

PAS DILEMMAS IN THE ERA OF ABDUL HADI AWANG

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to identify the position of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) as a party during their *muktamar* (general assembly) on June 6 in Kuala Selangor. PAS leadership has been dominated by ulama leaders, labelled ‘traditionalist’ or ‘purist’ and the ‘mainstreamer’ or ‘reformist’ had admit that they have lost their positions in the party. The focus of this research is to identify that when Hadi had successfully purged the reformist from being a part of the party members, he and his factions had made an unpredictable action to withdraw from multi-ethnic opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) in June 16, 2015. As a result, PR was dissolved and the rift worsened after the PAS leadership was captured by conservatives and the party accepted a motion by its conservative *ulama* (clerics) wing to sever ties with the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and People Justice Party (PKR). Hadi realized that it is near impossible for PAS to be in power on the national level without assistance from the opposition parties. However, this research found that although Hadi was a veteran politician, he asserted that his ideology, characterized, political thought and the way he solved the political problem are against PH. Hadi was categorized as an arrogant person, often disagrees with his colleagues, lacking of coalition spirit and always making controversial statements toward PH.

Keywords : *organization, mainstreamer, reformist, ulama and politicians*

Introduction

The result of the 61st Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) *muktamar* (general assembly) in Kuala Selangor, June 6, 2015 revealed that the PAS leadership has been dominated by *ulama* leaders, labelled as ‘traditionalist’ or ‘purist’ and the ‘mainstreamer’ or ‘reformist’ had to admit that they have lost their positions in the party. PAS President Abdul Hadi Awang believes that his party will continuously be a competitive party even without the

reformist. The result of the *muktamar* was well organized by Hadi and his followers, and they will ensure that only those with religious background knowledge will be retained at the top brass of PAS leadership while the reformist have opted to make a decision whether to keep their loyalty and willing to accept defeat or quit the party and create a splinter party - the reformist choose the second option.¹ Therefore, the reformist factions had agreed to form a new political party on Sept 16, 2015 known as The Trust Party (AMANAH).

Ironically, during the former PAS President Fadzil Noor's era, he encouraged many professionals to give up their university or government positions and participate in the party as full-time activists in the 1998-99 national crisis, which PAS doubled its membership from 400,000 to 800,000 within months (Liew Chin Tong 2007 : 205). The influx of new recruits updated the membership profile from that of being mainly led by rural-based religious scholars at various levels to one that included the new urban middle class created by the social engineering of the New Economic Policy (NEP). His successor, however, Abdul Hadi Awang had done much detriment to the party when he and his followers had purged almost all the reformist factions through the *muktamar*. Hadi will ensure that only those with religious background knowledge will control the party management and he still believes that PAS will be a stronger party without the support from the reformist.

In comparison, in the early years of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that rule Japan, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) had been a powerful and seemingly growing party. It had the support of a large number of young, well-educated urban electorate as well as the organized blue-collar workers, precisely those constituencies numbers were being rapidly increased by Japan's rush toward industrialization (Curtis 1988 : 117). In addition, local professional politicians, lawyers, journalists and a number of high-ranking national government bureaucrats who saw the JSP as a vehicle to national politics power also populated its Diet member contingent. Seen as a party of the future by many of the politically ambitious, it was able to draw a relatively large pool of talent for its Diet candidates. Union leaders accounted less than 30 percent of JSP candidates in the first post-merger lower house election in 1985. Two decades later, the JSP had changed their political strategy and channeled almost through that part of the union movement organized into the Sohyo² union federation. As a result, by relying so heavily on Sohyo, the JSP declined in popularity among voters and by the 1970s, JSP was no longer a predominant urban party. In the 1976 lower house election, for example, it won 60 percent of its seats in semi urban and rural districts. Only 26 percent of his lower house members were elected in urban districts and just 14 percent in metropolitan ones (Curtis 1988 : 118).

When Hadi had successfully purged the reformist from being a part of the party members, he and his factions had made an unpredictable action to withdraw from a multi-ethnic opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR)³ in June 16, 2015. As a result, PR was dissolved and the rift worsened after the PAS leadership was captured by conservatives and the party accepted a motion by its conservative ulama (clerics) wing to sever ties with the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and People Justice Party (PKR). In response,

DAP's Secretary General Lim Guan Eng said in a statement that the PR no longer existed. Analysts believe the DAP and PKR will try to link up with a new partner to form a new opposition pact before the next general election because this is their only realistic path to defeating Barisan Nasional (BN). Therefore, after the PR dissolved, a new opposition path called *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) was founded on Sept 22, 2015 consisting of the former PR parties except PAS and two splinter parties; AMANAH and Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu).⁴

This article analyses the distinctive patterns of conflict and frictions that have emerged within PAS and its relations to PH. Two distinctive patterns have become particularly conspicuous. First, the triumphant performance of PR in general election (GE) 2008 and 2013 has in great part been attribute to opposition pact strategies and many vacancies was offered to the party members upon political appointments. However, what will happen to those who are appointed upon political appointments when Hadi and his factions finally agreed to sever ties with PH? In addition, should the PAS's assemblyman be loyal to the party even though some of them disagree what Hadi and his factions had done. For instance, the DAP has asked PAS representatives to resign from their posts from the Penang state government and its agencies. PAS does not hold any influence in the state assembly as it has only one lawmaker while DAP dominates the 40-seat state legislature with 29 assemblymen.

Second, prior to the existence of PR and PH, there was a political cooperation in 1999 among opposition parties and it was known as *Barisan Alternatif* (BA). However, on the political front, the conservative Islamalist position of PAS leadership under the newly elected President Abdul Hadi Awang severely offended their non-Muslim political partners, especially the Chinese-dominant DAP, in the then opposition coalition pact, BA. As a result, DAP withdrew from the coalition altogether and the opposition pact was dissolved in 2004 (Kikue Hamayotsu 2010 : 165). What surprised and bewildered outside observers was why PAS antagonism towards DAP despite their status also as opposition party? As Liew Ching Tong (2007 : 201) mentioned that it is near possible for PAS to win national power on its own and it was supported by Mohd Izani (2014 : 42), PAS believed that to compete in democratic politics which has become increasingly competitive in Malaysia, it should accept and participate in the sharing power. In other words, PAS can no longer move alone even if the party is the only opposition party that managed to survive since the first election in 1955. Why have these trends grown conspicuous within PAS?

PAS antagonism towards PH

The PH's triumphant in the GE 2013 attest that political cooperation was the best strategies to be in power. Once in power, the PH could create a job vacancy through political appointments and most of the posts were occupied based on politics connection rather than qualification. The political post was created after winning an election and it gives government jobs to its supporters, friends and relatives as a reward for working toward victory and the post was a contract or had nothing limit. Mohamad Sabu and Mujahid Yusof Rawa, for example, had taken the challenge to resign from their posts in

various state agencies when Hadi had declared that PAS had no longer ties with PH. The question was does Hadi realize what he had done to PAS when his party had sever ties with PH and could all the PAS members follow Hadi's summons in order to reveal their loyalty to the party?

As a veteran politician, Hadi realized that it is near impossible for PAS to be in power on the national level without assistance from the opposition parties. Besides that, PAS has claimed they have a million members and many party branches all over Malaysia - this statement perceived that PAS could achieve the election victory despite being alone. However, in the plural society, working alone to topple BN was not a good idea as Mahathir argued after his party had joint PH, *"when I fought the previous elections under BN, I knew the opposition would lose because they were fighting each other. That's why we need a united opposition coalition,"* he was reported to have said, according to a post on Facebook. Mahathir had urged the component parties to set aside their ideological differences and unite if the coalition wished to defeat Najib's administration.

In GE 13, PR had retained their victory in Penang, Selangor and Kelantan and technically Penang was ruled by DAP, PAS in Kelantan and PKR in Selangor. In the state legislative, PAS had won one from 40 seats in Penang and 15 over 56 seats in Selangor and this result asserts that PAS had shown their good performance in Selangor. When Hadi and his followers urged their party members to sever ties with PR, Selangor PAS leaders, in particular, scrambled to warn party bosses against going through with the motion to sever ties with DAP (read PR), which the leadership forced through the assembly without debate, much to the anger of some delegates. In principle, PAS members should show their loyalty to the state government after the party has severed ties with PR, but this did not work and the top brass of PAS leadership did not instruct their members to resign from their state posts. In this scenario, what is more important; holding on to your principles or your posts?

Kikue Hamayotsu (2010 : 166) argued that Hadi and his followers were increasingly dissatisfied with their party's diminishing influence within PH despite making huge ideological compromise to stay within the coalition. Some of the PAS supporters insisted that PR should be led by PAS due to their party's experience in politics, background and reputation. Hadi and others top party leaders felt disappointed when some of his senior party members left PAS and form AMANAH. Once AMANAH had been registered, Hadi constantly gave negative perspective towards that party and assumed that AMANAH will be eliminated within two years from its formation. Besides that, Hadi believes that AMANAH will never get any support from voters because almost all of the AMANAH members were not loyal to the mother party.

Tan (2002 : 150) argued that it is often noted that, like any large organizations, political parties hesitant to change if the changes does not bring any benefits to the party. The question was what will happen to the party's mission when Hadi and his followers purged the reformist and do their party management will be more systematic if the party is merely led by the *ulama*? Without reformist in the party committee, what changes have

been made by PAS? After GE 13, Kelantan was ruled by PAS and no evidence showed that Kelantan administration become more reliable after the reformist had purged from the party. Only heard from PAS top brass of leadership that they will implement hudud law in Kelantan and in general, hudud was an old issue and had become an election campaign before PAS ruled the Kelantan. However, until now, PAS has failed to implement hudud law in Kelantan although Kelantan Menteri Besar had repeated his promises to implement hudud law latest by 2015. Besides that, the Kelantan government faced a chronic management and administration leak when they were burdened with court suits such as the people highway issue and the Kelantan Timber Complex.

PAS believed that politicians who had lost in the *muktamar* will retire, be inactive in politics or not involved in any political party. However, their believe totally changed when the losers in the *muktamar* have set up a new party and gave competition to their old party. After the formation of AMANAH, PAS have made sundry negative perspective against AMANAH and the most negative view was by the PAS President. He made a controversial statement that AMANAH will survive only two years after the formation. Basically, the process of set up a new party or a splinter party is not an odd phenomenon in the political system because Japan politics experienced the same when Ichiro Ozawa declared out of the LDP and set up a new party to give pressure to his old party. Ozawa with some of his colleagues and supporters have arranged a brilliant idea and set up a strong pact due to ensure that the LDP is no longer a ruling party and Ozawa's planning hit the target when they win the 1993 general election. (Christensen 2000 : 11-12).

Power sharing

The idea of power sharing is important to create a space for competing groups to share their view, working together and perhaps to be able to avoid hostility. The reality was sharing limited resources work best in the plural context allowing each competing entity to acknowledge the need to work collectively. To stay in power as a dominant party, BN can be seen as a role model due to their success to reign Malaysia for six decades. This complex multiethnic nation is being integrated wisely by a government that seeks to ensure that plurality and diversity are accepted in a delicately balanced relationship (Shamsul 2011 : 35). Furthermore, the power sharing formula is adopted by BN was applied since 1973 and successfully able to maintain its domination as the ruling party since independent of 1957 until 2018. Although the GE in 2018 and 2013 marked a significant shift of urban voters and the loss of 2/3 majority in the parliamentary seats to the opposition, BN still rules (Kartini Aboo Talib 2013 : 278).

Political scientist scholars such as Lijphart (1969, 1977, 1991) argue that power sharing was the means in order to maintain a harmonious relationship among all groups, each may have to practice a high degree of tolerance for any emerging issues. Unfortunately, *ulama* leaders from PAS believed that remaining in PR dominated by multi-ethnic PKR and DAP means that PAS is at risk of giving up its fundamental vision of state and society based on Islam and *Syariah* (Islamic law) that the party has long been championing (Kikue Hamayotsu 2010 : 167). Hadi and his followers realized that if their party wanted to compete in democratic politics, which has become increasingly

competitive in Malaysia, they should accept and participate in the sharing of power. In other words, PAS can no longer be a single party in order to achieve a victory in the election. However, why did PAS still maintain their decision to sever ties with PR although they realize the risk if they are a single party?

According to the leader of the PAS Ulama Council, Harun Taib, PAS has reached some resolution and suggested that political cooperation between PAS and its allies in the opposition, especially from PKR and DAP should be reviewed due to the declined of the Malays support for PAS on GE 13. Kikue Hayamatsu (2010 : 166) argued that Hadi and his followers are increasingly dissatisfied with their party's diminishing influence within PR despite making huge ideological compromises to stay within the coalition. Harun Taib also made some statements that the allocation of seats among PR component parties does not give much value to the strengthening of the position and the influence of PAS in PR. Besides that, he added that in order to gain more support from non-Malay, PAS had sold their dignity and as a result, this scenario has reduced the confidence of Malay voters to PAS (Al Husseyn51.blogspot).

PAS members fully supported the decision that had been suggested by Harun Taib and almost all of the PAS members agreed with Harun Taib although they realized that Harun Taib's action will give detriment to the party. Probably every party members must assert their loyalty to the party and there should be no objection from the grassroots. PAS top leadership always gives advice and encouragement to their followers to get involve strongly in any discussion on the party matters, but in reality, there were no platform for PAS's members to make the argument. Besides that, Mohd Izani (2014 : 43) argued that PAS's influence in PR is weakening despite an increase in public support. In other words, PAS is not a leader but merely a follower in PR. However, Hadi and his followers had make thousands of announcements that their party should lead the PR due to the reputation, seniority and establishment of their party.

Coalition in a majority system offers ways to win voters' votes. Bargsted and Kedar (2009) mentioned that in a majority system, voters' preference are subjective, but they are likely to incorporate chances for victory when choosing a candidate or political party, either individually or as part of a coalition, before casting their ballots. According to Mahathir, before his party joined PH, he gave some advice to the opposition party that they will never be able to topple BN if they fought each other. Mahathir warned the opposition parties that if they wanted to be a part of the government or ruling party, they have to temporarily forget about their enmity with each other in order to pursue their vision. Therefore, Hadi and his followers should have taken Mahathir's advice into consideration because Mahathir has a wide experience in Malaysian politics and the greatest is he was a prime minister before.

Conclusion

Wickham (2004 : 207-212) argued that leaders and political parties moderated their agendas in order to exploit new opportunities for electoral participation created by democratization. Based on democratic process, leaders and political parties were willing

to de-radicalize their stances, including efforts to reconstruct, renounce violence and abandon the goal of revolution in post-transition elections, particularly in Southern Europe and Latin America. However, Hadi as a President PAS believes that his party has a strong fundamental to rule the country without support from other political parties. Furnivall (1948) mentioned that “*a plural society is rich with conflicts*” and Hadi should take a note with this statement although he has strong confidence that PAS has their own strength to manage Malaysia.

This research found that although Hadi was a veteran politician, he asserts that his ideology, characterized, political thought and the way he solved the political problem are against PH. Hadi is categorized as an arrogant person, often disagrees with his colleagues, lacking of coalition spirit and always making a controversial statements towards PH. In Fadzil Noor’s era, he emphasized that PAS needed to combine the strength of the religiously and the non-religiously educated members and this statement showed that PAS members should seriously involve themselves in political cooperation in order to be a good government. However, Hadi believe that his own strategy and his arts of politic could make his party a reliable party and PAS can survive without collaborating with other political parties. As a conclusion, Hadi was an out dated politician although he is supposed to get a noble prize in his career as a politician.

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¹ Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang retained the PAS presidency by a landslide in the party’s first open contest for the post in over half a decade this week. Joining him was a fresh line-up of leaders comprising those endorsed by the party’s Ulama or clergy wing, who similarly trounced their so-called progressive contenders. There was never any doubt that Abdul Hadi would defeat his challenger, former vice-president Ahmad Awang. That was before the Ulama wing released its “cai”, or “menu”, of candidates whom it endorsed as the preferred leaders to direct the party’s future, just a day before the elections, which all but buried their rivals’ chances. For details, refer Zurairi Ar. June, 7, 2015. Three things we learned from the PAS Muktamar. <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/three-things-we-learned-from-the-pas-muktamar>. (April 11, 2018).

² Sohyo unions are strongest in the public sector: among teachers, railway workers, postal office and local government employees in particular. These unions can provide fairly powerful campaign machines in the relatively small constituencies of semi-urban and rural Japan where their members enjoy extensive community ties and in the case of public school teachers in particular, are part of the local social elite: they can support candidates there better than they can among the more anonymous, less easily mobilized voters of Japan’s large urban and metropolitan election districts (Curtis 1988 : 118).

³ The opposition bloc was formed in April 2008, uniting opposition parties that had long been pushed around by the governing Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN). Experts said PR was always a fragile alliance, given that it brought together bedfellows who were opposed ideologically, particularly the Islamist PAS and the secular DAP. The PR currently controls three states: Kelantan (PAS-led), Penang (DAP-led) and Selangor (PKR-led). The DAP holds 37 of 222 seats in Malaysia’s parliament, the PKR 29, and PAS 21. For details, refer Asrul Haji Abdullah Sani, Jun 18, 2015. Break up of Malaysia’s opposition bloc Pakatan Rakyat: What happened and what’s next? <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/break-up-of-malaysias-opposition-bloc-pakatan-rakyat-what-happened-and-whats-next>. (April 17, 2018).

⁴ The Malaysian United Indigenous Party or Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), informally known as BERSATU, is a political party in Malaysia. The party is led by former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad as Chairman and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as President. The party officially registered on Sept 7, 2016.

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