

PAS Dilemmas in the Era of *Abdul Hadi Awang*

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Abstract: The objective of this research is to identify what will happen to the PAS organization when the result of 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 'traditionalist' or 'purist' and the 'mainstreamer' or 'reformist' had to admit that they have lost their positions in the party. The focus of this research is to identify that when Abdul Hadi Awang, the PAS president, 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 asserts that his ideology, political thought and his ways of solving political problems are against with PH. Hadi was categorized as an arrogant who always disagrees with his colleagues, lacks of coalition spirit, and always makes a controversial statement towards PH.

1 INTRODUCTION

The result of 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 'traditionalist' or 'purist', and the 'mainstreamer' or 'reformist' admits 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 reformists. The result of the *muktamar* was well organized by Hadi and his followers, and they will ensure that only those with religious background will retain the top brass of PAS leadership, while the reformists have option to make a decision whether to keep their loyalty and accept the defeat or quit the party and create a splinter party; the reformists choose the second option. The reformist factions 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 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 saw PAS double 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 has done much detriment to the party when he and his followers have purged most of the reformist factions through the *muktamar*. Hadi ensures that only those with religious background will control the party management and he believes that PAS will be a stronger party without the support from the reformists.

In comparison, in the early years of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) rule in Japan, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) had been a powerful and seemingly growing party. It had the support from a large number of the 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 on a relatively large pool of talent for its Diet candidates. Union leaders accounted for less than 30 percents of JSP candidates in the first post-merger lower house election in 1985. Two decades later, however, the JSP had changed their political strategy and channeled almost through that part of the union movement organized into the Sohyo 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 percents of its seats in semi urban and rural districts. Only 26 percents of his lower house members were elected in urban districts and just 14 percents in metropolitan ones (Curtis, 1988: 118).

When Hadi has successfully purged the reformists from being a part of the party members, he and his factions has also made an unpredictable action to withdraw from multi-ethnic opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) on 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 that the PR no longer exists. Analysts believe the DAP and PKR will try to link up with a new partner to form a new opposition party before the next general election because this remains their only realistic path to defeat *Barisan Nasional* (BN). Therefore, after the PR dissolved, a new opposition party called *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) was founded on Sept 22, 2015 consisting the former PR parties except PAS and two splinter party; AMANAH and Malaysian United Indigenous Party (*Bersatu*).

This article analyses the distinctive patterns of conflict and frictions that emerge 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 attributed to opposition party strategies, and many vacancies were 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 agree to sever ties with PH? In addition, should the PAS's assemblyman keep loyal to the party even though some of them disagree with what Hadi and his factions have done? For instance, the DAP has asked PAS representatives to resign from their posts in 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 has offended their non-Muslim political partners, especially the Chinese-dominant DAP, in the opposition coalition pact, BA. Subsequently, DAP withdrew from the coalition altogether and the opposition pact was dissolved in 2004 as a result (Kikue Hamayotsu, 2010: 165). What surprised and bewildered outside observers was why PAS was in antagonism towards DAP despite their status also as an opposition party? As Liew Ching Tong (2007: 201) mentions that it is near possible for PAS to win national power on its own, and it was supported by Mohd Izani (2014: 42). PAS believes that to compete in democratic politics which has becoming 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 manage to survive since the first election in 1955. Why have these trends grow conspicuously within PAS?

2 PAS' ANTAGONISM TOWARDS PH

The PH's triumphant in the GE 2013 attests that political cooperation is the best strategies to be in power. Once in power, the PH can create a job vacancy through political appointments and most of the posts are occupied based on politics connection rather than qualification. The political post is created after winning an election, and it gives government jobs to its supporters, friends and relatives as a reward for working toward victory and usually the post is a contract or no limit time. Mohamad Sabu and Mujahid Yusof Rawa, for example, have taken the challenge to resign from their posts in various

state agencies when Hadi declares that PAS has no longer tied with PH. The question is does Hadi realize what he has done to PAS when his party has severed ties with PH, and can all the PAS members follow Hadi's summons in order to reveal their loyalty to the party?

As a veteran politician, Hadi realizes that it is near impossible for PAS to be in power on the national level without assistance from the opposition parties. Besides, PAS claims that his party has a million of members and party branches all over the states in Malaysia - this statement perceives that PAS can achieve the election victory despite being alone. However, in the plural society, working alone to topple BN is not a good idea as Mahathir argues after his party has joined 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 has urged the component parties to set aside their ideological differences and unite if the coalition wishes to defeat Najib 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 state legislative, PAS has won one from 40 seats in Penang and 15 over 56 seats in Selangor and this resulted asserts that PAS has showed their good performance in Selangor. When Hadi and his followers urge their party members to sever ties with PR, Selangor PAS leaders, in particular, scramble 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 it does not work and why the top brass of PAS leadership does 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) argues that Hadi and his followers are 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 insist that PR should be led by PAS due to their party experiences in politics, background and reputation. Hadi and others top party leaders feel disappointed when some of his senior party members leave PAS and form AMANAH. Once AMANAH has been registered, Hadi constantly gives

negative perspective towards that party and assumes that AMANAH will be eliminated within two years from its formation. Besides, Hadi believes that AMANAH will never get any supports from voters because most of AMANAH members are unloyal to the mother party.

Tan (2002: 150) argues that it is often noted that, like any large organizations, political parties are hesitant to change if the changes cannot bring any benefits to the party. The question is what will happen to the party's mission when Hadi and his followers have purged the reformists, and will their party management 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 is ruled by PAS and no evidence shows that Kelantan administration becomes more reliable after the reformists have been purged from the party. It is often heard from PAS's top brass of leadership that they will implement *hudud* law in Kelantan and in generally, the *hudud* is an old issue and has become an election campaign before PAS rules Kelantan. However, until now, PAS has failed to implement *hudud* law in Kelantan although Kelantan *Menteri Besar* has repeated his promises to implement *hudud* law at the latest by 2015. Besides, Kelantan government has faced a chronic management and administration leak when they are burdened with court suits such as the people highway issue and Kelantan Timber Complex.

PAS believes that politicians who have lost in the *muktamar* will retire, be inactive in politics or not involved in any political party. However, their belief is totally changed when the losers in the *muktamar* have set up a new party and given competition to their old party. After the formation of AMANAH, PAS has made sundry negative perspective to AMANAH and the most negative view that has been done by the PAS President is he has made a controversial statement that AMANAH will survive within 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 have some experiences when Ichiro Ozawa declares 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 hits the target when they win the 1993 general election. (Christensen 2000: 11-12).

3 POWER SHARING

The idea of power sharing is important to create a space for competing groups to share their view, work together, and perhaps be able to avoid hostility. The reality is 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 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 rules still (Kartini Aboo Talib, 2013: 278).

Political scientist scholar; such as Lijphart (1969, 1977, 1991) argues that power sharing is 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 believe that remaining in PR dominated by multi-ethnic PKR and DAP means that PAS runs the 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 realize that if their party want to compete in democratic politics, which have become increasingly competitive in Malaysia, they should accept and participate in the sharing of power. In other word, PAS can no longer being 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 realized the risk if they moved alone as a single party?

According to the leader of the PAS Ulama Council, Harun Taib, PAS has reached some resolution, and suggests 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) argues 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 makes

some statements that the allocation of seats among PR component parties does not give much value to the strengthening of the position and influence of PAS in PR. Besides, he added that in order to gain more support from non-Malay, PAS has sold their dignity and as a result, this scenario has reduced the confidence of Malay voters to PAS (Al Husseyn51.blogspot).

PAS members have fully supported the decision suggested by Harun Taib, and why almost PAS members agree with Harun Taib although they realize that Harun Taib's action will give detriment to the party. Probably every party member must assert their loyalty to the party and there should be no objection from the grassroots. PAS top leadership always gives advice and encourages their followers to get involved strongly in any discussion on the party matter, but in reality, there is no platform for PAS's members to make the argument. Besides, Mohd Izani (2014: 43) argues that PAS's influence in the 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 have made thousand 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) mention that in a majority system, voters' preference is 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 becomes a coalition member to PH, he has given some advices to the opposition party that they will never be able to topple BN if they fight each other. Mahathir has warned to the opposition party that if they want to be a part of 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 take notice what Mahathir has told because Mahathir has wide experiences in Malaysia politics and the greatest memory that he has is becoming a prime minister.

4 CONCLUSIONS

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 are 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 the support from other political parties. Furnivall (1948) mentions that “a plural society is rich with conflicts” and Hadi should take a note with this statement although he has strong confident that PAS has their own strength to manage the Malaysia politics.

This research found that although Hadi is a veteran politician, he asserts that his ideology, characteristics, political thought and the way he solved the political problem are against with PH. Hadi was categorized as an arrogant, who disagrees with his colleagues, lacks of coalition spirit and always makes a controversial statement towards PH. In Fadzil Noor era, he emphasizes that PAS needs to combine the strength of the religiously and the non-religiously educated and this statement shows that PAS should seriously involve in political cooperation in order to be a good governance. However, Hadi believes that his own strategy and his arts of politic can make his party reliable, and PAS can survive without doing collaboration with other political parties. As a conclusion, Hadi is an out dated politician although he is supposed to get a noble prize in his career as a politician.

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