1972, the government approach has been one of militarization. The Muslim areas are highly militarized; there are about five battalions now stationed in Basilan and more troops are stationed elsewhere. The last few Philippines administrations declared a "total war" policy on these provinces. This resulted in the displacement of some 500,000 people, many of whom could not return to their homes because their houses had been destroyed, their lands bombed, and their livestock killed.

The Arroyo administration reversed this "total war" policy. Because of the devastation caused by the Abu Sayyaf and the economic loss from declining tourism, another policy, known as "warrant-less arrest", was issued in its place. Many of Basilan's residents have been victims of warrant-less arrests. They were often randomly singled out by masked men and arrested. Such human rights violations have caused much resentment among the local populace.

On the other hand, there were also policies to accommodate Muslim goals. This is often done by establishing bureaucratic organizations to handle Muslim affairs. The leading organization is the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMAR). On closer examination, you would notice that before this organization, there were other transitory agencies. Each of these agencies lasted only for two to three years and the final transmutation, the OMAR in 1987, is now known as the Office of Muslim Affairs. If the agency does not transform every now and then into a new organization, its executive director would be frequently changed so much so that the programmes they proposed could not be implemented. For example, the OMAR executive director who was appointed just recently, was replaced once again by another executive director on 5 November and his programmes have been suspended. Such discontinuity of programmes is a familiar trend brought about by the frequent changes in administration.

But concessions have been granted to the Muslims and these included the appointment of the first Muslim Cabinet member, who is currently the Secretary of Department of Works and Highways. Another accommodative gesture by the government was the formation of the *Syariah* Courts (as part of the national system of courts) through the passage of the Code of Muslim Personal Laws in 1977. Yet another is the formation of agencies such as the Southern Philippines Development Agency in 1975 and the Islamic Bank in 1974 which are responsible for the economic development of the region. Even barter trade was permitted in 1973 so that Muslim barter traders can go to Malaysia and Indonesia, and bring goods back without having to pay revenues or taxes — but this has been cancelled.

Thus far, the most accommodating policy was the granting of autonomy to 13 of the 23 provinces in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan islands, and the cities located therein. The autonomous regional government would have its own executive, legislative and judicial branches, and a regional security force independent of the Philippines Armed Forces. This came under the auspices of the 1979 Tripoli Agreement during the time of President Marcos. In 1989, these areas were renamed the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The ARMM, however, did not include the required thirteen provinces but only four provinces of Lanao del Sur,

Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Now, the newly reconstituted arm has six provinces.

The Philippine government has also undertaken peace negotiations with the MNLF initially and later with the MILF. Many are familiar with the signing of the peace agreement in 1976 and the 1996 Peace Accord with the Ramos government, which resulted in the final peace agreement. The final peace agreement provided for transitory mechanisms for three years, which have now lapsed. The most successful aspect of this programme was the integration of about 7,500 MNLF groups into the Philippine Armed Forces who are now known as “integrates”. Recently the revised Organic Act was passed into Law, a plebiscite was held and a new election for the ARMM officials will be held on 26 November 2001.

In spite of these political arrangements and concessions, why do hostilities continue to exist? Because the root causes of the conflict (economic, political and cultural marginalization) were not addressed. Let us look at the material conditions of the Moro people. If one studies the human development indices, one will notice the wide development gap between the Muslims in South Philippines and the national average. The figures are self-explanatory. The national real per capita income is much higher than the averages that are found in Muslim areas. In Sulu, for example, residents there earned a meagre 8,181 pesos annually. If there are no improvements made in the material conditions of the people, political negotiated settlements will be useless. The past decades of hostilities go to demonstrate the inefficacy of the military approach that defines the Muslim armed struggle as the problem, rather than the conditions that brought about its existence.

The final internal dynamic that would affect the Muslim struggle is the growth of moral civil societies. It has been difficult for civil society to take effect in these areas because of the militancy and the willingness of people to use guns to settle scores. But presently, it is observed that the civil society movement is growing stronger. NGOs, for example, especially women’s based organizations, are attempting to close the educational gap by offering adult literacy programmes or to foster economic development through cooperatives. Recently, at a civil society conference in Davao, a referendum of the Bangsamoro people was proposed as a

means to bring peace to the region, in a manner similar to the resolution of the East Timor problem.

There are now people asking for independence because they perceived that the form of limited autonomy granted has not been successful. It might have changed the material well-being of the people, but it has not changed the local political environment. To some Moro people, there seems to be no other option except independence. Whether these independence movements will be successful remains to be seen. Simultaneously there is also the federalist movement, which is gaining strength in Mindanao. The federalist structure was perceived to be the answer to the political aspirations of the minority communities that have been marginalized and heavily exploited.

The external factors at this present moment only come from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), an influential international body made up of foreign ministers of Muslim states. The OIC arranged the first peace agreement in 1976 and facilitated the peace agreement of 1996. As to whether there are external al-Qaeda or bin Laden organization operatives in the southern Philippines, these claims have not been proven or evidence has been very sketchy. In any event, the problems of the Muslim south in the Philippines rest on complex issues and a complex history unique to Mindanao.

#### NOTE

1. In the Philippines, the terms 'Muslim' and 'Moro' have been used interchangeably to refer to the various ethno-linguistic groups. Whereas the term 'Muslim' refers to a universal religious identity, the term 'Moro' denotes a political identity distinct to the Islamized peoples of Mindanao and Sulu.

## **About the Speaker**

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## **ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: ANALYSING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS — SINGAPORE'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY**

### **Introduction**

The September 11 attacks and its aftermath have exposed the underlying, but much ignored, tensions between the United States and the Muslim world.

If this major turn in human history has convulsed the West, it has had the same effect on Muslims everywhere. But while Muslims in many countries have reacted to September 11 and the subsequent military offensive on Afghanistan with great emotion, those in Singapore have chosen a course of restraint and caution.

Their minority position here means Muslim Singaporeans prefer to be more circumspect. Comprising 15% of the three million multi-ethnic population, they are highly conscious not to be a cause for any inter-religious friction. But at the same time, members of the community are also committed to their religious values while being emotionally linked to the *Ummah* (the global Islamic community).

Pulled in different, and at times conflicting, directions, they have had to delicately balance their identity as Muslims and as Singaporeans at the same time. It is the most crunching dilemma they have faced since Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965. But it is fair to say that they have so far managed these contradictory pulls rather well. They have carefully reconciled the two identities and have shown that both can co-exist.

This ability to manage their emotions was acknowledged openly by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong a day after the 3 November general election. The Prime Minister observed how the Muslim community here had handled itself steadily throughout the September 11 crisis. Significantly, Prime Minister Goh also expressed understanding for the feelings of the local Muslim community.

### **Mufti's stand**

The first open display of the inclination of the local Muslim community came on 23 September when the American expatriate community in Singapore organized a memorial service at the national stadium for the victims of September 11. The Mufti, the highest Muslim religious authority in Singapore, made it a point to be present. And so did several other Muslim civic leaders. The collective presence of the local Muslim leaders at the occasion, which was also attended by the Singapore Cabinet, was an important gesture of sympathy for the victims of the September 11 attacks.

A week later on the first of October, the Mufti came out with the first authoritative stand from within the community. In a carefully considered “advice”, the Mufti expressed concern over September 11 and its aftermath, including the US-led military action on Afghanistan. He underscored the community’s “abhorrence for violence and the killing of innocent lives” and for terrorism “committed anywhere” in the world.

He urged all Muslims and Singaporeans to preserve religious harmony by strengthening greater human understanding and well-being. On humanitarian grounds, the Mufti expressed sympathy for the plight of the Afghan people but urged Muslim Singaporeans to “act wisely” as they pondered over their response. Significantly, the Mufti found it necessary to also issue a list of Islamic terms which have often been misunderstood or misused in the media. Top on the list was the very term “jihad” itself.

The Mufti’s statement stopped short of a binding *fatwa*, or religious edict. While careful not to contradict the Islamic principle of *jihad* — or struggle — the Mufti made it clear that jihad did not necessarily take on the narrow definition of a holy war. The implication is that Singapore’s Muslims do not have to rush to take up arms to fight alongside their Muslim brothers in Afghanistan. Their jihad can take other forms, such as humanitarian assistance.

### **Reactions of civil society & political leaders**

On the same day that the Mufti issued his statement, the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) also called on Muslims and non-Muslims to preserve religious and racial harmony. Separately, the Malay-based opposition party, the NSP (National Solidarity Party), reportedly urged Muslims not to be swayed by calls for jihad. On 2 October, Malay/Muslim MPs (members of parliament) came out with a joint stand in support of the Mufti's position.

On 4 October, a total of 50 people from various backgrounds were surveyed in a straw poll by the Singapore Press Holdings on the US-led military actions on Afghanistan. Noticeably, many of them, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, expressed concern for the rising number of civilian casualties. Six out of ten Muslims interviewed disapproved of the US retaliation on Afghanistan.

### **What the Singapore Muslim community response means**

The measured reactions of the local Muslim community are in sharp contrast to the tempest seen in Indonesia, Malaysia or other parts of the Muslim world. There were no demonstrations or street protests in Singapore. In comparison, even the Muslim minorities in Thailand took some action, such as a boycott of American fastfood outlets.

The cautious response of the Singaporean Muslims does not however mean that they have no anxieties or concerns about September 11 and the war in Afghanistan. Behind closed doors, they engaged in dialogue among themselves and with non-Muslims over the meaning of September 11.

Muslim groups, such as AMPRO,<sup>1</sup> the economic self-help group, also engaged the US ambassador Franklin Lavin following the envoy's participation in a forum on 10 October on terrorism organized by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). Behind closed doors, the sentiments of the local Muslim community were less inhibited. On related issues, the local Muslims were as disturbed as Muslims from other parts of the world.

They harboured initial fears of being singled out by the government or by the non-Muslim majority, as if they too were guilty by association for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. But such fears proved short-lived. One reason



is that the larger non-Muslim community in Singapore generally stayed carefully away from the trap of “Muslim-bashing” seen in some Western countries such as the US, Britain and Australia.

The non-Muslims in Singapore have been more understanding not only of the predicament faced by the local Muslims but also of the complex causes of international terrorism. Another reason is the Singapore government’s quick and decisive action. It sent the signal early to the population not to treat the local Muslims differently or unfairly. This has prevented the seeds of discord from taking root.

### **Other Implications: Beyond Solidarity**

It is significant that Singapore’s Muslim community has responded to September 11 by instinctively closing their ranks to contain the damage from the episode. The differing nuances within the community over a range of other issues such as madrasah education and community leadership were kept under lid. The cohesion has been such that no religious or ethnic issues surfaced during the 3 November general election. The absence of religious issues in the hustings was significant enough for Prime Minister Goh to openly acknowledge it.

It appears that Muslim leaders — from religious leaders and MPs to civic groups and NGOs, even some members of the opposition — are coalescing around an emerging common position vis-à-vis September 11 and its aftermath.

They reject the wanton killing of innocent people, which they see as an act not condoned by Islam. But at the same time, they also want to see some moral consistency on the part of the US and its allies in their campaign against terrorism. For instance, terrorism, to the community, must not be defined as if it comes only from the Muslim world. Freedom fighters should also not be confused with terrorists. The label of “state-sponsored terrorism”, to them, should also be applied to Israel whose systematic and bloody crushing of the Palestinian struggle for statehood — ignored by the US and the West — has been a sore point in the Muslim world.

At the same time, the Muslims in Singapore are concerned about the unnecessary loss of innocent lives in the US-led military actions against Afghanistan. While they do not condone terrorism, they are concerned whether the current international drive against terrorism will be effective, fair and just.

Given the open nature of Singapore society, the Muslim community here cannot be totally divorced from how events will play out in the period after September 11 and after Afghanistan. Their perceptions and thinking may be coloured by whether and how four likely scenarios take place on the global stage.

### **Scenario I: A New Relationship Between the US and Muslim World?**

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the actions on Afghanistan, have brought into sharp focus the underlying tensions between the Muslim world and the United States as the dominant superpower. Hopefully, however, the impending political change in Afghanistan may usher in a new and better relationship — one of mutual accommodation and acceptance — between the West and the Muslim world.

Notwithstanding the strong Islamic grievances against the US, the Muslim world still needs the US. It has benefitted from the US as a benign power. Many Muslims all over the world have studied, or have children and relatives studying in the US. They have returned, or will return, with scientific and other knowledge. Armed with such skills, the returnees have helped, or will help, develop their own societies or economies. No competing superpower has brought comparable tangible gains to the Muslim world.

Until another benign superpower comes along, the better bet for the Muslim world is still the US. But post-September 11, it must be a different US for there to be a more workable peace. A new accommodation with the Muslim world can happen if the US is less arrogant in the exercise of its might, more sensitive to the aspirations of the Muslims, and more just and more aware that the world is not made of just one civilization.

### **Scenario II: Huntington's Clash of Civilizations?**

Many people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, recoil at the thought of the Huntingtonian scenario of a "Clash of Civilizations". They reject instinctively the notion that a clash between the West and the Islamic world will come about, if it has not already, because of September 11.

The US has time and again assured that its war against terrorism is not a war against Islam or the Islamic world. Muslim leaders also say that a clash of civilizations is bad for all of humanity. Yet, a clash is lurking dangerously in the background. For all of President Bush's appeasement, the suspicion runs deep among many Muslims towards the US agenda.

US leaders make little attempt to hide the possibility that after Afghanistan, the guns will aim next at Iraq. Then who? Syria, Somalia, Lebanon, Sudan and perhaps Iran — not necessarily in that order. The questionable list of alleged “sponsor states” of terrorism is long, but it is replete with Muslim or Arab states. If the US agenda is pursued aggressively, the logical conclusion is to go on a widespread confrontation with a large swathe of the Muslim world.

Even if this “next-stage” scenario is all a coincidence, it will be difficult to avoid the impression that a clash of civilizations is on the way. Tighter US immigration rules post-September 11 have singled out Muslim visitors, which has angered countries like Malaysia. The new rules are a bad omen. What the US and its allies will do next, and how they act in the campaign against terrorism, will shape the psyche of the Muslim world, including Muslims in Singapore.

If the Muslims feel their suspicions are justified, anti-US sentiments in the Muslim world will only worsen — not decrease — post-Afghanistan. It will not help eradicate terrorism against the US. Ironically, the more victorious the US is in the war against terror, the less likely it is that it will listen to the grievances in the Muslim world about the failings of American foreign policy.

American “imperialism” in many parts of the Islamic world, while it shows unflinching support for Israel, is a root cause of the widespread antipathy towards America from Gaza to Yogyakarta. The Muslim world sees this as the breeding ground for terrorism against the US and its interests. The Muslim hope is that a triumphant US, post-Afghanistan, will see the point. Nothing short of this can help create the right conditions for world stability.

### **Scenario III: World in Reflection**

A victory for the US in its war against terror will not come without costs. September 11 will send the world into a period of deep reflection and review. This is happening in Europe and Asia. This will happen in America.

European diplomats have talked of a rethinking of some policies. In Asia, there is already a shift to reduce the long-standing dependence on the US economy post September 11. One important sign of this is the decision by ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) leaders to link up with China to form the world's largest free trade area within 10 years. ASEAN and Chinese leaders made no secret of their desire to rely more on the region's own strengths post-September 11.

America is also going through a period of introspection. There are signs of this happening: Firstly, the emergence of dissenting views in America over the causes of September 11; Secondly, the emergence of anti-war protests in the US and also Europe. If the anti-war protests grow, it will worsen the anti-globalization movement. Thirdly, changes in US approaches, if not thinking, towards the Arab and Muslim worlds. There seems to be a new attitude towards Israel over the Palestinian issue. President George W. Bush now talks openly of "Palestine", the future Palestinian state.

It is unthinkable that the US will fail to see the linkage between the threat of terrorism and Washington's policy towards the Middle East and the Islamic world. It is also untenable for America's allies to continue turning a blind eye to the unresolved question of Middle East peace as a major cause of international terrorism. The question is, is the apparent change in US policy over the Palestinian question a fundamental and lasting one, or is it just temporary histrionics?

### **Scenario IV: The Ibn Khaldun Prognosis**

Despite the initial shocks, America's resilience will ensure that it will bounce back and rise again, phoenix-like in the immediate term. But what about America's long term future?

In 1979, the then foreign minister of Singapore S. Rajaratnam tried to understand the nature of human history by looking at the rise and fall of civilizations. In this, he learned from Ibn Khaldun, the Muslim thinker of the Fourteenth Century

whom world scholars like Arnold Toynbee credit as the father of modern sociology and history.

In his voluminous *Muqadimmah* [Introduction to History], Ibn Khaldun sees a pattern in the lifespan of civilizations. Civilizations, he says, tend to stretch over four or five generations. In some cases, they last for about 200 years — each lasting 40 years — before they decline.

The first generation creates the civilization through a special human quality called *Assabiya*, or group cohesion. The second and third generations expand and develop the civilization. By the fourth generation, decline sets in due to internal economic, political and moral decay. By the fifth, the decline is complete and a new civilization takes over.

Mr Rajaratnam did not refer to any modern-day civilizations or empires. In today's context, however, there is only one dominant empire, the US. American “civilization” is about 25 years past the 200-year mark outlined by Ibn Khaldun. Modern-day students of history who have borrowed from the Khaldunian concept include Paul Kennedy, the Yale historian who wrote the 1987 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.

Kennedy contends that the US is actually in the stage of relative decline. This is because of what he calls America’s “imperial overstretch”. This over-extension is due to the erosion of the American economic base due to an extended need to protect the empire through a larger military-industrial complex.

The implication of Kennedy’s argument is that the war on Afghanistan may quicken America’s decline. The possibility of the empire being further stretched is real if the US-led campaign in Afghanistan and the general war on terrorism get protracted. Even if the campaign in Afghanistan comes to an end, it does not mean that the “imperial overstretch” effect will not come into motion.

But the decline of America, if indeed it happens, will affect everyone, including its friends. Should the American empire decline, who will rise to fill the vacuum in Asia?

In Asia, the desire to reduce dependence on the US economy has quickened the rise of East Asia. It is significant that ASEAN and Chinese leaders recently spoke of this act of “self-reliance” as a direct consequence of the common need to adjust to

life after September 11. At the rate things go, China will become the next superpower. The question is: Will China rise to be an equal to the US, or will it displace the US as the sole superpower?

### **Conclusion**

It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the world now depends on how two “Big Wheels” turn — or, to paraphrase one commentator, how the struggle for two souls will play out. The first soul is the American one. The second is Islamic. Both are closely intertwined.

#### *The American soul and Islam*

America need not be in decline. Ibn Khaldun’s prognosis need not be inevitable. This can be achieved if the US leadership can go beyond its fury to extract some wisdom from this very difficult episode. This way, the US will emerge from the ashes of the WTC not just stronger but also wiser.

The US need not abdicate its leadership of the world. But US leadership will be more widely appreciated if there is a recognition in Washington that mistakes have been made and must be put right. In many parts of the world, not just the Middle East or Southeast Asia, there is a new consciousness that the problem of terrorism cannot be resolved by merely removing Osama bin Laden, if he was indeed behind the September 11 attacks.

There are deepseated causes that the US must recognize, causes which do not necessarily lie in the Muslim world. As Chalmers Johnson, professor emeritus at the University of California in San Diego, says:

We must recognise that the terrorism of September 11 was not directed against America but against American foreign policy. We should listen to the grievances of the Islamic peoples, stop propping up repressive regimes in the area, protect Israel’s security but denounce its apartheid practices in Palestinian areas and reform our “globalisation” policies so that they no longer mean that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer.

### *Struggle for the Muslim soul*

In a recent university forum on Islam and the West, one participant — a Chinese Singaporean — made an interesting observation. She said that as horrible as the September 11 attacks have been, they were not just acts of terror. They were also a “911 call”. In a sense, she is right.

It is a call for help from voices within the Islamic fold, borne out of a desperate exasperation with the state of the world today. It is both an exasperation with the US, as it is with the Muslim world. It is a cry for understanding from the one billion people who profess the second largest — and fastest growing — faith in the world but who have for too long been misunderstood. It is also a cry to be left alone.

In many parts of the *Ummah*, there is a growing religious consciousness borne out of a dejection with the ugly side of westernization and modernization — though not modernization or westernization *per se*. In specific countries, the disappointment with successively corrupt and oppressive leaderships fuels the yen for greater morality in society through religion. Unfortunately, the return to religion has been misunderstood, even looked upon with fear and trepidation.

In some Muslim countries, unpopular governments crush Islamic dissent by portraying false struggles, such as one between “moderation” and “extremism” or between “secular modernity” and “religious dogma”. The media pick this up without question. The truth is, the return to religion is not necessarily bad, as it is made out to be. The mistake the US tends to make is to support unpopular power-wielders because it suits America’s economic and strategic interests, and because of the questionable assumption that the Islamists are always a threat and, therefore, secular leaders are better.

Islam has a built-in response to inequity, injustice and oppression. The more repressed a society feels, the greater the consciousness to put things right. The mistake of foreign powers is to get involved and to interfere in the process of political change in Muslim societies, whether it is Pakistan, or Indonesia, or now Afghanistan.

*Post-Sept 11 — Bridging the Civilizational Divide*

After the war is over, both the US and the Muslim world must act quickly to start a process of healing and rebuilding. Both have big roles to play in making this world not only a safer place, but genuinely a better one.

The Muslim world must actively showcase the human side of Islam. Muslim leaders, intellectuals and organisations — including those in Singapore — must take steps to reach out to the non-Muslim world and make them understand that a more assertive Islam is not a threat to them. In this, Muslims in Southeast Asia, namely Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, can play an important part. They have a natural proclivity for avoiding violent confrontation.

The US and the West, on the other hand, need to make a serious attempt to appreciate the aspirations of the Muslim world. From Indonesia and Malaysia to the Arab world — indeed in many of the developing societies — there is a genuine yearning for a truly just global order, a civilised global order in which international law, not the law of the jungle, is the rule of the game.

There should be a serious attempt to come to an accommodation with the aspirations of the Islamic societies. The aspirations of one billion people with a proud history, a history that plays no small part in the birth of Western civilization, cannot be forever ignored.

The US must be the benign power that it claims to be. It must refrain from trying to shape the world in its mould. Be it the Middle East, or Southeast Asia, nations and Muslim communities want their own identities, and to be left alone to forge them.

After the war, the task of building bridges of understanding cannot be left to the governments alone. Individuals, communities, intellectuals and civil society — in the Islamic world and in the West — will have to take the initiative and set the agenda. Even in tiny Singapore where the Muslims are a minority, this is a relevant role to play.



## NOTE

1. AMPRO is an economic self-help group that was formed in 1995 to act as a catalyst for economic change and development for the Malay/Muslim community within Singapore. Run by volunteer professionals, AMPRO's vision is to create an economically dynamic Malay/Muslim community by participating actively within the Singaporean economy. It also aims to promote economic and commercial links, acting as a bridge between Malay/Muslim and non-Malay/Muslim professionals, executives and entrepreneurs. It is linked to the Association of Malay Professionals (AMP).

## DISCUSSION

### *Questions*

**Soedradjad Djiwandono (ISEAS):** My question is for Dr Crouch. You are very convincing in your analysis as some of your statistics show that there is not really any resurgence of radical Islam in Indonesia given the very small role of the exclusivist Islamic parties in the elections. You said that the threat of radical Islam is largely a misrepresentation by the press and what is happening in Indonesia is a result of the break down in social order and domestic security. However, is it not possible that the minority would play a much bigger role than the statistics show? As we know the majority is usually silent and the Indonesian majority is much more silent than other majorities. Perhaps the minority may be imposing their views on the majority and these minority groups may be more dangerous than you are claiming right now.

**Marco Mezzera (FOCUS on the Global South):** I have two brief questions, one for Dr Crouch, and another one for Dr Abubakar. The first one is on the situation of Aceh. You said that the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) is not an Islamic movement. Yet, whenever we read news wire agencies' reports on the situation in Aceh, there is always an assertion that GAM is fighting for an Islamic state. When I was doing my research, I asked the Acehese how did such perceptions arise and why. Most Acehese could not understand it either. I would like to hear your comments on these rumors and what kind of purpose they might serve.

The other question is for Dr Abubakar. I would like to hear your comments about the role of economic interests in the Mindanao conflict and the implications of land control and land reforms on the armed struggle.

**Lim Ho Hup (AIM Pte Ltd.):** I would like to pose a question to Dr Abubakar. The difference in income and other human welfare indices between the Muslims in the south and the rest of Philippines, is the result of active discrimination on the part of the central government in Manila, or differences in culture and/or educational attainment? Further, what are the reactions of the political elites in Manila to

suggestions of greater autonomy or independence from the South? The last question is a minor one: what is the difference between the Tagalog and the Bangsamoro? Are these differences ethnic or religious?

*Dr Harold Crouch*

Even though Islamic radical groups constitute a very small minority, is there some sort of threat from that quarter? I think you are right in a sense. In a situation where there is a general breakdown in law and order, groups that have a capacity to mobilize people in the streets can cause quite a lot of trouble. If one looks at past examples, anti-Chinese rioting in Indonesia, for instance, has often been associated with radical Islamic groups. The mobilization capacity of radical Islamic groups can thus be a threat. But it is still within limits. What I am really saying is that there is no real prospect of these radical Islamic groups ever coming to power in Indonesia. That is, there will be no Ayatollah Khomeini in Indonesia because such groups are so small. There is no real likelihood of widespread support for these groups but they certainly can create disturbances. In fact, it is not just the Islamic minority that can cause trouble, there are other political parties, even the Indonesian military, that can engage in violence from time to time. Despite sporadic violence in certain areas and more vocal Islamic groups, it is highly unlikely that there will be an Islamic take over of the government.

As for Aceh, if you recall, in 1999, the Habibie government passed a law that granted autonomy to the Acehnese in the fields of culture, education and religion. That is to say, technically speaking, the Aceh government actually has had the authority to implement Islamic law but it has done nothing so far. Gus Dur also tried to win over the Acehnese towards the end of his rule by waving the Islamic law card as an incentive. But the Acehnese said that they did not need any Islamic laws, they practise Islam as part of their everyday life and formal Islamic laws given by Indonesia are nothing special.

You questioned why outsiders always portray GAM as an Islamic fundamentalist movement. Criticizing journalists is often the easy way, the reality is that Aceh is the most Islamic province in Indonesia. Therefore it is natural to assume that the rebels must want an Islamic state. The other more sinister explanation: it is

possible that Islam has been made a convenient scapegoat during the Soeharto era and it probably served his purpose to portray GAM as a fundamentalist Islamic movement. The explanation just came to mind, but I have no real evidence of that at this point.

*Dr Carmen A Abubakar*

Mindanao has been known as “The Land of Promise” because of its rich natural resources and economic potential. Ironically, its minority Muslim population continued to languish in poverty and underdevelopment. Many in Mindanao have been displaced from their ancestral lands by multinational investors and local companies owned by national economic elites in Manila. Yet these issues over ancestral land are hardly debated in Congress because of vested political and economic interests.

For instance, the government has reportedly begun implementing the Liguasan Marsh Development Project through the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC). The project, which involves extraction of natural gas, will operate on the Liguasan marshland largely occupied by the Moro communities. This will not only destroy the ecological environment in the area but also the local way of life.

While foreign and local capitalists continue to extract profits from Moro lands, the Moros are still being denied their right to economic resources and benefits. A case in point is the exploration of the Lanao Lake for power generation. The local communities who lived along the Lanao Lake currently pay a higher rate of kilowatts per hour than people outside Lanao who actually pay less.

The cause of poverty cannot be cultural nor can it be religious. No religion advocates an adherence to poverty; there is also no culture that supports poverty. Poverty is the result of policies and political decisions. For example, provincial budgets are usually allocated by the central government in Manila. Recently armed officials walked out of the budget allocation conference in Congress because their budget was slashed by almost half. They simply refused to compromise. Distribution of state resources is a political process. Very often, if a province is aligned with key political individuals, it is going to get more than those provinces which are not politically aligned.

The essence of autonomy that the Bangsamoro people have always asked for is genuine but what does genuine mean to these people? It is the ability to determine their own destiny. So far the Autonomous Act, which is supposed to implement this, has not been able to do so. One of the flaws in this Organic Act is that the autonomous region is unable to raise sufficient revenues because the national government has control over revenues that are specified at the national level. They are therefore dependent on the budget that is given to them by Malakanyan. So here we have an autonomous region, which is in reality not self-sufficient or self-reliant because it lacks its own means of revenues. How can there be a self-determining autonomous unit when it cannot even pay the salaries of its own workers?

As to the difference between the Tagalog and the Bangsamoro, I would say that the difference is both ethnic and religious. The Tagalog come from Central Luzon, while the Bangsamoro live in Southern Mindanao. Territorially, they are quite different. Religious affiliation would show that most Tagalog are Christians and most Bangsamoro are Muslims. (When we use the term “Bangsamoro”, we exclude the converts to Islam who are living elsewhere.)

### *Questions*

**Syetarn Hansakul:** I have a question regarding the concerns expressed in the media on the role of Islamic religious schools or the *madrasah* as a breeding ground for terrorists. In the context of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, are these concerns valid? Should these concerns be addressed or should they be dismissed entirely? Also, what should Muslims do to respond to these concerns?

**K S Nathan (ISEAS):** I would like to direct my question to Dr Ahmad Fauzi. In the Malaysian constitution, Islam is the official religion and there is a clear differentiation between religion and politics. So, there is a contradiction in terms when Dr Mahathir speaks of an Islamic state, because Malaysia is still not an Islamic state constitutionally. The Malaysian constitution does not put *hudud* as the primary law or *syariah* as the primary law. As such, is this declaration of an Islamic state more of a political game between PAS (Parti Islam SeMalaysia) and UMNO (United Malays National Organisation)? That is, Dr Mahathir is actually using this to silence PAS

because first of all, he himself does not believe in an Islamic state and he does not see the necessity of declaring one or not declaring one. Even if he desires an Islamic state, there is also the element of constitutional change, which will be very difficult to effect; so I agree with you that it is difficult to create an Islamic state constitutionally in Malaysia. The second question is about leadership. As long as Dr Mahathir is at the helm of Malaysian UMNO's leadership (he is still very strong and healthy), he is likely to outwit all his political opponents because he is able to use the institution and machinery of the state to moderate Islam in a multi-ethnic setting.

**Lai Ah Eng (National University of Singapore):** I have two questions: the first is for Dr Ahmad Fauzi. You discussed the response of non-Muslims towards Islam in Malaysia and how that would determine the viability of an Islamic state in a multi-ethnic society. I wonder if you could share with us the elements in Islamic scriptures that ensure the equality of non-Muslims living in an Islamic state. And whether such issues have been substantively and seriously discussed among Muslims in Malaysia.

My second question is for Mr Yang Razali Kassim. I have been monitoring the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and I detect two trends, at least in commentaries in newspapers. One trend, as you rightly point out, is calls for the United States to re-examine its foreign policies, especially its attitude, knowledge and outlook on Islamic peoples in the Middle East. But the other consequence of September 11 is that it forces the Muslims to ponder and reflect among themselves the various aspects of Islamic thinking and rules in the Middle East. Could you share with us how some of these calls to re-examine the Muslim practices, and even Muslim faith, are received by the local Muslim community?

*Dr Ahmad Fauzi*

One of the primary dilemmas of Muslim groups is that there is no specific or explicit indication in the Islamic scriptures on an Islamic state and its viability in a multi-ethnic society. Possibly, the most explicit statement is that the leader must do justice to both the Muslim and non-Muslims populations. Most of the evidence of an Islamic state is historical and even then, the evidence varies and the political dynamics of the Islamic state depends very much on the leadership. If the leadership is good and

benign, as evident in the days of the Seljuk Turks, the benefits of an Islamic state will disseminate to all parts of society, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. There were also cases in Islamic history where the leadership was authoritarian or tyrannical. In such cases, the effects of tyranny affect not only the non-Muslims but also the Muslims. Many Islamic scholars often wrote about the persecution of non-Muslims by tyrants and forget that the same tyranny has also affected the Muslim population. The pertinent question now is how the leadership interprets or acts according to the scriptures in order to do justice to the population. This has sparked off a great debate among the Islamic scholars. Some scholars even argue that the term Islamic state itself, *daulah Islamiyah*, is not in the Quran and it is a term coined by the scholars, the *ulamak* during the Umaid dynasty, Abasaid dynasty, in the era of the nation state. In other words, it is possible that an Islamic state is not inherent in the Quran.

Is there a contradiction between Dr Mahathir's declaration of Malaysia as an Islamic state and the separation of religion and politics in the Malaysian constitution? It is not surprising that Dr Mahathir contradicted himself. He does that on many occasions. Whether the declaration of an Islamic state is a political ploy by Dr Mahathir? Certainly. He is a political animal; he often outmanoeuvres his political opponents. This shows how determined and strong-willed he is. Whether you like him or not, you have to accept that he has left a long lasting impact on Malaysian politics. While I do not deny that most young Malaysians of my generation have problems with him, we have to admit that he has the charisma and character that makes him a strong leader. I would say that the leader after Dr Mahathir would be a weak, if not very weak, leader. This is evident in the history of dictatorial regimes: after a strong leadership, very weak regimes often followed. So, this is actually a very trying moment for Malaysian politics especially in view of Dr Mahathir's age. Speculation on Dr Mahathir's successor has gone on for some time now. Dr Mahathir once said that he would like his successor to be someone like himself — someone who is equally or ideally just like himself. But there is nobody who can be exactly like him except himself.

Are the *madrakah* fertile grounds for Islamic terrorism? Historically, Islam in Malaysia has been largely non-violent. The discovery of militant cells operated by the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM), whose leaders were subsequently

arrested under the ISA, is among the few exceptions. In fact, a non-militant form of Sufi-ism played a pivotal role in the evolution of Islam in the Malaya Peninsula. Of course, there are militant forms of Sufi-ism, particularly those in Sudan, the Middle East and North Africa, but the non-militant variety is found in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia. This explains why Islamic struggle in Malaysia has been almost devoid of violence. Indeed even the struggle for independence in Malaysia was relatively peaceful. Evidence supporting the recent upsurge of violence is still very sketchy. Note that the arrests made under ISA were made on the basis that those individuals constitute a potential threat to domestic security, and not necessarily because they have actually committed acts of violence against the state.

*Mr Yang Razali Kassim*

I would like to underscore what Dr Fauzi said about the role of Sufi-ism in the evolution of Islam in Southeast Asia. Sufi-ism is the major cause for the passive nature of Islam in Southeast Asia. It is the non-violent variant. We know that the early Muslim traders were the ones responsible for bringing Islam into Southeast Asia. These Sufi traders had a profound influence on the worldviews of the people here. Most Southeast Asian Muslims are disinclined towards violence and confrontation. But that does not mean that they do not hold strong views, rather the ways they express these views are different. This also does not mean that they would not resort to protests and demonstrations. But I am inclined to think that public protests are a modern manifestation of power. I do not think that people in the 15th Century protested.

The emerging portrayal of the *madrasah* as a breeding ground of terrorism is doing injustice to *madrasah* schools. It may be true of *madrasah* in some parts of the world but it does not mean that all *madrasah* are therefore the natural breeding ground for terrorism. The idea of *madrasah* is derived from the Islamic conception of universal knowledge, which also forms the basis for the university we know today. *Madrasah* are supposed to produce students with total knowledge, knowledge that makes no distinction between the secular and the religious. Unfortunately over time, *madrasah* have been applied in such a way that they do not reflect what they were supposed to be. Even in Singapore the *madrasah* are being reviewed to make sure



that they actually produce economically viable students. The government has also stepped in to find a way to make *madrasah* in Singapore relevant to the economy.

Yes, various Muslim groups in Singapore have been introspective. They are asking a lot of questions about US foreign policy, the meanings of recent developments and their appropriate responses. However, the introspection does not go to the extent of re-interpreting Islamic doctrine or Islamic principles. These principles are sacrosanct. The areas of review should be on how Muslims should adapt or adjust themselves to challenges that have emerged. The basic point here is how Muslims should try to educate outsiders that Islam is actually a universalistic religion that applies universal values and that there is no real distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims: we are all humans, all part of the human civilization. As a result of the September 11 tragedy, we may find more of such outward manifestations of Islam in Singapore and Southeast Asia. However this issue of reconciling Islam and modernization is an old one and it will continue with or without September 11.

*Dr Harold Crouch*

In Indonesia, there are *madrasah* or *pesantren* schools, as they are known there, but there is no evidence to suggest that the vast majority of graduates from these schools are terrorists. However, if the hostilities between the Christians and the Muslims continue in Maluku for another ten years or so, a lot of people graduating from *madrasah* will become terrorists. But it is not just the Muslims. If the situation continues, graduates from Christian schools will also become terrorists. In other words, it is not the type of school you go to but the situation in which you find yourself.

In Aceh, the other factor that we have to consider is the behaviour of the Indonesian military. The Indonesian military is partly responsible for the conflict in Aceh. The military culture is deeply ingrained in Aceh. There is a strong *esprit de corp* and an intense loyalty to one's unit. If one of them were shot by the Acehese, they would retaliate with even greater force. Their brutal suppression has resulted in deep resentment among the populace. They are unlikely to win the hearts and minds of the Acehese if they continue with this repressive military policy.

I was dismayed when I saw President Bush's initial reaction to the September 11 attacks: he condemned the attacks as an attack on democracy. To me, the terrorists would not care less about democracy in America, they were clearly protesting against the American foreign policy. Of course, while their actions were easily explainable, they were clearly not justifiable.

### *Questions*

**Jynard Byrd (Student, National University of Singapore):** I have a question for Dr Abubakar. You mentioned the difficulties the Muslims in the south of the Philippines had in raising revenue. If so, what is the economic viability of an independent state in Mindanao? Is it realistic to expect that independence would promote the economic prosperity of the Moro people?

**Ameer Jumabhoy (Mendaki Holdings):** I am very happy to see Dr Abubakar, a highly educated Muslim lady without a *tudung*. This reflects the development of Islam over the centuries. In this spirit, I would like to ask the panel to share with us their thoughts on United Nation's Chief, Kofi Annan's, comments when he introduced President Khatami as the originator of the twenty-first century, "a century of dialogue between civilizations".

### *Dr Carmen A Abubakr*

Wearing a veil does not automatically mean a woman is docile, submissive and even stupid.

Those opposed to self-determination by the Moros have expressed doubts on the economic viability of an independent Muslim state in the south. Historically, the Moro sultanates were not only effective sovereign states, they were also economically prosperous. So in the collective memories of the Muslims, an independent and prosperous state is not an impossible dream. If we look at Singapore, it is a small state with no natural resources, yet it is one of the richest countries in Southeast Asia. If this is possible for Singapore, it could also be possible for Muslims in the Philippines.

*Yang Razali Kassim*

I very much agree with Dr Carmen Abubakar's comments that a woman wearing a veil does not mean that the society is backward. Therein lies a very fundamental misunderstanding between the western civilization and the Islamic civilization. It is as if that the veil is the single most obvious manifestation of backwardness and by that measure, the religion itself is also backward. Students of history will know very well that Islamic civilization contributed to the rise of Western civilization. The spirit of learning in the Islamic world actually led to the transfer of knowledge to the West during the Dark Ages. This goes back to the need for civilizational dialogue. The fact that Anwar Ibrahim spoke about this in the 1970s shows that the Muslim world recognized the urgent need to promote greater understanding between different civilizations. Unfortunately, today, civilization is taken to mean only the western civilization. Perhaps it is the fault of the international media but when President Bush called the September 11 attacks as an attack on democracy and "civilization", he seemed to imply that there is only one civilization. The Muslim world is against terrorism, but they are also against the US response in Afghanistan. If after Afghanistan, the war on terrorism is pursued on other 'rogue' states, there will be no end to this conflict. I think that it is the job of everybody to find a solution to what is essentially a very challenging development.

*Questions*

**Michael Ong (Australian Parliamentary Library):** Dr Fauzi, it seems to me that in discussing the Islamic state in Malaysia, both sides want to have their cake and eat it, i.e., PAS wants to have an Islamic state without having to spell it out, the UMNO led government declared Malaysia as an Islamic state without any clear indication of what an Islamic state entails. But the declaration of an Islamic state in the Gerakan political assembly, I believe, represents a fundamental change in Malaysian politics. The non-Malay parties in the Barisan Nasional supported UMNO's version of the Islamic state largely because they wanted to gain an edge over the opposition party, PAS. But once they agree to that, they have accepted a particular form of Islamic state, be it the UMNO or PAS model. As such, I suspect that the movement towards

an Islamic state in Malaysia will accelerate as UMNO tries to regain its political ground. Do you see this as a likely development?

**Kumar Ramakrishna (IDSS):** I have a question regarding *Wahibism*. If you read some of the media reports lately, especially in the wake of September 11, there had been reports that attributed the attacks to a particularly austere and conservative brand of Islam known as *Wahibism*. To what extent are these media reports an unfair characterization of the Wahibi movement? In particular, these reports suggested that this particular ideology is intolerant of other forms of Islam, unwilling to accommodate other religions, and likely to create a narrow view of the world among its followers. Is this brand of Islam guilty as charged or is this an unfair characterization? If *Wahibism* is all it is made out to be, surely, Middle Eastern governments should make attempts to ensure that the *madrasah* do not teach and propagate this ideology? If Wahibism is so conservative, is there a basis for any civilizational dialogue?

*Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid*

I agree with the points you raised. Academics tend to have a very ideal vision, which stresses equality, civilizational dialogue, and peace in society. But sadly, the reality is often not like that. Conflict is endemic in society. That is why the issue of an Islamic state in Malaysia cannot be defined or discussed in purely religious terms, it is also embedded in ethnic relations and politics. Although as academics, we support dialogue and discussions, the fact is that most Malaysians think the Muslim/non-Muslim divide will not only continue but it could widen further.

*Mr Yang Razali Kassim*

If I understand you correctly, your question is this: if *Wahibism* is intolerant, is there a basis for civilizational dialogue? Civilizational dialogue cannot take place without flexibility, readiness and openness to accommodate each other. Our problem is we sometimes adopt a very reductionist approach to matters and we tend to oversimplify complex phenomena. So we say intolerance is due to a particular persuasion or due to a particular religion. In fact, I believe intolerance is often due to the practitioners of

the religion rather than the religion *per se*. An ignorance of others has caused a lot of tensions between different societies and September 11 is a manifestation of that communication breakdown. That is precisely why dialogue is essential.

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