

# ISLAMIC DIPLOMACY AS AN ETHICAL TRADITION OF MALAYSIA: LESSONS FROM THE FIRST ISLAMIC STATE OF MADINAH

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This article explores the principles and tools of diplomacy used by Prophet in the first Islamic State of Madinah, and also to analyze the foundations and objectives of Islamic diplomacy. This paper, in a way attempts to reawaken the readers on how Islamic principles and values could be the best foundation for modern diplomacy and International Relation, instead on modeling on western ideological foundation and practices. In short, this paper insists on urging the mind of people to always regard Prophet Muhammad as the best model in every aspect of life, especially his praise less task as the ideal diplomacy of first Islamic State of Madinah. Indeed, he gave a moral basis for diplomacy and this is what we should not abandon in our approach to modern diplomacy and International Relation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Islamic diplomacy, Malaysia, Constitution of Madinah, foreign policy*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political sphere in Islam is not an independent but it bound to religious ethics. By the way the study of diplomacy and International Religion, being parts of Political Science are no doubt subject to religious guidelines.

Islam as the political force in world affairs can be best explained from the first Islamic State of Madinah established by Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century Arabia. In order to have a clear and fair diplomacy one could seek model and example from Prophet diplomatic practices, on how he preserved peace, how he conducted war, how he dealt with the non-Muslims, how he treated his allies and enemies and so on.

By studying thoroughly his *seerah* one will not notice the ideological foundation of any matter but also the clear and practical side of it. It is this work that I will give the stress on his character as the unique religion-political leader and as for the work is concerned, the emphasis will be given on his uniqueness as the ideal diplomat. It is apparent that Prophet's conducts were actually the reflection of all the Islamic principles like justice, tolerance, truthfulness and fair play to anyone. That's why he was described as "Quran in practice" (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993). He was indeed, "the philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, and conqueror of ideas of a cult without images, the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire" (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993).

## 2.0 PROPHET'S PRINCIPLES AND TOOLS OF DIPLOMACY

### i) Principle of Arbitration and Mediation

This principle could be traced earlier before his appointment as the Messenger of Allah. In this case, he was selected by the Qurayshite leaders to be the arbitrator in the dispute regarding the depositing of the holy stone after the reconstruction of Kaabah. This was indeed, his first act of arbitration (Afzal Iqbal, 1977). During his governance on the Republic of Madina he used to practice this principle, for illustration, once he selected Sa'ad B. Muadh, to be the arbitrator to judge on the type of punishment that should be imposed on Bani Qurayzah who betrayed the treaty with Prophet by conspiring against Muslim in the Battle of Ditch (Mazhar Haq, 1992).

According to the Charter of Madina, Prophet was given the task as the mediator in any dispute that occurred as referred to the clause 23,

“whenever there is anything about which you differ it is to be referred to God and Muhammad” (Akram Diya’ Al-Umari, 1991). Throughout history, Prophet always made a fine and fair judgment without fear or favor.

## **ii) Principle of Negotiation**

In this principle, Prophet never showed himself as the rigid and narrow-minded diplomat, but he always accepted negotiation and disliked militancy as solution. Like in the case of Charter of Madina, he attempted to negotiate with all these people of Madinah and the Jews, and later the negotiation had been documented which is known as “Constitution of Madinah”. It is a document of great historical importance. It was clearly a complete transformation in the political, religious and civic life of Madinah (Afzal Iqbal, 1977). The provisions of the Treaty itself really showed the credibility of Prophet Muhammad as diplomat. Indeed, it proclaimed the principles of civic equality, freedom of worship, religious tolerance and rule of laws. Even Prophet Muhammad attempted to win the loyalty of non- Muslims to Islam and the state by granting a due respect and tolerance to them, never to regard them as alien race but also as part of the League of Madinah. Clearly, the Charter of Madinah demonstrated Prophet’s political foresight and diplomacy which managed to bring socio-political revolution in the history of Arabia. Prophet’s diplomacy in Madinah can be largely seen in his dealing with Jews and hypocrites. Here, he always endeavored towards winning the favor and loyalty of non-Muslims. He proclaimed equal rights and duties, religious tolerance as well as equal security. In spite of all these kind treatment there were always conspired against Prophet. But Prophet Muhammad always pursued his method of tolerance and persuasion and not coercion when dealing with them. Action will take against them only when they became the threat to the security and peace of the state as well as to Islam.

Also another remarkable diplomatic practice of Prophet Muhammad can be clearly notice in the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. In this Treaty he really exhibited to us the real art of negotiation. As a peaceful-oriented diplomat he preserved peace and offered negotiation even when his attention to enter Mecca was deterred by the Quraisyh. Prophet Muhammad during the negotiation upheld the principle of tolerance, persuasion and patience. It can be clearly seen in any provocation met by the envoy of Quraisyh he preserved his calm (Afzal Iqbal, 1977). His diplomacy really enabled him to handle this extremely complicated and fragile negotiation. Even the terms of the Treaty were unfavorable

to the Muslims he still did not react aggressively. His ability to foresee the long term advantages was really admirable. Indeed his political foresight and diplomacy later led to the clear victory of Islam in the following years.

### **iii) Principle of Delegation and Deputation**

This principle of sending envoys on behalf of Islam was practiced by Prophet Muhammad for the first time after the Pledge of Al- Aqabah, where he sent Mu'sab bin Umair to be his first commissioner and teacher for Yathrib people (Mazhar Haq, 1992). By a sending a deputy to a certain country, Prophet Muhammad actually attempted to gather information about the internal socio-political situation of the society thus, this could enable him to plan the strategy for inter-relationship with the people later. This is why in many cases; Prophet could conduct well any complex negotiation since he already had an advanced knowledge about the nature of the particular society gathered from his commissioner.

Prophet definitely provided a kind and generous treatment to the envoys that he received. He proclaimed on them "personal immunity" which mean that they will not to be killed or maltreated (Afzal Iqbal, 1977). Full freedom was given to the envoys to perform their religious right. Even the Prophet allowed the deputy of Christian Najran to hold their service in his mosque. Clearly the seventh to ninth year of Hijrah (Post Hudaibiyah and Fall of Mecca) can be regarded as the "Age of Deputation". Some of the deputation received by the Prophet like Banu Ashja, Banu Juhaina, Banu Muzainah, Banu Saad bin Bakar, Banu Tamim and also some deputation from Southern Arabia like the envoys of Oman, Yemen and Bahrain. Even he also gave a great welcome and a kid treatment to the deputation from Christian state like Christian Najran and Princess of Banu Kindah from Hadralmaut (Haq, 1992).

To those envoys dispatched by him, they were subjected to Prophet standing instruction where he ordered them to hold their wok in patience, avoid severity, to give good tiding to the people and not to incite hostility towards the mission (Afzal Iqbal, 1977). They were also instructed to uphold the Quran and Sunnah as their main references and for any matter which was not available in these two, they were allowed to follow their own Ijtihad like in case of Mu'az bin Jabal whom he dispatched to Yemen. Some other envoys sent by him were to Byzantine Emperor of Heraclius, Khusraw Parves of Sasanid King of Persia, Najash of Abyssinia (Mazhar Haq, 1992) and so on.

It is clear now that Prophet in managing the political affairs of the state, he devised his own tool of diplomacy which is largely practice in today's political affairs such as negotiation, sending a diplomat abroad, signing a treaty and arbitration. Prophet also used to practice the Principle of conciliation in his diplomacy. For illustration, we could notice this practice in the distribution of war booty from the Battle of Hunayn. As a generous diplomat, he looked for conciliation of the heart of the new converts (the Qurayshites) where he willingly granted to them greater share out of royal fifth (Mazhar Haq, 1992). It is somehow noticeable that Prophet's moral diplomacy especially his gentleness in human relations really led to his greatest triumph.

### **3.0 PRINCIPLE OF WAR IN ISLAM**

Prophet was somehow used to wage war as a mean to resolve conflict and threat. In Islam war is intimate in order to deter aggression and persecution. As Allah says in 22:39,

*"To those against war is made, permission is given to fight, because they are wronged - and verily, Allah is Most Powerful for their aid".*

As a peaceful diplomat, Prophet always favored peace and negotiation, where he would only resort war when it involve the question of religious dignity and state's freedom and security. Prophet also used to resort war when the treaty was broken or treachery was done by enemies for examples violation of treaty done by three Jewish tribes of Madinah which led to their expulsion. Prior to Battle of Badr, Prophet used to resort an economic warfare to frighten the Quraishites in trading activities (Haq, 1992). It is alleged that Islam enjoins its believers to carry out Jihad until Dar al Harb is integrated into Dar al Islam. As theorizes by Majid Khadduri, fight polytheists until they say: "There is no god but God" (Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, 1994). However, Prophet indeed, provided an ideal formula for the management of a just and fair laws of war and peace. It is said that "one of the greatest contribution of Muhammad to the civilization of mankind was his civilized law of war. He purified uncivil and barbaric war customs and traditions of nations and replaced them with the humane, just and benevolent international law relating war" (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993). Indeed, Muslim armies were subjected to strict observance and adherent to Islamic law of war. Prophet even he treated the conquered people with kindness, generosity and liberty. For illustration, he insisted on bloodless occupation of Mecca and proclaimed general amnesty to the conquered people. This clearly proved that Islam is not a militant and

oppressive religion but the religion which always pruned to peace, as commands by Allah in Surah 8:61,

*“But if the enemy inclines towards peace, Do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust In Allah: for He is the One that hearth and knoweth (All things)”*

#### 4.0 PRINCIPLE OF SHURA

Prophet political and diplomatic tool was somehow based on the concept of Shura. He conducted governmental matters by following the principle of mutual consultation. As Allah says in surah 3:159,

*“.....and consult them in affairs (of moments), Then when thou hast taken a decision, Put the trust in Allah”.*

Next in Surah 42:38,

*“Those who harken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer, who conducts their affairs by mutual consultation”.*

In this case ruler has to consult with his people consistently and not to subordinate welfare of people to his personal inclination and interest. The implementation of Shura in Islam is not only as legal obligation but also the religious one as say by Abdalati:“ Consultative methods in politics or in any other field for that matter, are not only a democratic formula of government, but a religious injunction and moral duty enjoined upon the rulers as well as the ruled” (Lukman Thaib,1994).

#### 5.0 FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAMIC DIPLOMACY

The diplomacy which practiced by Prophet in Madinah State, was indeed based on Quranic principles. Definitely, Islam against any kind of deception, cunning injustice, trickery and dishonesty in diplomacy as underlined in Machiavellianism (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993). Islamic diplomacy on the other hand, stressed on the principle of justice, tolerance, equality, fraternity, honestly, sincerity and many others. To illustrate the above arguments I would like to furnish some verses from the Quran:

Justice:

*“God commands justice and good-doing...and He forbids indecency, dishonor and insolence” (16:90)*

The Prophet is also commanded to administer justice, as laid down in the Quran (42:15); "I am commanded to judge justly between our gods is our lord and you're Lord".

Equality:

*"O ye who believe, stand out firmly for justice..." (4:135)*

*"O ye who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you" (2:178)*

Peace-keeping:

*"[O Humans!]...He [Allah] does not love aggressors. So creates not confusion in the Earth after the fair ordering"( 7:55-56)*

Truthfulness:

*"The truthful men and the truthful women. Allah has prepared for forgiveness and a mighty reward" (33:35)*

It is obligatory upon us to deal with our enemies with mercy and kindness as this will somehow be an impressive way to attract their heart.

Allah says in Surah 3:159:

*"It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away".*

The illustration for this act of kind and generous dealing with people especially with enemies has been best exemplified by Prophet in Madina. Especially when study the event of the Conquest of Mecca we will find the highest degree of his tolerance and kind-hearted characteristics where he proclaimed general amnesty on his former enemies (the Qurayshites).

Prophet also gave a great adherent and respect to International law and treaty where the violation of the treaty would never come from his side. Therefore, he kept urging his followers to be true to their promises and trusts. As ALLAH commands him in Surah 23:8;

*"(They will win) who faithfully observe their trusts and their promises and treaties...and those who respect their trusts and treaties..."*

For illustration, we could notice the event after the signing of Treaty of Hudaibiyah where Abu Jandal and Abu Basir who fled to Madina without the permission from their guardian were sent back by him to Mecca. Really, he gave a respect to the Treaty which said that those who fled from Mecca to Madina without permission from his guardian should be returned by Prophet (Mazhar Haq, 1992, p.92). He never violet the Treaty even he knew that they were on the right side. Indeed, Islam asked its followers to be humble and spread peace always. As stresses by Allah in Surah 7:55-56,

*“Call on your Lord with humility and in private. For Allah loved not those who trespass beyond bounds. Do not mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order...”*

Indeed, Allah urges the believers to be the exemplary on earth, and Prophet was really the best examples among all. Allah stressed in the Quran:

*“We made you a nation of moderation and justice”(Q.2:143)*

Therefore, it is obvious now that Prophet in all activities was guided by the Quranic principles which really assisted him to materialize his vision for the clear victory of Islam.

## **6.0 OBJECTIVES OF ISLAMIC DIPLOMACY**

Indeed, diplomacy in Islam is aimed towards a just and fair world order in which all states, strong or weak, big, or small, should enjoy peace, stability, freedom of conscience and human welfare (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993). It is meant to serve the cause of peace, justice and truth which all in accordance with the principles laid down by Quran. It is in a way, to ensure that equity may prevail, even to the non-Muslim; the complete physical security as well as complete freedom of religion, culture and social development is recognized. All these noble objectives were materialized successfully with the Prophet's diplomacy in Madinah state. With his noble diplomatic skills, Prophet managed to turn his weak position into a grand empire and won over the heart of many people as well as foreign emissary. Indeed, he also managed to make a new and fair social order in Madinah which embodied in the Constitution of Madinah. His diplomatic conducts really proved that Islam is a religion of peace and justice not an oppressive or militant religion.



## 7.0 CONCLUSION

Islam in a multi-religious and racial country like Malaysia, proves neither dominating nor a foreign religion. Since, independence in 1957, Islam was declared the official religion of the country, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony. The absorption of Islamic values will not destroy other values in Malaysia. This is due to the uniqueness of Islam as a universal religion. All the Islamic values are similar to the concept of universal values of good and evil. Therefore, what is regarded, as good values by other religions are indeed desirable in Islam too.

The prosperous interracial development in Malaysia is without doubt one blessed by God. Ghazali (1997) stresses this in his saying;

*“These happy developments have been due to the positive blend of abundant natural resources, good management and most importantly a pragmatic, tolerant and wise population. Love of peace and working towards peace is the Malaysian forte”.*

It is obvious that after we studied the seerah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), especially on his career as a Head of the first Islamic state, one should understand the nature and qualities of Islamic diplomacy. Prophet was indeed the real administrator and an ideal diplomat. He was the greatest and most perfect embodiment of the finest principles and ideals of the theory and practices of International relation. Indeed, all the moral guidelines on how to practice the best diplomatic conducts have been underlined by the Holy Quran, and it was Prophet Muhammad who made it practical and became reality. Remarkably, Prophet with the support and guide from the Quran, they together gave a moral basis for diplomacy. This is definitely the real clear diplomacy that could preserve an everlasting peace and order; the diplomacy which founded by the ethical and moral principles particularly justice, tolerance, truthfulness, modesty, gentleness in human relation and so on. Diplomacy in Islam is indeed a clear and faithful game. There is no place in Islamic diplomacy for the concept of “the end justifies the means” (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993).

The concept of “Philosopher-King” of Plato and supreme-law giver” of Rousseau (Golam W. Choudhury, 1993) are not utopian dream as far as Prophet’s career was in concerned. Prophet Muhammad was really a historical reality. He was definitely the perfection of spiritual and temporal leader. Always in diplomatic mission and military strategy he exhibited nobleness, justice, dignity and modesty.

This is what modern politician and diplomat should uphold. It is only with the inclusion of Islamic ethical tradition into the modern political sphere particularly in diplomacy and International Relation, a just and peaceful World Order will not more a mere utopian dream.

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