What is Wrong with Democracy?

A View from Hizbut Tahrir

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Abstract

By the end of the cold war era, democracy is believed as the last solution of the world problem. Democracy is believed can solved political, economic and social problems. Fundamental principles of democracy as people participating in politics, transparent system of government, limitations on the power of governments and protection of human rights is perceived as the only solution of the human problem. In muslim world, democracy is responded differently. Some say, democracy is compatible with Islam, what democracy struggle for is similar with the mission of Islam. However, another perspective to say, Islam contrasts with democracy. Democracy is derived from western and secular values while Islam is from god revelation and every Muslim should be bound by Islamic Law. This paper will describe the argument of Hizbut Tahrir for its objection to democracy. Hizbut Tahrir is an international group that always calls for establishing world state system under Islamic Law called Khilafah. Khilafah, according to Hizbut Tahrir, is the only state political system that is legalized by Islam and derived from Quran and Sunnah (prophetic tradition). The opposition of Hizbut Tahrir toward democracy here can be seen in two aspects. Firstly, the difference of the notion sovereignty, god or human sovereignty. Secondly, the standardization of freedom of the people based on consensus or god law. Western intellectuals and think tanks include Hizbut Tahrir as one of radical and fundamentalist group.

Keyword: Democracy, Hizbut Tahrir, Khilafah, Fundamentalist Group

A. Introduction

In combating terrorism and radicalism, Hizbut Tahrir (HT) is included as the part of organizations in which supposed to be threat to the Western world. Though Hizbut Tahrir declares itself that it’s moves are nonviolence, it’s ideas potentially produce terrorist activity. Zeyno Baran, in his research report, Hizb ut-Tahrir Islam’s Political Insurgency, 2004, stated that Hizbut Tahrir brings a set of threats to U.S Interest due to its ideological and theological justification to terrorist. If Hizbut Tahrir succeeds to achieve its goal, establishing Islamic State (Khilafah), it would be disaster for American interests generally (Baran, 2004: 48). In line with

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Zeyno Baran, Ariel Cohen in Heritage Foundation, 2003, attributed Hizbut Tahrir as a threat to American interest,” By breeding violent anti-American attitudes, attempting to overthrow existing regimes, and preparing cadres for more radical Islamist organizations, Hizb poses a threat to U.S. interests in Central Asia and elsewhere in the Islamic world where moderate regimes are found” (Cohen, 2003). Those statements above are just a little pessimistic view of western people to Hizbut Tahrir.

Such a view also happens in some Islamic Countries, like in Indonesia, some Islamic intellectuals and ulama’s respond the same with western view in opposition of Hizb ideas, Many intellectuals who oppose Hizbut Tahrir, mostly follow the arguments of western view as a dangerous organization, radical view of Islam, extremist, fundamental, a threat to nation state and so on .

However, this paper will not be following those views in portraying this group. This paper will focus to discuss about Hizbut Tahrir thinking or respond to the concept of democracy. In Muslim world democracy is perceived differently, some accepted that democracy is good and not contradictory with Islam, while other rejected, that democracy contrasts with Islam. In this dispute, Hizbut Tahrir’s stance in the second point of view.

B. Hizbut-Tahrir

Hizbut Tahrir is an Islamic Group or Party which calls for restoring Islamic State, Khilafah. Khilafah is the only one system that can ensure the implementation of Islamic Shariah in order to create Islam as way of life in Society. The party was established in 1953 by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani in East Jerusalem. An-Nabhani died in 1977 and Abdul Qadeem Zallum replaced him until 2003 and then succeded by Atha bin Abu Rusytah. The short description about this group can be seen in its leaflet “Hizbut Tahrir” that:

“Hizbut Tahrir is a political party whose ideology is Islam, so politics is its work and Islam is its ideology. It works within the Ummah and together with her, so that she adopts Islam as her cause and is led to restore the Khilafah and the ruling by what Allah (SWT) revealed. Hizb ut-Tahrir is a political group and not a priestly one. Nor is it an academic, educational or
a charity group. The Islamic thought is the soul of its body, its core and the secret of its life” (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org).

Khilafah is believed as the only one political system that has been legalized by Quran and Sunnah, another system is infidel and Muslim is forbidden to take other system rather than Islam. Democracy, socialism, nationalism is not from Islamic doctrine so no place for those ideology in Islamic way of life. Moreover, those ideologies are the root of all problems in Islamic World in recent time. Hizbut Tahrir also criticizes all Islamic Groups which have tried to revive Muslim and Islam along history. All those Islamic groups failed to revive Islamic Ummah due to lack of clarity in Islamic thoughts and laws. Islam is treated just as justification for the existing situation in Muslim world (www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org).

Hizbut Tahrir exists in many countries, in Muslim Majority states and Western countries. There are about 40 countries where Hizbut Tahrir conducts its activities. In Indonesia, it is called Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, in Britain, Hizbut Tahrir Britain, in Pakistan, Egypt and etc. In some countries, this group is banned and its members are arrested and tortured, but it openly operates in many other countries.

In Rand Corporation Report, Hizbut Tahrir is grouped as a part of radical fundamentalist groups, which is the characteristic of these groups are, using Islam to achieve political goals, interpreting Islamic scriptures literally, Anti Democracy, seeking to establish pan Islamic Caliphate, rejecting western concept of human rights and individual liberties (Rabasa, et al., 2004: 7-8). Hizbut Tahrir in this sense is put aside with Jamaah Islamiyah in Egypt, Salafi Jihadist Group in Saudi, and Jamaat al-Islami Pakistan.

C. Hizbut Tahrir Critics on Democracy

In Muslim world, democracy is perceived differently, and each group defends democracy through its own logic. Some say Islam is compatible with Democracy, what democracy struggle for is the same with Islam do such as human freedom, and political transparency. So there is no problem between Islam and Democracy. This argument is supported by many muslim thinkers like, Rashid Ghanouchi, and Faraq Fouda. Ghanouchi argues that, that there is no contradiction between Islam and democracy even, democracy offers the means to implement the
Islamic Ideal today and even democratic notions and liberal democratic values were derived from medieval Europe, which in turn was influenced by Islamic civilizations (Esposito & Voll, 2001:113).

Others say Islam is nothing to do with Democracy. Democracy is from western civilization which is secular, while Islam is from god where Quran and Sunnah (prophet tradition) becomes its primary resources. John A. Voll in his paper, wrote that some reasons why many Muslim, which he called conservative, rejected democracy, because of first,

The Islamic concept of the absolute sovereignty of God – they believed that ideas of the sovereignty of the people in a democracy contradicted this fundamental principle; second, in Islam the law was defined and promulgated by God and that God’s law, the Shari’a, could not be altered by elected parliaments; and third, the concept of parliaments as sources of law was seen as blasphemous (Voll, 2007: 172).

Hizbut Tahrir argues that, the rejection of democracy is not only seen in normative view but also in rational and logical thinking. The second leader of Hizbut Tahrir, Abdul Qadim Zallum, has written in his book focuses on Islamic contention to the concept of democracy, and its application. Some points of his conclusion about the nature of democracy is that (Zalloom, 1995: 10):

1. Democracy is the product of the human mind and not from Allah. Does not rely on the divine revelation, nor has it any connection to any religion revealed by Allah to His Messengers.
2. It emanated from the creed of separating religion from life, and consequently separating religion from the state.
3. It was established on two ideas:
   a) Sovereignty is for the people
   b) The people are the source of authority
4. Democracy is the rule of the majority, and the selection of rulers and the members of parliament are decided by the majority of voters. All decisions in democracy are taken by the majority vote.
5. Democracy advocates the general freedoms, which are:
   a) Freedom of belief;
b) Freedom of opinion;

c) Freedom of ownership, and

d) Personal freedom.

The very fundamental of Hizb rejection on democracy is about the notion of secularism as an inherent part of democracy. The idea of secularism emerged when some philosophical thinkers frustrated of the existing system in the era of western kingdom. The western rulers claimed themselves as representatives of god, where they are executive and legislative at once and lead their people together with the priests. Through such reason, the rulers are free to oppress and exploit their people as master with his slave under the name of god authority. This thinking was opposed by philosophers who think that the power is from the people, sovereignty not from god but from the people. This different perspective resulted very long time conflict. Finally, the conflict ended with compromise solution between two parties. “Render. . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Lewis, 2010: xi).

The arguments of secularism is opposed by founder of Hizbut Tahrir, Taquiuddin An-Nabhani, as he wrote in his book, Nizham al-Islam (system of Islam), that secularism is built not through rational thinking, rather, it was the result of compromise solution after long dispute between priest/clergy and intellectual (Nabahani, 2002: 56). Secularism opposed the human nature (fitrah), the instinct of religiousness. When someone believes god, he automatically sanctifies god as well as need god help to manage his life. Thus, secularism is not rational and not based by mind because it believes the existence of god in other side, but rejecting god’s management in human life. An-Nabhani insists, “The presence of the deen in life does not mean making the functions of life religious rites. Rather, the presence of the deen in life means making the system that Allah ordained, solve man's problems in life. This system emanates from the ‘aqeedah, which agrees with man's nature (fitrah)” (Nabahani, 2002: 52).

In Islam, the consequence of believing Islamic Aqeedah is, to follow all Islamic shari’a as a whole, like in food, worships, transactions (mu'amalaat), punishments, etc. This also includes politics as the part of islamic system
(Nabahani, 2002: 18). Therefore, according to Hizbut Tahrir, it is unlawful to adopt any thought concept, rule or criterion, which is not emanated from Islamic Aqeedah. It is forbidden for the Islamic State to have any thought, concept, rule or criterion not emanating from the Islamic ‘aqeedah. Democracy is one of any variant of thought that is not from Islam, thus democracy is forbidden to be adopted in Muslim or Islamic State (Hiz-ut Tahrir 5th edition, no year: 20).

Lies of Democracy

Irrational basis of democratic secularism thinking, in Hizbut Tahrir’s perspective, brings to the next argument why democracy have to be rejected. Democracy since the ancient time is never really implemented. Abdul Qadeem Zalloom wrote, what the people argue to support democracy is only based on lies and deception. In reality, democracy is absolutely corrupted, wherever democracy spread in the world it will result misfortune and affliction. Zalloom wrote, “Democracy, in its true meaning, is an imaginary and inapplicable idea. It never existed and it will never exist” (Zalloom, 1995: 10-11). In any democratic countries, the owner of sovereignty is not the people but the minority of people, which is called parliament legislative and executive. They are elected by the people, but their decision making process do not involve the people, and even, not always represent the willingness or aspiration of the people. Zalloom states, in democratic state, the government represents the interest of capitalist power, from business, landowners and from the class of aristocratic lords (Zalloom, 1995: 11).

Hizbut Tahrir arguments on the problem of democracy is quite the same of what Robert Dahl expressed in his book, A Preface to Democratic Theory, 2006, that democratic theory cannot be implemented full in reality, factually or historically (Dahl, 2006: xvi). In Ancient democracy, the majority of the people had no political rights, notably slaves, women, nonnative born citizens and property less. Jeffrey Winters in his study about oligarchy also found that one problem of democracy is the emerging of power elites which is from supra rich people who can dominate political activity (Winters, 2011: 27).

The last Hizbut Tahrir’s reason for rejecting democracy is concept of freedom, that democracy advocates Freedom of belief, Freedom of opinion,
Freedom of ownership, and Personal freedom. This idea, as Abdul Qadeem Zalloom wrote, caused nothing but disaster for humankind and societal decadence in democratic countries to a level lower than that of the animals. The freedom of ownership produces capitalism which produces global imperialism and inequality, and exploitation among states. Personal Freedom results free sex, sex exploitation, and same sex marriage or lesbianism. While in Islam, there is no “freedom”, all muslim activities must be bound by Islamic Law, Shariah. Islam has its own regulation in ownership which is very different between capitalism. Islam forbid Muslim to change his religion, and will punish who does that, Islam manage men and women behavior, food, drink, political activity, and so on. Hizbut Tahrir believes that Islamic Aqeedah should bind every Muslim activity.

D. Conclusion

Western intellectual always perceive Hizbut Tahrir in perspective of threat and it is followed by many muslim as well. In this paper, Hizbut Tahrir is portraited in another perspective that Hizbut Tahrir should be threated as a one of Islamic Groups which need to discuss on their thoughts and ideas specially in rejecting the concept of democracy.

Hizbut Tahrir rejects democracy because of some reasons, firstly, democracy is derived from secularism, where separating between religion and politics. This concept is not acknowledging in Islam and clearly contradictory with Islamic Aqeedah. In Islam, politics is the inner part of Islam, thus state in Islam should be based by Islamic Aqeedah. Other reason, democracy is never truly implemented, since in ancient time until recent time or in the future. In fact, democracy is only for the interest for particular people, mostly the owner of big capital. The last reason, democracy advocates general freedom that contrasts with Islam.
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