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# IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC DA'WAH IN THE MALAYSIAN ARMED FORCES: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ARMED FORCES RELIGIOUS CORPS

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## ABSTRACT

Efforts to implement da'wah in the organisation must be made in an orderly and planned manner to achieve good results. The Ministry of Defence Malaysia, established the Armed Forces Religious Corps (Malay: Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera, KAGAT) in 1985, to build an appreciation of Islam among the military to form the strength of personnel's, both spiritually and mentally, to provide a strong combat force to defend religion, race and country. This paper will explain the da'wah efforts made by KAGAT in the way of wasatiyyah to have a significant impact on the appreciation of Islam among the personnel of the Malaysian Armed Forces as well as the effects of Islamic da'wah in Malaysia. Library research, questionnaire methods, interviews and observations were used to obtain research data. The findings of the study show that KAGAT's experience in the implementation of da'wah through wasatiyyah in military organisations and face various of challenge can be used as a useful guideline for da'wah organisations and preachers in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** da'wah, appreciation, military, *wasatiyyah*

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## Introduction

Da'wah Islamiah is an invitation or a call towards the acceptance and appreciation of Islamic teachings and values. This aspiration can be realised through the systematic management and planning of the da'wah in accordance with the recommendations of the Qur'an so that da'wah can be delivered and disseminated wisely and effectively. In this regard, due to the awareness to convey the Islamic da'wah more effectively and to build faithful and pious military personnel capable of serving with excellence and effectiveness, the Islamic da'wah efforts in the organisation of the Malaysian Armed Forces have become more widespread and organised. This paper is aimed to explain the implementation of the da'wah by the Armed Forces Religious Corps (Malay: *Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera*, KAGAT) in the organisation of the Malaysian Armed Forces in conveying the message of Islam. In addition, this paper also highlights on the understanding and appreciation of Islam to all members of the Malaysian Armed Forces.

## The meaning of da'wah

The meaning of da'wah etymologically, da'wah is derived from the Arabic words *da'a*, *yad'u*, *da'wan*, *du'a* (Ba'albaki1982), which means to invite, call, command, proclaim, applications and requests. This term is often given the same meaning as the terms *tabligh*, *amar maaruf and nahimungkar*, *mauizzahhasanah*, *tabsyir*, *inzar*, *washiah*, *tarbiyah*, *taa'lim* and *khutbah*.

In other words, da'wah means to worship, solicitation, request (*al-istighatahah*), appeal and determination. According to the terminology, the purpose of da'wah is to invite people to goodness and guidance, to command the good and to forbid the evil (*al-amr bi al ma'rufwa an-nahyl al-munkar*) and to achieve happiness in this world and in the hereafter in which this category is divided into three parts. First of all, the preaching of the ummah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to others to embrace Islam. Second, da'wah to fellow Muslims to always do good and third, da'wah to each other to propel good and at the same time encourage them to do it (Ali Mahfuz 1994).

Based on the above interpretation either etymologically or terminologically, da'wah can be defined by invitation, either through words, writings or attitudes, whether the invitation is towards good or evil. This meaning is explained in the Qur'an, which mentions that da'wah is not only meant for good things but also the invitation to bad things is also called da'wah. This is as found in surah al-Mukminun verse 41-42, Allah says, "*Then the Blast overtook them with justice, and We made them as rubbish of dead leaves (floating on the stream of Time)! So away with the people who do wrong! Then We raised after them other generations*".

Based on the above sentence, it can be understood that the word da'wah in a neutral form is to invite something good or bad. According to Al-Syawkani (1973), da'wah to goodness is to invite people into heaven and avoid going to hell with faith in God and obeying the call of the Prophet. While the bad da'wah is to invite people to go to hell by associating Allah or shirk.

The view of al-Syawkani is not much different from that of al-Razi (1987) in his tafsir book *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, who said that, what is meant by da'wah to goodness is to call people to a faith that can protect them, while what is meant by da'wah to evil is to invite people to disbelief until one falls into hell.

Regarding da'wah to the path of Allah SWT, Ali Mahfuz (1994) divided it into four stages, namely the first, performing da'wah to the path of Allah through sword or war. The second is to render da'wah in the way of the approach that has been done, like the prophets and messengers, by providing examples of goodness. Third, da'wah by focusing on the question of the heart by educating and giving stimulation and life to the heart. Fourth, da'wah towards divinity which means prioritising all the desires and rulings that Allah SWT has determined compared to others.

Da'wah is also an effort to transfer the paradigm of mankind to a level that follows the natural human nature created by Allah SWT (Abdul Aziz 2006). This means a change of consciousness from disbelief to Islam, from evil to good, from error to right, from mistake to guidance, from negative to positive and from bad things to good.

Apart from that, da'wah also means, as an effort to change a situation to a better and more perfect condition, either against individual, organisations or society. Da'wah is not just an effort to increase religious understanding, behaviour and perspective on life, but also towards

a broader target. Moreover, todayda'wah should play a more holistic role in the application of Islamic teachings in various aspects of life (Rozhan Othman 1990).

Based on the definition given, while somewhat different, it can be concluded that the nature of da'wah is the activity and action to change people, both individuals and society, from a bad situation to a better one. Apart from that, according to Wan Hussein Azmi (1980), the term da'wah includes the following meanings:

- a. Da'wah is an activity that calls for or invites others to practice the teachings of Islam.
- b. Da'wah is the process of delivering Islamic teaching that is done consciously and deliberately.
- c. Da'wah is an activity which implementation is done in various ways and methods.
- d. Da'wah is an activity designed to find happiness in life by seeking the pleasure of Allah.
- e. Da'wah is an effort to increase religious understanding to change the outlook on life, inner attitude and human behaviour that is not part of the teachings of Islam to be in accordance with the guidance of the Sharia to obtain happiness in this world and the hereafter.

### **Religious Services in the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF)**

The Malaysian Armed Forces Religious Corps (Malay: *Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera*, KAGAT) was officially established on 16 April 1985 after various efforts were made to create a special institution that handles religious and spiritual affairs in the Malaysian Armed Forces (KAGAT 20 Tahun, 2005). The duties and responsibilities of KAGAT should not be taken lightly because its role is so broad that it covers the three branches of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF), namely the Malaysian Royal Army (MRA), Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) and Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF). Since the personnel of the MAF mostly made up of Malay Muslims, it is therefore appropriate for an organisation under the MAF to be given the mandate to inculcate Islamic values among its members. The establishment of KAGAT at that time was timely because based on history, the country has inherited the pattern of leadership and administration of the British army since before its independence (Mohammed Rahim 1989)

The Constitution of Malaysia, in article 3 (1), has been stated that "Islam is a federal religion, but other religions can be practised peacefully in any part of the Federation" (Perlembagaan Persekutuan, 2007).

Based on this, religion is one of the important features of Malaysia, and therefore it is appropriate to strive and apply Islamic values to the Civil Service procedures of this country in accordance with the provisions of the Malaysian Constitution as mentioned in Article 3 (1) in Federal Constitution of Malaysia (Wan MohdNor 1994). In general, Islamic activities in Malaysia after independence are divided into two parts. The first is the official activities as carried out by the government through the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia, as well as the religious activities and programmes organised by the Islamic Religious Council in the states. Second, religious activities carried out informally by the people and the public through non-governmental organisations such as residents' associations, Malaysian Islamic

Welfare Association, Malaysian Islamic Youth Organisation and others (Wan Hussein Azmi 1980).

### **Religious Services inMAFs in The Early Stages**

The glorious history of Islamic civilisation since the early days of Islam has proved that Islamic values can shape human beings to be excellent. The Arabs in the pre-Islamic era were a backward nation, but after accepting and practising the teachings of Islam, they were able to give a great civilisation at that time and develop Islamic civilisation from Spain in Europe to the Eastern Chinese states. Islam has succeeded in producing a great civilisation that brings peace and prosperity to the world, being the impetus for human progress in spiritual, thought, moral and worldly aspects. It is the primary source of knowledge that benefits not only the Eastern world but also the West, which receives intellectual, moral and ideas for material progress (Wan Hussein Azmi 1980).

As a military organisation based on the British Armed Forces (BAF) model, the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) certainly have important attributes and key characteristics of the BAF which are elements that influence the foundation of the establishment and direction of the construction of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF). The history of the Armed Forces began after the establishment on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1933, when 25 young Malay locals were chosen as suitable recruits for the new regiment. Formed on 1<sup>st</sup> March in 1933 in the Haig Lines, Port Dickson Negeri Sembilan, this Experimental Company began with the 25 recruits under Commanding Officer G. Mc Bruce and Captain K.G Exhan as Adjutant (Abdul Samad Idris 1983).

The establishment of this force is the result of greater awareness and insistence by the Malay authorities at that time on the enlightenment of the utmost importance for natives in charge of the defence of their homeland. This proposal was voiced by the Sultan of Perak Sultan Alang Iskandar, Tuanku Yang Dipertuan Negeri Sembilan Tuanku Muhammad Ibnu Yam Tuan Antah, Raja Di Hilir Perak Sir Raja Chulan and Undang Rembau Dato 'Abdullah Haji Damat in the Federal Assembly Hall in 1920, and then *Malay, The Regiment Bill*, was passed on 23 June 1933, as Enactment No.11 (Abdul Samad Idris 1983).

Although the military organisation based on the British model, the MAF still has its own identity in maintaining Islamic and local elements and has the potential to create an Islamic-based defence concept with a local environment. The Islamic potential is an element that correlates with the Malay spirit of awareness to liberate the country from the shackles of colonialism. The colonial authorities are well aware that the religious spirit is a power or a force that can undermine the colonial system in which Islam, as a religion, aspires to the Malays. Therefore, the colonialists are very careful in serving sentiments and welfare in this religious aspect. When the Malaya Regiment was established on March 1, 1933, the British did not take serious note of the requirements of the Islamic religion, but after the first group of the Malaya Regiment had completed a series of basic training sessions, they began to press the British to emphasise the needs and welfare of the religious aspect. As a result of the insistence, the British established the position of imam on September 1, 1933. The salary of this imam was paid using the battalion fund (Mohammed Rahim 1989).

However, this does not mean that the colonialists provide a religious function to determine the direction of the profession. It simply serves the demands of the natives by limiting religious functions within the scope that do not challenge the colonial system. Religious programmes are permitted within a limited range of activities that are specific to worship

only and are usually held outside official working hours. In other words, this religious programme is not formalised in the official activities of the team, thus it shows that the religious function only plays a role while in the mosque and will expire when in the wire field. The separation of religious functions from military life has placed both of these in a wide area or gap (Burhanuddin Jalal 2018).

Although the British did not emphasise the religious aspect of the military service at that time, the appointed military-religious teachers actively taught and guided Muslims personnel in the space allowed. The first religious teacher to serve in the Malay Regiment was Tuan Haji Ibrahim bin Yussuf, who hails from Kampung Sawah Rantau, Negeri Sembilan and joined in 1935 (Di Persada Kegemilangan, 2005).

Appointed religious teachers strive to expand their role from time to time, in accordance with the needs, the state of opinions and censure that have been made by covering all aspects of Islam. The views and advice are forwarded from time to time to the military authorities through the Annual Meeting of the Senior Military Religious Teachers. Many issues relating to religious administration and programmes have been raised and received due attention. However, the position of religion at that time still separates itself from the military service, whereas each of them played a role within its own area, and thus religion has not yet been able to perform religious functions in a broad sense (Mohammed Rahim 1989).

For several years, especially from 1933 to the early 1970s, it turned out that military-religious teachers played an essential role in the efforts to provide religious guidance to military personnel. Despite the many challenges and obstacles in the effort to convey the message of Islam, as well as the strong influence and bound by the customs, ethics and rules practised by the Western colonialists, the role played by these religious teachers was enormous in the understanding and appreciation of religion among the members of Islam and their families before they continued to be influenced by the western ways and lifestyles that were indeed prevalent at that time (Abdul Samad Idris 1983).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the spirit of Islamic awareness and revival has become a universal phenomenon and has also been felt in the military institutions. The military community felt that the traditional role of military-religious teachers could no longer give them a high level of spiritual satisfaction. Awareness and commitment to the appreciation of Islam have permeated personal and family life. At the same time, the services of religious teachers could no longer meet the needs of the military community, both in terms of quality and quantity. This is due to the stagnation and imbalance in the development of the services of military-religious teachers compared to the development of the MAF in all aspects at that time (Mohamad Rahim 1989).

### **Establishment of the Malaysian Armed Forces Religious Corps (Malay: *Kor Agama Angkatan Tentera*, KAGAT)**

Awareness of continuing to elevate Islamic teachings in the service of the Malaysian Armed Forces, especially among the early generations of religious officers in the Ministry of Defence, has certainly inherited the continuity of the struggle of the Prophet, his companions and also previous Islamic scholars. The challenge of continuing this Islamic message has existed since the time of Prophet Muhammad. As stated by Majid Khadduri (1969), in his book, *War and peace in the law of Islam*, has mentioned, "Allah gave Prophet Muhammad four swords (for fighting the unbelievers): the first against polytheist, which Muhammad himself fought; the second against apostates, which Caliph Abu Bakr fought; the third

*against the people of the book, which caliph 'Umar fought with; and the fourth against dissenters, which caliph Ali fought with".*

In highlighting the da'wah process carried out by Prophet Muhammad, it turns out that at the beginning, Islam only spread 'quietly' among family and close friends. After a few years of receiving the first revelation, he began to preach openly until he received threats from the enemy, and his safety was always threatened and humiliated by his people. The struggle to spread, to elevate Islamic teachings, as well as efforts to appreciate religion and da'wah in the service of the Malaysian Armed Forces, can be seen as the same form of struggle, where the only difference is the terms of challenges that need to be faced (Burhanuddin Jalal 2018).

As the effects of the socio-cultural and political change of the country and society have already been mentioned, especially by the 1980s, efforts are being made to inculcate Islamic values in the government sector, and efforts to instil Islamic values in military organisations are also experiencing the same process in line with other public sectors. Following the above developments, ideas and efforts to develop religious services as an organisation in the form of a corps under the MAF service have begun to be mobilised. In addition to bringing religious members closer to 'militarisation', there are other factors driving the establishment of KAGAT, namely:

- a. Planning, coordinating and implementing the Islamic da'wah effort and appreciation of Islam to all MAF officers and personnel.
- b. Provide and develop the teaching of Islamic sciences, especially the emphasis on the height of morality, attitudes and attributes (spirit de corps) as well as understanding the true meaning of military service according to the Islamic view.
- c. Implement and enforce all Islamic rules, laws and regulations that have been decided by the Federal Islamic Religious Council and the states.
- d. Provide assistance in efforts to enhance the heroic spirit of military personnel in line with the mission of the MAF struggle (Burhanuddin Jalal 2018).

On 29 November 1984, the 238th meeting of the Malaysian Armed Forces Council, approved a special service scheme for the Religious Corps of the Armed Forces, covering technical aspects, personnel, emoluments and also the terms of service of officers and members of other ranks (238th Malaysian Armed Forces Council Meeting Minutes). Further to the 249th Malaysian Armed Forces Council meeting on 29 March 1986, approved the terms of exchange of Islamic Affairs Officers under the Department of Public Service to the Ministry of Defence under the Military Service Scheme at that time, it was clear that the establishment of KAGAT was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- a. Meet the religious needs of the MAF members and their families.
- b. Provide facilities and Islamic religious education for the military community in times of peace, emergency or war.
- c. Build a strong moral stand, firmness and discipline among MAF members based on the application of Islamic values appropriate to time and circumstances.

d. Resolve the problems of the administration of Islam in accordance with the laws that have been enforced from time to time, especially in Shariah affairs and the relationship between the MAF and the public.

e. Strive to manage whatever matters the authorities consider necessary for the good and development of Islam in the MAF (*Di PersadaKegemilangan* 2005).

### Goals, Objectives, Vision and Mission of KAGAT

In line with the development of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) in the process of modernising the force as well as developing the scope of its duties and roles, KAGAT also expands the scope of its terms of reference, roles and responsibilities that need to be implemented in accordance with the passage of time and era.

In this regard, KAGAT is formulating its new mission, vision and objectives under the strategic management determined by the Malaysian Armed Forces. The mission, vision and objectives of KAGAT to achieve the strategic management of KAGAT 2000-2020 (JabatanArah KAGAT 1999). are as follows:

a. **Vision.** To be a generator of excellence in the spiritual development of MAF human capital.

b. **Mission.** Assist the MAF in increasing the level of professionalism through Islamic education, as well as providing religious services to all MAF staff.

c. **General Objectives.** To produce MAF personnel who are knowledgeable, faithful, charitable and pious towards strengthening spirituality and combat power (spiritual combat power).

#### d. Operational Objectives

i. Make KAGAT more up-to-date and global professionals through sound and systematic structuring and planning.

ii. Build human resources that are professional, progressive, comprehensive, skilled and have credibility.

iii. Provide knowledge, understanding, guidance and awareness towards the true appreciation of Islamic teachings to MAF staff.

iv. Develop, administer and manage the affairs of mosques and *surau*.

v. Provide religious services including family counselling services, welfare and community.

vi. Conduct scientific and general studies towards consolidation and religion in MAFs.

vii. Provide printed and multimedia materials as reference sources in MAFs.

viii. Enhancing KAGAT capabilities through the procurement and management of program and logistics personnel as well as infrastructure development more effectively and efficiently.

ix. Develop professional and excellent KAGAT human resources.

- x. Provide Shariah legal services to MAF staff.
- xi. Provide Islamic education to develop the combat strength of MAF citizens (JabatanArahKAGAT 1997).

### **Islamic Mental and Spiritual Development Program**

To provide more outstanding Islamic education and appreciation to every Malaysian citizen who joins the Malaysian Armed Forces, KAGAT has worked on a policy called the Islamic Mental and Spiritual Development Policy. Under this policy, the personnel of the Malaysian Army who is a Muslim is required to receive an education and Islamic appreciation programme of 857 hours each year for Islamic mental and spiritual development, with specific guidance and guidelines that will be issued from time to time (PerintahMajlisAngkatanTentera Malaysia Bilangan 9/91).

Through this gazetted policy, two forms of construction are presented, in addition to the existing physical training policy, aimed at producing soldiers with physical, mental and spiritual resilience. The form of construction shall be mastered as follows:

- a. Mental resilience, through the filling of Islamic knowledge which includes the sciences of *farduain* and the sciences of *fardukifayah*.
- b. Spiritual resilience of training and appreciation of authentic and accurate Islamic deeds.

Through the mental resilience programme, every Muslim member who serves in the service of the Malaysian Armed Forces can and will be able to implement the demands of *farduain* and *fardukifayah* properly and perfectly. Behaviour, acts or practices which deviate from religious teachings are not permitted in the Malaysian Armed Forces, therefore as long as members serve in their military service, they are required to:

- a. Having a mature and stable Islamic mind and clear of any negative elements that are protected from being influenced by the streams of wrong thoughts that deviate from the actual teachings of Islam.
- b. Receive primary Islamic education that includes the following:
  - i. Basic education *farduain*.
  - ii. Basic education *fardukifayah*.
  - iii. Jihad education.
  - iv. Family education.
  - v. Moral education.
  - vi. Leadership education.
  - vii. Qur'anic and Sunnah education.
  - viii. Worship education.
  - ix. Education of Islamic civilisation.
  - x. *Tasawur* Islam.



All training centres, formations, and teams must provide a minimum of 857 hours per year to enable members under their government to obtain Islamic education as prescribed. In terms of spiritual resilience, all members of the Malaysian military who are Muslims will be given training and education throughout the service to become soldiers with Muslim, Mukmin and Muhsin characteristics (PerintahMajlisAngkatanTentera Malaysia Bilangan 9/91).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Islamic da'wah efforts in the Malaysian Armed Forces must continue to be enhanced, strengthened and solidified. It is also necessary to reinforce the strength of prayer and acts of worship aspects in line with the sophistication of weapons, as well as the strength of the soul and of the heart, with a strong balance of physical and mental strength. The word of Allah (s.w.t) in surah An-Anfal verse 45, which gives guidance to achieve success in facing the enemy. The words of Allah in Surah al-Anfal (8:45): "*O you who believe! When you meet a force (enemy), then be steadfast in the face of it, and mention and remember Allah (with prayer) many times, that you may succeed (achieve victory).*"

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