Islamic Practice among the Malaysian Armed Forces Personnels

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Abstract

The Malaysian Armed Forces, through the Armed Forces Religious Corps formed in 1985, has strived to enhance the internalisation of Islam among its personnel to strengthen them spiritually and mentally so that they can be a solid combat force to defend religion, race and nation. This study examines the extent of internalisation of Islam among Malaysian Armed Forces personnel based on the Religious Corps through the Malaysian Armed Forces Islamic Mental and Spiritual Development programme. Data was obtained through library research, questionnaire, interviews and observation. The survey method was used as an instrument for the field study to assess their internalisation of Islam through faith, acts of religious devotion as well as morals. 383 Malaysian Armed Forces were randomly sampled in this study. The overall results were analyzed using SPSS. In general, the results showed a noticeable high internalisation of Islam among the Malaysian Armed Forces personnel and conclude that the efforts of the Armed Forces Religious Corps in promoting internalisation of Islam among the Malaysian Armed Forces personnel have been successful.

Keywords: Islamic understanding, spirituality, dakwah, religiosity
Background

The term Islamic understanding or religiosity refers to the religious lifestyle or pious life especially referring to religion in the West. In the context of Islam, religious life is connected to Islam as a way of life, or ad-din. (al-Nahlawi 2002; al-Mawdudi 1981). Religiosity or pious life is essential in human life as religiosity exudes a great influence towards the behaviour, personality, emotional peace, human’s self-confidence, also life happiness (HAMKA 1997).

Muslims who practise Islam as their al-Din are said to appreciate Islam in their everyday lives. This is consistent with the decree of Allah (s.w.t.) in the verse of al-Baqarah (2:208): which means: “Oh you believers! Enter perfectly in Islam (by obeying all the rules and regulations of the Islamic religion) and follow not the footsteps of Shaitan (Satan). Verily! He is to you a plain enemy”.

Other terms that would be appropriate to replace the term ‘religiosity’ include hayyah muttadayyinah or religious life (Zakaria 1999), faith and awareness and Islamic appreciation (al-Attas 2002). In this study, religiosity from the Islamic perspective, refers to the Islamic appreciation as a way of life that encapsulates aspects of faith, worship and moral as seen in the comprehensive and integrative scope of Islam.

Based on the meaning stated, the appreciation of Islam involves appreciating Islam in the truest sense of the word, so much so that it permeates into one’s soul. This definition is harmonious with the view put forth by al-Qaradawi (1988) who mentions that religion is an internal urge to affirm that everything that they are and that are around him has their own Superior, which is the Most Divine and Supreme to whom they succumb and surrender to with full of respect, hope, fear and helplessness. Therefore, those who fulfill these internal urges will be granted peace and the sweetness of faith. In this matter, Muslims who are denied these urges of faith, will not be granted the sweetness of iman from their souls.

In terms of the measurement, most scholars agree that Islamic appreciation can be measured and the basis for the measurement is purely on the surface as faith must be proven by way of practice. The whole appreciation can be detected through knowledge, understanding, thought, practice, personality and culture.
Based on this premise, the military field is one aspect that is integral in Islam. This field is inextricably linked with national defence and furthermore, the formidability of ummah. A country known to be strong and respected is one that is equipped with strong military forces and high technology, particularly in terms of its weaponry. This justifies why the main thing that the Prophet Rasulullah (s.a.w) did as he was upholding the first Islamic government in Medina was forming its defence machinery or establishing a military front that was able to stand strong for the country and the Muslims, in particular.

The preparation for a strong team of soldiers, who are both professional and credible is not habitual, in itself. It does not imply that there are enemies or threats that have propelled a country to have to form a body of army which may seen as the answer to issues pertaining to national security and defence. In actual fact, the formation of a military force in a particular country especially in countries dominated by Muslims, is something that has been decreed by Allah SWT. He has dictated this in the Quran, in al-Anfal verse 60 which means: “And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles, artillery, etc.) to threaten the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides whom, you may not know but whom Allah does know. And whatever you shall spend in the Cause of Allah shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly”.

Based on the verse above, Islamic enemies will prevail whether they are within our knowledge or outside our knowledge. This is why Allah commands Muslims to get prepared and to be careful as to face any possibilities so that they will not be in shock when uninvited enemies come to attack. The importance of the Malaysian Military Force as a highly mandated organisation when it comes to defending the country has been affirmed by one of our former Prime Ministers of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Mahathir Mohammad (BTDM 2002) in the recruits' end-of-training speech on 31 December 2001 where he states, “The country owes it to the military forces who have fulfilled their duties in full loyalty and are willing to sacrifice to ensure that the country is safe and free from any form of threats since the World War 2. Thus, as the citizens we must stay united with
the soldiers in sustaining peace so that we will not become slaves to the colonisers once again”.

In the effort to form a formidable and intimidating military front, we should know how to choose a really capable formula in producing members who are efficient and have credibility. Some training aspects like disciplining the members, training members to develop weapon-handling skills, forming morality among them so that they will obey the rules and commands, working hard and staying away from any form of abuse are things that should be given the priority. However, the success of these aspects cannot be fully anticipated without one more important element in the members’ self-development and formation. The element would be the element of ‘spirituality’ that is related to faith, belief, and piety towards the religion.

The importance of the consolidation of these spiritual values should further be stimulated to ensure that the servants of the Malaysian Military Force are able to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. General Tan Sri Dato’ Seri Zulkifli Zainal Abidin Malaysian Chief of Army, in his first command speech in his appointment as Malaysian Army Chief, asserts “In the context of training in the Army Force, and to build human professionalism and development, spiritual-oriented training must be prioritised. This aspect is important to strengthen the platform of the training to be more effective”. To ensure that the whole organisation can be formed and educated, an ongoing construction process through a systematic training is vital. According to Muhammad Ahmad Bashil (1989) in his book, Politics and military – the Hudaibiyyah Agreement, he explains that, the efforts to form soldiers who can understand their duties effectively, and at the same time who become the loyal servants of Allah, require continuous efforts of dakwah and proper education.

Statements clearly demonstrate that the knowledge of aqidah, shari’a and moral is important to each and every member of the Malaysian Armed Forces, in eliminating the negative influence of secularism and to help them become pious Caliphs of Allah. Therefore, the Armed Forces’ Religious Corps or KAGAT has been given the duty, role and responsibility to build the religious appreciation and spirituality among the members of the Malaysian Armed Forces.
Objectives Research

Among the research objectives intended to be achieved are as follows:

A) Identify the concept of appreciation of Islam required by every Muslim, including members of the Malaysian Armed Forces.

B) Identify the background of dakwah program conducted by Armed Forces Religious Corps in an effort to increase religious practice among members of the armed forces as well as raising the syiar of Islam in Malaysian Armed Forces.

C) Analyse the level of appreciation of Islam among the Malaysian Armed Forces in terms of faith, ibadah and morality.

Research Methodology

The research have been carried out among the Malaysian Armed Forces personnel from September 2010 to December 2012. The instrument used in this study was questionnaire. Questionnaires were constructed containing 102 questions. The questionnaire consisted of the instruments were built by Azma Mahmud (2006), which has a Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.97. However these instruments have made modifications and reconstruction based on the needs and goals of the study respondents.

It should be mentioned also that the research that have been done is a descriptive research. This means that both qualitative and quantitative research. The combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Delbert C. Miller and Neil J. Salkind (2002) study is a study that combines the best characteristics of both quantitative and qualitative, and so on Neuman (1991) stated drawbacks can be accommodated with quantitative and qualitative vice versa. In addition, the instrument for obtaining data is through library research, field studies, interviews, observations and questionnaires. The population for this study was about 102,398. According Krejcie and Morgan (1970) population exceeding 100,000 require a sample size of at least 383 respondents connection with that set the number of researchers in this study were a total of 383 respondents. Selection of sampling randomly divided into three services with ATM which is complimentary army, navy and air force. In the area of data analysis,
the data obtained were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science), and the method of data analysis is divided into two, namely descriptive analysis and inferential analysis.

**Findings**

In this study, a total of 102 questions related to the appreciation of Islam encompassing the aspect of faith *ibadah* and morality were presented to the respondents. Basically, questions posed were of basic level, in accordance to respondents' ability and their level of appreciation on Islam, based on the MAF’s Islamic Mental and Spiritual Development objectives which focus on developing an Islamic oriented army towards achieving a true Muslim, *Mukmin* and *muhsin*. This study applies a holistic approach to the aspect of Islamic appreciation which includes faith, *ibadah* and morality, and in terms of Islamic appreciation among MAF personnel, it was found that no respondents were at low level, whereas 25 respondents (6.5%) at intermediate level and a total of 358 respondents (93.5%) at high level with overall mean of 411.48 in terms of (Min =411.48). This is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**: Score for level of Islamic appreciation among respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>102-238</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>239-374</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>375-510</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>383</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2012 Survey
Table 2: The aspect of weaknesses in Appreciating Islam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Does not show any fear after being reminded that the messengers record all</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their deeds in detail.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Refuse to remind myself that <em>Raqib</em> and <em>Atid</em> record all the deeds that</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I performed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rejecting Prophets sent to uphold Allah’s religion.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Disputing the fact that Sunnah of the Prophet is appropriate to be practiced</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>till the end of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Do not felt horrified and regret when being told about torments in the grave.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>State that human is free to embrace any religion as long as believing Allah</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(s.w.t.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Do not feel unease whenever late in performing prayers.</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Being lazy to perform prayer especially <em>fajr</em>.</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Sometimes failing to complete the obligation of praying five times daily.</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do not perform additional <em>sunat</em> prayers (<em>nawafil</em>).</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Not making savings for haj preparation.</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Do not make any effort in memorizing the <em>hadith</em> of the Prophet.</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Do not attend <em>tafsir</em> lecture to acquire the knowledge of al-Quran in</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>greater depth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Do not learn <em>tajwid</em> to improve the quality of al-Quran recitation.</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Always performing work hastily</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Felt satisfied when finding other’s fault.</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Take other's belongings without permission when in desperation or when the</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>owner is not around.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Prefer to say ‘hai’ rather than <em>Assalamualaikum</em>.</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rarely go to the mosque or <em>surau</em> to mix with the outside community</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Admitting of using foul language when speaking.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2012 Survey.
Discussion

Generally, in determining the level of appreciation Islam, this study meets three basic criteria to gauge the level of appreciation norms, namely representativeness, relevance and recent as proposed by Wiersma (1986). A sample size of 383 was chosen via random sampling technique based on the zoning system, team, rank, type of service and gender with a reasonable fraction. With the small number of respondents, namely 383 within a population of 102,000 people, it is possible that the results of this study do not reflect the level of appreciation of Islam among MAF personnel as a whole, but at least it could reflect the reality or the current level of appreciation of Islam among MAF.

Although basically the study found that the level of appreciation of Islam as a whole is high, there are some aspects of Islam that are generally imbalanced. There are few aspects in faith, ibadah and morality among respondents that need to be improved and the study shows that there are defects in tasawur, feelings and behaviour in faith, ibadah and morality which could affect one’s faith. Weaknesses in terms of the appreciation of religions obtained from this study are described below.

Based on Table 2 pertaining the aspect of respondents’ weaknesses in appreciating Islam, there are some significant weaknesses in terms of the appreciation of Islam among Malaysian Armed Forces personnel.

On of the significant findings revolves around the aspect of faith, of specifically matters pertaining to the belief on the existence of angels. In this aspect there are 25 respondents or 6.5 percent who were not aware that the angels record all deeds that we perform, and another 10 (2.6%) rejected the fact that Raqib and Atid record all deeds performed by mankind. The same can be said with the aspect of the effort to seek knowledge and readiness to go to the mosque to acquire knowledge. Verily, a lot of respondents were still reluctant to go to the mosque for that purpose. This study also found that most of the respondents still did not appreciate prayers. It was found that a large portion of the respondents or approximately 80 to 86 percent of the respondents admitted that they had frequently missed their prayers and did not feel unease whenever performing it late, especially the fajr prayer. Solat or prayers are indeed a very important ibadah for all Muslims who are mukalaf and are considered as fardu ain.
This statement is reinforced by a hadith of the Prophet which means: “Prayer is a pillar of the religion (Islam). Whoever establishes it, establishes religion; and whoever destroys it, destroys religion.”

Based on findings from this study, specifically in the aspect of prayer, a similarity can be observed to the study and report by Mohd Fadzilah Kamsah, who states that 80 percent of Muslims in Malaysia have yet to complete their obligatory five daily prayers (Utusan Malaysia, 23 Jun 2008). Based on his study, Dr. Mohd Fadzilah reports that only 17 to 20 percent of respondents performed their obligatory daily prayers in a complete manner, whereas for students in secondary schools, only 15 percent admitted that they perform such thing and this fact is parallel with what found in this study where a total of 86.2% respondents admitted that they frequently skipped their prayers. Meanwhile, a small percentage of respondent admitted that they had performed it completely.

Besides that, the low rate of prayer completion among respondents in this study might be attributed to their level of knowledge and proficiency in performing this kind of ibadah. What factors that cause a large number of respondents to fail in performing their daily prayers? This particular question will not be answered by just focusing on the facts or methods to perform prayer. Indeed, it involves many other factors including the motivation to perform solat and ibadah. According to Sulaiman al-Kumayi (2009), there are three constraints in performing ibadah, namely:

a. Laziness (kasal) in performing ibadah for Allah, while everyone else is willing and able to perform it.
b. Weak mind (futur) or not having a strong determination as a result of being influenced by the worldly matters.
c. Boredom (malal) or easily getting bored in performing ibadah, although goals are yet to be achieved.

Another interesting fact that can be observed here is the relationship between the habit of completing job hurriedly and what it has to do with the habit of performing solat. This study found that a large portion of the respondents admitted they had the tendency to hastily complete their job and this had made them tend to take their
prayers for granted. For those who are patient, they will perform it meticulously and for those who are impatient, they belong to those who failed to perform solat perfectly. Allah said in the Holy Quran: (al-Baqarah 2: 45), which means: "And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive".

From this study, particularly in the aspect of low moral appreciation among respondents, it reflects that there exists a close relationship between all aspects of Islamic appreciation. According to Prof. Dr. Hassan Langgulung (1987), Islamic values that exist in a person have two functions which are mutually dependent on each other, namely as a result of learning process and also part of that learning process. At the same time, the appreciation of Islam in a particular aspect also affects the appreciation of Islam in other aspects.

Findings of this study also confirm the view proposed by prominent Islamic scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali, Hassan al-Banna, Muhammad al-Ghazali and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas who state that the basis for appreciation of Islam must be initiated from the appreciation of tauhid, ibadah, morality and the shari'a in the life of a Muslim. In contrast, the spread of moral decadence, bad morals and behavior are essentially due to the low level of iman and the appreciation of Islam in a person (Zakaria Stapa : 1999).

It should be noted also that the items or statements being questioned are generally related to knowledge, tasawur, feelings and the practice of Islam which are fundamental in every Muslim which have to be properly known. Dr. Salah al Sawi (1995) in his book entitled, "Ma la yasuhu al-Muslim jahluhu' states that there are few things in which Muslims were not given the leniency from not knowing, and such things are related to aqidah and ibadah. Clearly, the appreciation of Islam should encompass all aspects as ordered by Allah SWT in al-Baqarah 2: 208, which means: “O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy”.

Indeed, the appreciation of Islam among military personnel in Malaysian Armed Forces is crucially important since history had proven that military personnel under the
command of Commander Tariq bin Ziyad had successfully opened Andalusia and the army under the leadership of Salahuddin Al-Ayubi managed to set Al-Quds free whilst the army led by Sultan Muhammad Al-Fatih had successfully conquered Constantinople. This is in line with the hadith of Prophet which means, "Verily, Constantinople shall be conquered, its commander shall be the best commander ever and his army shall be the best army ever." Narrated by Ahmad bin Hanbal al-Musnad 4/335.

In this context, especially in developing a good military personnel, Umar bin Khattab had once reminded, upon releasing his army for war, "Fear your sins more than you fear the enemy as your sins are more dangerous to you than your enemy. We Muslims are only victorious over our enemy because their sins outnumber ours, not for any other reason. If our sins were equal to those of our enemy, then they would defeat us due to their superior numbers and resources."

Based on this study, it is clear that members of Malaysian Armed Forces already have a good foundation in appreciating Islam and this must continue to be maintained and further enhanced. Dakwah efforts by Armed Forces Religious Corps should continue to be strengthened and reinforced. The aspect of the strength of dua and the practice of ibadah should be established in accordance with the sophistication of weapons and the strength of the soul and the heart so that a perfect balance can be achieved with mental and physical strength. Allah SWT decrees in Surah an-Anfal verse 45 which provides guidance towards achieving success while facing the enemy. Allah said, (al-Anfal 8: 45), which means: “O you who have believed, when you encounter a company [from the enemy forces], stand firm and remember Allah much that you may be successful.

According to Ibn Kathir (1988), while giving his interpretation for this verse, Allah ordered five things to those performing jihad in the name of Islam including soldiers who fight to defend their religion, race and homeland; firstly, regarding one's resolve while fighting and Allah will bestow courage accordingly, secondly, always remember Allah via zikr and prayers, thirdly, be a loyal servant of Allah and his mighty Messenger, next, foster unity and avoid division and fifth, able to maintain all four
things previously highlighted. If these can be fulfilled by members of Malaysian Armed Forces, surely Allah will always bestow His mercy in fulfilling duties and in their noble cause.

**Recommendations**

Overall, this paperwork discusses the aspect of appreciation of Islam among members of Malaysian Armed Forces. Based on the results of the study, the level of appreciation of Islam as a whole is high but there are areas of weaknesses that need to be improved. This is due to the fact that thorough appreciation of Islam requires the fulfilment of all aspects including tasawwur, feelings and behaviour. In this matter, Mustaffa Masyhur (1995) explains that the act of appreciating Islam requires the achievement of a certain level, starting from understanding Islam in its true manner, precise as being delivered by Rasulullah (s.a.w), to the extent that all teachings are practiced correctly and perfectly, similar to the level achieved by amilin and solihin. The peak of one's appreciation of Islam among the most ordinary Muslim individuals (general mass) is to be a soleh individual who understands and embraces the principles of Islam, demonstrates obedience in practicing the syara' humbly for Allah SWT, in terms of following His orders, as well as avoids His prohibitions in all aspects of life, in both secular and religious contexts.

**References**

al-Qur'an


