

Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy

Shanti Nair

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Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy

The Mahathir Administration has strived to propagate an “authentic” kind of Islam in Malaysia while attempting to delineate an exemplary role for Muslim countries in the new democratic order.

Shanti Nair explores the implications of this enhanced religious identity for Malaysia’s relations with both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. The book draws specific connections between the direction and intent of the country’s foreign policy towards other Muslim countries, concerning global and regional Islamic issues, and the politics of Islam within the domestic scene.

Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy makes an important contribution to understanding the intense relationship between domestic and foreign contexts, and the impact of such policy in the case of post-colonial states. It also addresses the real and imagined significance of Islam as a force in contemporary global politics.

Shanti Nair is a lecturer in religion and society, comparative politics and elites in Southeast Asia at the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore.

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Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy

Shanti Nair

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In memory of my mother
Manipray Malathi
and
for my father

Padmanabhan Prabhakaran Nair

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional research centre for scholars and other specialists concerned with modern Southeast Asia, particularly the many-faceted problems of stability and security, economic development, and political and social change.

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Foreword

The relationship between religion and politics has been given strident expression in recent decades in the case of the Islamic faith. Islam provides an all-encompassing world view which conceives of identity in terms of an ideal unitary community of believers who transcend artificial political boundaries. That view suggests a close correlation between religious identity and foreign policy which challenges the basis of contemporary international society constructed on the notion of separate sovereignties. Shanti Nair has taken the theme of the relationship between religious identity and foreign policy and has applied it in an intellectually illuminating way to the experience of Malaysia, especially during the tenure of Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Malaysia, which is located at the periphery of the Islamic heartland, is a plural society where the dominant Malay community defines its identity with strong reference to Islam. Moreover, the dominant political party within that community, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), has assumed a prerogative protecting role towards the Malays which is expressed in part through its projection of a prescribed Islamic identity as a basis for political legitimacy. Through inter-communal tensions, the impact of economic modernization and the penetration of international influences, Islam has been a resurgent factor in Malaysia's post-independence society and politics. It is in that context that Dr Nair has addressed the complexities of the relationship between Islam and Malaysia's foreign policy in a pioneering study which stands at the interface of the study of International Relations and of Comparative Politics.

In this volume, Dr Nair skilfully demonstrates how Malaysia's domestic politics have been affected by Islam and its resurgence and also the ways in which religious identity has found expression in foreign policy and, importantly, to what ends. Political divisions within Malaysia are not only a reflection of communal differences but also of intra-Malay rivalries. A claim to a prerogative position in protecting and advancing the Islamic cause has been a powerful

weapon in a set of internal struggles for political supremacy within the Malay community. Dr Nair explains, in this meticulous and penetrating analysis of Malaysia's society and politics, how foreign policy has been used to register a prescribed religious identity and thus employed as an instrument of political mobilization and control in UMNO's interest. The prerogative position assumed by the dominant Malay party in upholding that identity, expounded in foreign policy, has served also to fend off external Islamic influences which might play a part in challenging UMNO's position as well as subverting Malaysia's political process.

The co-religionist dimension of Malaysia's foreign policy is said by Dr Nair not to be a new phenomenon in itself but novel in its expression during Dr Mahathir's tenure. That expression is explored through a careful examination of Malaysia's role within the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the United Nations and with reference, for example, to its stand on the Palestinian issue, towards the wars in Afghanistan and in the Gulf and over the conflict in Bosnia as well as towards Muslim minorities within its own region of Southeast Asia. In the process, Dr Nair has written an exemplary account of how foreign policy can serve a domestic political function. She has helped also to demystify preconceptions which may be held about the notion of an Islamic foreign policy and the presumed tension between it and the Westphalian model of international relations.

Michael Leifer

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National University of Singapore
August 1996

Abbreviations

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia
Aliran	Persatuan Aliran Kesedaran Negara
APU	Angkatan Perpaduan Umma
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
BERJASA	Barisan Jamaah Islamiah Se Malaysia
DAP	Democratic Action Party
EAEC	East Asian Economic Caucus
EAEG	East Asian Economic Grouping
FOSIS	Federation of Student Islamic Societies
GBC	General Border Committee
GBA	General Border Agreement
GERAKAN	Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia
HAMIM	Parti Hizbul Muslimin Malaysia
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IIFSO	Islamic Federation of Student Organizations
IKIM	Institut Kefahaman Islam diMalaysia
IRC	Islamic Representative Council
LUTH	Lembaga Urusan dan Tabung Haji
MABIMS	Menteri-menteri Agama Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia dan Singapura
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MSA	Malaysian Students Association
MSD	Malaysian Students Department
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NEP	New Economic Policy
NDP	National Development Policy
NOC	National Operations Council

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OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia
Perkim	Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Se-Malaysia (Islamic Welfare and Missionary Association of Malaysia)
PKPIM	Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-pelajar Islam Malaysia (National Association of Muslim Students Malaysia)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PMIP	Pan-Malayan Islamic Party
PPIM	Pusat Penyelidikan Islam Se-Malaysia
PULO	Pattani United Liberation Organization
PUM	Persatuan Ulama Malaysia (Malaysian Ulama's Association)
RISEAP	Regional Islamic Dakwah Council for Southeast Asia
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USNO	United Sabah National Organization
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth

Introduction

The significance of religion in modern international relations lies in its political influence. As a potent force in the life of states and in inter-state relations, its assertion has been a striking phenomenon of contemporary times. Scholarly expectations that the role of religion in modern states and societies, through inevitable processes of modernization and secularization, would gradually diminish have been dramatically disproved by events in the latter half of the twentieth century.

While it is true that modernity has held problematic consequences for religion, as a faith and as a social value system, it has enjoyed a rising prominence in both domestic and international society. And nowhere more so than in the case of Islam. The retention of a religious orientation in all Muslim societies through various forms of social action, across other dividing criteria, has helped to some extent to disprove the secularization thesis.

The relevance of Islam to international relations, doctrinally speaking, goes back to the founding of the religion itself. For Muslims of classical times, Islam was not only the “one, true, final and universal religion” but also the foundation of their conception of the “international system”.¹ Even while unity and diversity have co-existed as an integrated fact in the commonwealth of *Allah*, an ideal has persisted of its unitary expression located in the nature of the religion itself; namely an insistence on the movement from the *Dar-al-Harb* (abode of war encompassing unbelievers) to the *Dar-al-Islam* (the abode of peace, encompassing all Muslims), and towards the expression of a universal spiritual community through the *umma*.

From the seventh to the thirteenth centuries Islam in its Middle Eastern expression formed a vast empire dominated by a caliphate out of which grew an impressive civilization. The subsequent experiences of colonialism and domination by the West, generated a fractured and yet common reaction in terms of a reforming impulse in Muslim societies that was to regenerate central and traditional concepts as well as new ideas towards religious renewal. The

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exacting transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the counter impact of Islamic nations on the West imposed “distortions” on the religion even while reviving a dynamic sense of civilizational importance towards its promotion in international relations. While it would be a mistake to attribute changes in the world of Islam solely to Western contact and influence, there remains a sense among Muslims, that this feature remains central in the major expressions of its renewal and reform and to its potential role in international society. This has also allowed, to some extent, for the projection of the modern day manifestation of Islam in international relations by both Muslims and non-Muslims as an impending clash between mutually hostile civilizations that would appear to hold little connection to each other.

However, an appreciation of the actual and potential role of Islam in international relations needs an understanding of the historicity of the religion. Even as the trans-historical, “eternal truth” of the religion lends its appeal to its adherents, any perception of Islam and of Muslim societies as encompassing one global, timeless, cultural system would be misleading if not altogether false. Dogma, religious practice and world vision may have seen some permanency through fourteen centuries of Islam, but the realities of political practices in Muslim societies have been as numerous and complex as their sociological realities have been diverse. Certainly, the common scriptural basis of Muslim religious communities has not negated the existence of a broad range of opinion within those communities over the “correct” social and political implications of the *Qur’anic* message.²

The problem is that contemporary discourse on the role of religion, particularly on Islam in international relations, tends to be dominated by the themes of threat and of conflict, of resurgence and renewal which spring in part from the thesis that transnational allegiances based on affective considerations like religion are ultimately threatening to the basis of order in international society because it involves beliefs and values which are incompatible with the Westphalian principles of the international system.³

The basis of the contemporary notion of a “return” of Islam in all of the Muslim world has in fact been served by “essentializing” scholarship which has represented Islam as static and as constituting its own “authenticity”.⁴ As Mohammed Arkoun points out, this is also the referent for a modern social science discourse that has tended to create conceptions of an unalterable incompatibility between “Western” and “Islamic” civilization—of an “irreducible and impermeable difference” between the two. This has frequently been engaged in by Muslims themselves who appear to have readily accepted Western depictions of a Muslim “Otherness”.⁵ Subsequently, religious, primarily Islamic, political activism is frequently painted as monolithic and by definition, anti-Western.⁶

Such foci and concerns, however, lend themselves to a simplification and reification of religion and of religious politics. While there may be commonalities in Muslim politics across societies, it is as likely that religious politics are dictated by factors in combination with religion if not beyond it. Nor

should there be any assumption that the historical trajectory for Muslim societies is the equivalent of that for other religious cultures.⁷

Some historians like John Obert Voll have nevertheless used a historical framework to demonstrate that contemporary Islamic revivalism is part of a rhythm in which Islam resembles a self-regulating system, persisting in various historical circumstances, adapting to external forces when it must but reasserting its true shape from within when it seems that adaptation might change the shape beyond recognition.⁸ This lends itself to the view that although distinct communities joined by faith and practice have been confined by the bounds of individual histories and the western form of nation states, a sense of a global Islamic society—given expression through the traditional idea of the community of believers (the *umma*)—has persisted as an ideal in tension or in an alternating framework with others.

This study attempts to communicate the complexities of any assessment of Islam as a factor in international relations by relating its significance for one state—Malaysia—against the processes of its domestic politics and the backdrop of its relations with other states and institutions that make up international society. In doing so, it seeks, in particular, to place Muslim (or Islamic) discourse and its practice within its specifically Malaysian social context.

The impact of Islam is largely associated with its heartland in the Middle East, but there is a wider sense of its global significance transmitted through its status as one of the fastest growing of the world's major religions. This dynamic growth is forcefully represented on the very periphery of those Islamic heartlands. Malaysia, located on that periphery, within the southeastern subregion of Asia, has experienced that growth to political effect. Historically, the pattern of Muslim influence and interaction in the Malay world has been diverse and has drawn on Islamic traditions from the Middle East and through the Indian subcontinent.

The contemporary character of Malaysia as an independent state has been affected by the resurgence of Islam and has found expression in its international relations. This expression has reflected the political priorities of its dominant domestic constituency—the Malays. In Malaysia, where the proportion of Malays to non-Malays is almost even, Islam is linked closely to the ethnic identity of the politically dominant Malays. The domestic political system has functioned since Independence on the basis of a formal pluralism, but in practice, through Malay prerogative. Non-Malay erosion of and challenge to that prerogative provoked ethnic violence in 1969 followed by a reordering of the political economy to Malay advantage. Malay elites have displayed continual vigilance towards any perceived threats to this new political “balance” to ensure the unchallenged dominance of their community in Malaysia. This has, however, always been envisioned within the acceptance of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious constituency by national leadership.

Historically relevant in the creation of Malay political society in the country, Islam has increasingly become vital to the maintenance of that prerogative, because of its centrality to communal and political identity. While religion has

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remained a dynamic factor in the poly-ethnic and multi-religious context of Malaysian society, it has also been reinforced by the re-emergence of a perceived universal Islamic identity as an issue in global politics. The point at which these domestic and external identities have intertwined has allowed for the emergence of Islam as a factor in Malaysian foreign policy, and for its selective adaptation and employment under the Mahathir administration.

LOCATING ISLAM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Considering the protean and imprecise nature of the term itself, any study proposing to locate “Islam” is fraught with difficulty. It is vital to reiterate that, quite aside from its theological dimensions, Islam is not a monolith in contemporary societies, both local and international. In reality, even the basics of faith have been contested. The problem obtains that it is virtually impossible to say precisely and with authority what Islam is or what it is not at any given time. In practical terms, as James Piscatori has suggested, there are as many Islams as there are Muslims: “Only the profession of faith in *Allah* and the Prophet remain beyond question”.⁹ Aziz Al-Azmeh proffers the analysis that there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain them and any assumptions positing any kind of Muslim or specifically Islamic homogeneity to Muslim societies as incongruent with reality. As such, Islam “is not necessarily a culture but a religion amongst diverse cultures...therefore, a multiform entity”.¹⁰

In accepting that a singular definition of Islam is impossible, its variety of thought and practice must also be accepted. As a set of universal and authoritative beliefs and practices a certain constancy in the pattern of Muslim conduct is implied. However, the contexts in which Muslims find themselves are as likely to influence their behaviour as the sense of the universality of their faith. The senses of community which derive from faith and practice are necessarily interpreted and shaped in distinct ways in differing places, times and societies. An examination of the history of these communities indicates both the diversity of these practices and traditions and their transformation over time.

Having said this, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are difficulties in understanding action within “religious” fields (religiously rationalized), because, by their very nature, “religions” or at least world religions are proposed to various degrees by their adherents to be universal, unaffected by human vicissitudes and unambiguous. In acknowledging that for Muslims, Islam is the acceptance of faith and represents an ideological force of some symbolic value to its adherents, their representations of practice and tradition are asserted as stable, uniform and derived from the distant past. It is therefore necessary that Islam be viewed as what Muslims say as well as what they actually do—or what Muslims show by their actions they accept Islam to be.¹¹

The assessment of Islam as a singular expression in domestic and international politics is important to this discussion in other ways. The issue of identity is in fact central to any discussion of Islam in contemporary

international society. The bases and realities of particularity, universality, marginality and centrality are consistently part of Islamic political discourse but they also serve as the bases of discussion on the future or potential of the religion and its communities in international society.

The scale and complexity of global exchange in the late twentieth century has involved the moulding and remoulding of identity at both state and society levels which has included the matter of religious identity. Despite suggestions that these processes are helping to imprint a universal image of Islam, it would be misleading to assume any uniformity of Muslim identity. The reality of the internal diversity of Islam is compelling and political circumstances can and have compelled Muslims to highlight, emphasize, or underplay their identity in different ways. At the same time, the politics of all Muslim countries must also be seen within the global frame which has helped shape them.

These facts suggest that the avoidance of misleading reifications in the study of Islam in states and societies is important. It might even be more appropriate to speak of “traditions” and of “Islams”. Religions certainly have observable expressions and measurable vehicles or institutionalized manifestations, as Jacques Waardenburg has pointed out, but as he has also said, it is precisely the *meaning* of these expressions, vehicles and manifestations that is at issue.¹²

If there is little methodological certainty in arriving at definitive conclusions about Islam and its role in international relations this is compounded when attempting to locate it specifically in foreign policy. The task of seeking to relate Islam to foreign policy is problematic at several levels. While the attribution of any one factor as explanation towards the formulation, implementation, even legitimation of a state’s foreign policy can never be sufficiently accurate, it is even more difficult to measure the precise influence of affective considerations such as religion in foreign policy. Moreover, a definitive set of rankings of factors in foreign policy remains unrealistic. But in so far as it is possible to set the role of Islam against the social context of policy and to attempt to weigh its significance relatively, such an exercise would appear plausible and possibly fruitful.

Islam has provided direction and content for the foreign policy of Malaysia. At issue is to what extent the Malaysian viewpoint has been moulded by the social and political values of its foreign policy makers’ inherited and evolving culture; to what extent the Malaysian government has used Islamic terms and symbols to explain and justify to the Malaysian public what they are trying to do in the outside world;¹³ and most importantly, how far Islam in Malaysian foreign policy has been employed towards a domestic political function.

These questions constitute the primary focus of the book, which also concerns itself with a general evaluation of Islam as a factor in international relations and as a framework which gives Muslims the rationale and, in part at least, the tools for formulating and implementing state policy. A religious identity in foreign policy here refers also to the institutional frameworks within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued among a community of like-minded believers.

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However, doctrine should not be assumed to hold an independent existence nor as being invariable. It is not only imperative to point out that doctrine (and the way in which it is understood) is often a function of both time and place but its acceptability is frequently a function of social and political forces—of who uses them and how they are used. The dynamic means by which dogma is effected at least in terms of meaning, should indicate that while religious doctrine might go some way towards explaining Muslim social and political action, it should not be perceived as the sole determinant.

Foreign policy is viewed here also as a continuum in the formative, implementative and legitimating senses and as a process which unfolds in these three distinct, yet interrelated areas of analysis.¹⁴ The central argument of this book underlines the legitimating aspects of a religious identity and its effects on domestic society for Muslim and non-Muslim, which is only measurable in relation to the other components of the foreign policy process. Indeed, some analysts have argued that in practice, Islam has served far more as an instrument of rather than as an influence on foreign policy.¹⁵ In identifying factors and processes where Islam does or does not have an influence and by attempting to explain how and why they operate under certain circumstances this investigation will seek to locate Islam within any or all of these spheres.

To those ends, it will be necessary to delve into the domestic roots of Malaysia's foreign policy, describe and explain the social, political and organizational environment in which policy is made, the policy-making structure and the key political actors, their attitudes, images and perceptions and finally evaluate their relationship to the final stage of the foreign policy process, implementation. The additional dimension at each of these stages will be in assessing how this policy affects the domestic context, once it is executed, arriving at more general conclusions as to the aims, and goals of a religious character within that policy.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOREIGN POLICY AND DOMESTIC POLICY: FOREIGN POLICY AS DOMESTIC POLICY BY OTHER MEANS

There is also a wider objective here: an attempt to investigate the means by which in a more generalized sense, there exists a particularly intense relationship between the foreign and domestic spheres of the policy process but in the reverse order to what is normally expected of the relationship. That foreign policy can serve as a function of domestic policy is particularly vital to understanding the ways in which small but rapidly developing nations like Malaysia in fact engage international society.

Like many other post-colonial states, Malaysia might best be characterized as a “new” state. That is to say that it is still in the process of political evolution into a modern “national state”; its governing elite are still generally engaged in the process of state building.¹⁶ Some analysts have indicated that foreign policy is perceived as a luxury for such states; their main preoccupation being state

building—that process aimed at obtaining internal order, bridging economic and social disparities, ethnic, religious and regional fissures, building unconditional legitimacy of state boundaries, institutions and governing elites, managing internal and inter-state conflicts, correcting distorted and dependent patterns of economic and social development. Thus, rather than attempt to manipulate the external environment in ways suitable to the “national interest”, foreign policy seeks to affect the internal environment in ways favourable to the building of the state and to the maintenance of the regime in power.¹⁷ By definition, foreign policy is an effort to establish the identity and integrity of the new state, even though this often has a divisive domestic effect. Issues within the international context on the other hand, can unite the nation and mark it as a going concern.¹⁸

The exercise of state building is in fact an important preoccupation of those states and societies that might yet be referred to as “Third World”—a term still applicable within the specific contours of the post-Cold War era. It is a process as much related to their position in international society and their relationships with other states, as it is a function of their internal cohesion. As such the quest for security as it is broadly defined is determined by this capacity for state building but is one directed externally for internal purposes. As Mohammed Ayoob has pointed out for instance, it is virtually a *sine qua non* of Third World states that their security is internally defined and that policy towards the maintenance of that security can also be directed towards an internal goal. Foreign policy therefore, serves a domestic function.¹⁹

While there exist clear and obvious external challenges for these states, to their territorial boundaries or to their very survival as nation-states, it is the intangible ingredients of security, including the identification of the people with the state (legitimacy) and of people with each other (integration), that tend to preoccupy the attention of foreign policy makers in these countries, in part because “building stronger states is virtually the only way in which the vicious circle of unstable states and an unstable security environment can be broken”.²⁰ John Stremlau has maintained that the primary and prevalent concerns of Third World governments are with threats to their security that are domestic in origin or emanate from conditions in neighbouring countries and that the international dimensions of these local issues will typically determine the core of their foreign policy.²¹

Rauhollah Ramazani has perceived the study of foreign policy as being inextricably and conceptually linked to the study of political development. Indeed, given the special nature and scope of the problems of modernization in “new” nations, policy development requires conceptualization that emphasizes the particularly intimate interactions between external policy (in substance and process) and political development on the one hand, and with the international system, on the other. It is thus not only the external world’s impact on the domestic political system that is significant here but also the conceptualization of the relationship between political development and foreign policy in developing societies in all respects, including the relationship between domestic capacity and international capability.²²

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State building in fact also involves the complementary issues of legitimacy and regime maintenance. For new states, challenges continue towards their ruling regimes as appropriate orders of distributive justice and to their governments as fair and effective instruments of security and progress.²³ Correspondent with the experience of many other new states, independence did not bring automatic and unconditional legitimacy for state forms and institutions in Malaysia. Despite the fact that legitimacy, like nation-building, is the result of long and arduous endeavour, there has however, also been the obligation to move towards this end in a much shorter space of time and additionally to apply such strategies for legitimation as may seem appropriate in the circumstances.²⁴

Its attainment might be approached through the political culture of a country, that is to say its established attitudes and orientations towards political issues and institutions. Yet legitimacy is also promoted through attention to emotional and material appetites and in the case of the former, these are usually fed by symbols, relevant to their time, in order to sustain the political system. The internal problem of legitimacy however, in the case of new states, often becomes externalized through foreign policy. External relations help express and establish the reality of a new state—its integrity and its uniqueness. In short, state legitimacy is more easily asserted through, and made apparent when performing on, the international rather than (or as much as) the national stage.²⁵

Furthermore, a more specific security context also applies. The problems of Third World states are exacerbated by the fact that state building in them does not take place in an international vacuum. While its internal or intrastate dimension may be a primary preoccupation of state elites in the Third World, the impact of international forces whether military, political, economic or technological makes a substantive difference to the fortunes of state building enterprise and to the larger security problematic of Third World states.²⁶ The perception of acute vulnerability and continued marginalization in relation to the dominant concerns of the international establishment as well as a sense of easy permeability by all external actors—developed states, international institutions or transnational corporations characterizes this security predicament.²⁷

In such circumstances, foreign policy has, for these states, come to serve clear and specific internal purposes. Indeed, access to the international arena can be used to preserve and perpetuate internal political order. Many external relationships established by governments within the region of Southeast Asia have been contemplated above all as rendering access to a source of countervailing power to contain internal challenges. Indeed, in small states, foreign policy is ancillary to domestic policy and is perceived as “real” because the foreign policy making process in these countries is the occupation of a small elite dominated above all by considerations of their own political survival.²⁸

Put more succinctly then, the foreign policy of a “new” state is domestic policy pursued by other means. It is a domestic policy carried beyond the boundaries of the state—while the wider issues of international politics may be important, they are usually only of such function to the state where they provide an opportunity to respond to the most pressing problems which are, in large measure, domestic.²⁹

In feeling their way through the maze of experiences and events, smaller states like Malaysia, partly through the conviction of particular leadership but partly also as a generalized response, have sought to activate foreign relations at a more intense level, aimed at securing a more equitable status in the new international pecking order. In a globalizing and post-Cold War phase, the international environment has frequently been projected as holding imminent dramatic change for all states and societies operating within it. The impression is given that somehow this would imply new agendas for all states, even those of the “Third World” who might act decisively in shaping a new international order. The reality is that these Third World states remain insecure in a volatile environment. Even more importantly the heightened sense of effective globalization has meant that the as yet undetermined structure for an international framework has presented itself as an even more insecure arena for smaller states. In such an atmosphere, foreign policy has been employed all the more as domestic policy by other means, aimed at defending domestic society as well as moulding it.

Certainly, religion and religious considerations might be assessed as being increasingly relevant to the state building process and domestic politics of Third World societies. It can be significant to the bases of authority and legitimacy of political elites in these societies; issues of power and equity (social justice) are frequently part of religious discourse and are entirely relevant to the dominant political discourse in these societies. Religion might also be seen as significant to the shaping of post-colonial identity, domestically, regionally, internationally, as an expression if not qualification of modernities, as offering resistance to or promotion of the modernization process even as it aids in resisting secularization and “Westernization”. Religion and religious politics are clearly relevant to these processes and issues. In as much as it constitutes a social value system, religion remains a part of the developmental process of most Third World societies.

Islam has long been a component of Malay political culture but it has represented a symbol of legitimacy for the ruling Malay party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), from its formation. While Islam is perceived as an integrative instrument in the Malay community, it does not function as an effective symbol of legitimacy as such for other Malaysians. All symbols of Malay political culture have in fact served largely to reassure Malay dominance but have had an alienating effect on Malaysia’s non-Malay constituents.

Islam’s symbolic function in foreign policy under the Mahathir administration is explained primarily by its political relevance to the ruling party, UMNO’s role of “protection” of the Malay community *vis-à-vis* the other ethnic communities in Malaysia. This symbol is particularly relevant to the period in question because of both serious and deepening intra-Malay rivalry and due to the capacity of international Islam to impinge on the Malaysian domestic scene.

The selective introduction of a co-religionist dimension to foreign policy has worked as a means of actively competing with domestic Muslim groups who make claims on the state in terms of a religious character and to deny these groups a sense of local and international legitimacy. In fact, co-religionism has thus far been selectively employed rather than actually dictating that foreign

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policy in total. It is also articulated as a response to the capacity of international Islam or foreign Muslim governments and movements to impose themselves on the domestic political process.

There exists, however, the tendency to view this foreign policy as somehow beyond the effective sphere of domestic politics and indeed as lying primarily outside the interest of domestic political actors or participants. While this may have been appropriately descriptive of state and society at a much earlier stage, it is hardly reflective of the increasingly complex and gradually maturing relationship between international and domestic society in the Malaysian case. Indeed, it is imperative that the emergence, particularly within the last two decades, of wide-ranging Malay nationalist and Islamic interests, as rapidly growing sources of political, social and moral influence in Malay (and Malaysian) society with the corresponding power to affect (and be affected by) foreign policy, be both acknowledged and accounted for.

Most studies of contemporary Malaysian foreign policy have tended to emphasize its consistently “pragmatic” substance, objectives and exercise. It is frequently also characterized in both form and content as attributable to idiosyncratic leadership, at least to some extent. While a number of analysts have commented on the distinguishing style of Dr Mahathir Mohammed, in his conduct of both domestic and foreign policy from that of previous Malaysian leaders, this book also hopes to demonstrate that the imperatives of rapidly changing patterns of division within political society (in particular that of the Malay community) and of power structures within the general system hold as much if not greater relevance for Malaysian foreign policy than the particular character and style of its leader.³⁰

The Mahathir Administration has been notable for the rhetorical and sometimes substantial significance it has placed on Islam, seeking, more clearly than its predecessors, to identify the country as an Islamic or Muslim state in its foreign relations. This has been made all the more relevant not only to its domestic audience but to its neighbours and to the larger international community, within the context of a revived global role for Islam.

Indeed, the Malaysian interaction with Islam further demonstrates the close linkage between internal politics and external policy. While state and society continue to be sensitive to international movements in the Islamic community, this sensitivity is moderated by the political and national considerations arising from the poly-ethnic nature of its society. These complex dimensions distinguish the country’s religious identity from many other Islamic societies where the populations are either totally or predominantly Muslim by outlook.³¹

In more recent times, the specific structural changes in Malaysian society and its needs coupled with the personality and beliefs of its current leadership have directed foreign policy, even its religious character, towards contributing to the reconstruction of the world system, its principles and institutional framework in the twenty-first century both towards international co-operation and for Malaysia’s specific benefit.

Clearly the period following the demise of the East-West confrontation and the dramatic developments that are in the process of determining a so-called new world order are all the more relevant here, because of the critical manner in which it has engaged the foreign policy of small and developing states, let alone the more established international actors. In a so-called post-ideological age, the re-emergence of strongly affective influences and instruments such as religion, race, nationality and ethnicity and their transnational strength, symbolic or real, in international relations, has heightened this recourse to foreign policy and entrenched its relationship to domestic policy. This has been made most apparent in the case of Malaysia.

This book then seeks to explain the employment of an Islamic identity in Malaysian foreign policy as serving the function of domestic political economy. It aims to relate the measure of Islam in Malaysian foreign policy under the Mahathir administration to the intensive and interactive relationship between domestic and foreign policy and also to explore the interaction among the various factors that have influenced that particular measure through a thematic framework, employing episodic analyses and evidence to underline the arguments.

NOTES

1. Majid Khadduri, "The Islamic Theory of International Relations" in J.Harris Proctor (ed.), *Islam and International Relations*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1965, p. 35; A.Abusulayman, *The Islamic Theory of International Relations*, Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1987, pp. 127–141.
2. Olivier Roy (trans. by Carol Volk), *The Failure of Political Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 35–47.
3. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993; Giles Keppel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, London: Polity Press, 1994.
4. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, London and New York: Verso, 1993, p. 22.
5. Mohammed Arkoun (trans. and ed. by Robert D.Lee), *Re-thinking Islam: Uncommon Questions, Uncommon Answers*, Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 1–14.
6. See Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam", *Commentary* 61, No. 1, January 1976, pp. 39–49; "The Roots of Muslim Rage", *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, pp. 47–60.
7. As Sami Zubaida points out in *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*, London: Routledge, 1989, there is "no such thing as common, general patterns of development" in religious politics.
8. See John Obert Voll, *Islam. Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994.
9. James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press and Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986, p. 2.
10. Aziz Al-Azmeh, op. cit. p. 4, 41.
11. James Piscatori, op. cit., pp. 3–14; Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, "Social Theory in the Study of Muslim Societies" in Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, pp. 3–25.

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12. Jacques Waardenburg cited in Fazlur Rahman, "Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies: Review Essay" in Richard C.Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985, pp. 189–202, fn. 1.
13. This framework of analysis has been borrowed from a series of studies on the importance of Islam in the foreign policy of a variety of states collected in Adeed Dawisha (ed.), *Islam in Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1983, and is emphasized in Albert Hourani's concluding essay in the same book.
14. Howard H. Lentner, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative and Conceptual Approach*, Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1974; James N.Rosenau, "The Study of Foreign Policy" in James N.Rosenau *et al.* (eds), *World Politics: An Introduction*, New York: Free Press, 1976, pp. 15–35; Christopher Clapham (ed.), *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: a Comparative Approach*, Farnborough: Saxon House, 1977, pp. 165–179.
15. Tareq Y.Ismael, "Domestic Sources of Middle Eastern Foreign Policy" in Tareq Y. Ismael (ed.), *The Middle East in World Politics*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974, p. 204.
16. See Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995, pp. 23–27. The modern national state (which is what most Third World states currently represent) cannot be seen as synonymous with nation states—national states frequently precede the consolidation of the nation-state, although not always. National states are products of the state making enterprise, rather than of nationalism or nation building.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Robert C.Good, "State Building as a Determinant for Foreign Policy in New States" in L.Martin (ed.), *Neutrality and Non-Alignment: The New States in World Affairs*, New York: Praeger, 1962, pp. 7–11.
19. Mohammed Ayoob and Chai Anan Samudavanija, "Leadership and Security in Southeast Asia: Exploring General Propositions", in Mohammed Ayoob and Chai Anan Samudavanija (eds), *Leadership Perceptions and National Security: The Southeast Asia Experience*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989, pp. 256–277.
20. Edward E.Azar and Chung-In Moon (eds), *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats*, Maryland: University of Maryland Press, 1988, p. 40.
21. John L.Stremlau, *The Foreign Policy Priorities of Third World States*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982, p. 2.
22. Rouhollah K.Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy 1941–1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations*, Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1975, pp. 3–5; Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1966, pp. 203–212; Howard J.Wiarda (ed.), *New Directions in Comparative Politics*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991.
23. Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *Regional Security and the Third World*, London, Croom Helm, 1985, pp. 3–33.
24. Michael Leifer, *Dilemmas of Statehood in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1972, p. 106.
25. Robert C.Good, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
26. Mohammed Ayoob, "Security Problematic in the Third World" (Review Article), *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2, January 1990, pp. 258–283.
27. Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995, p. 15.
28. Peter Calvert, *The Foreign Policy of New States*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986,

- pp. 1–26; Michael Leifer, op. cit., p. 110; Michael Leifer, “Southeast Asia” in Christopher Clapham (ed.), *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach*, Farnborough: Saxon Press, 1979, pp. 29–32.
29. Robert Good, op. cit., p. 12.
 30. See, for instance, previous studies of Malaysian foreign policy such as that of J.B. Dalton, *The Development of Malaysia’s External Policies 1957–1963*, Unpublished DPhil Thesis, Oxford University, 1967; Robert Tilman, *Malaysian Foreign Policy*, McLean, VA: Research Analysis Corporation, 1969; Johan Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Malaysia’s Foreign Policy*, Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia for School of Social Science, 1983; Murugesu Pathmanathan, “New Dimensions of Malaysia’s Foreign Policy” in M. Pathmanathan and D.Lazarus, *Winds of Change: The Mahathir Impact on Malaysia’s Foreign Policy*, Kuala Lumpur: Eastern Universities Press, 1984; H.J. Widdowsen, *The Influence of Islam in the Formation of the Foreign Policy of Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia*, PhD Thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1976; Chamil Wariya, *Dasar Luar Mahathir* (Mahathir’s Foreign Policy), Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Fajar Bakti, 1989 and Robert A. Scalapino, *Asia and the Major Powers: Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1988.
 31. Murugesu Pathmanathan, “New Dimensions of Malaysia’s Foreign Policy” in M.Pathmanathan and D.Lazarus, *Winds of Change: The Mahathir Impact on Malaysia’s Foreign Policy*, op. cit., p. 51. Of course, the exact homogeneity of views, attitudes and interpretations is difficult to determine even in societies with overwhelmingly Muslim majorities. However, the connection between religious belief and ethnicity is prevalent enough in Malaysian society to indicate the deep divisions arising out of an Islamic identity and of the uniqueness of Malaysia’s circumstances.

1 Islam in Malay politics

Islam's identification in Malaysia's domestic politics is best understood in structural terms and against the elements of Malay political culture within which it largely operates.

The Malaysian domestic political process rests within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy (based on the British model) and a federal system of government administering eleven states including the Peninsula (West Malaysia) and the North Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia). To this framework must be added the realities of the contemporary political scene which revolve around communal political representation on the part of Malay, Chinese, Indian and other minority interests. The political definition of the Malaysian state since the declaration of the sovereign independence of its Malayan core in 1957 has rested however on the axis of a non-negotiable Malay dominance (later to be defined in the distinction between the category of *Bumiputera*—i.e. as native to the land—from other Malaysians) in both political and economic terms but fully cognizant of, and necessarily committed to, the essentially multi-ethnic character of the state.

The role of Islam within this political process has been dictated largely by these structural constraints and by its relationship to Malay identity, legitimacy and dominance although it has not been exclusively determinative of either that identity or of the process itself.

ISLAM IN MALAY POLITICAL CULTURE

Since its introduction to the Peninsula between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Islam contributed significantly to ideas and offices of political authority and was anchored in Malay identity. Historically, however, it has constituted only one ingredient of Malay political life and has had to compete with and accommodate at least two other fundamental organizing concepts—Malay kingship and Malay nationalism. The combination of these forces have

themselves been affected by the transformation of the country, by the turn of the twentieth century, into a complex poly-ethnic and multi-religious entity.

Islam and Malay kingship

Islam made significant contributions in legitimating the earliest forms of political authority in Malay society. It was acknowledged as a pre-condition of political and social participation but acted as an embellishment on the existing political order and its social values. Political society was essentially ordered around separate states each with their own ruler (*Sultan*) and court. Motivated by Islamic symbols and a culture constituting myriad influences from the Islamic world through the Indian subcontinent, the Sultanates were also influenced by religious leaders and scholars (*ulama*) who increasingly constituted an elite substratum of Malay society.¹

The unity of the state was symbolized by Islam, mentioned in the covenant defining the loyalty of the Malays to their Ruler whose authority and divine power were in turn rationalized and legitimized by Islam. However, the capacity of the religion to both support as well as challenge traditional political authority (*kerajaan*)—re-enforcing existing institutions and practices but also qualifying the legitimacy of the Sultans to rule—indicated its earliest tendencies both to accommodate and to struggle against other constituents of traditional Malay culture. The possibilities for such tension continue to the present and have increasingly served to define the development of Malay politics.²

The subversion of such political structures through the intervening period of colonialism in fact underlined the link between royal authority and Islam by diverting the powers of the *Sultan* to purely ceremonial and religious matters. The sustenance of parochial Malay loyalties towards state and locale were enabled by the retardation of Islam's development in political terms even as British rule enabled the codification and development of Islamic law and an expansion of a religious bureaucracy.³

Despite a further decline in their political power with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the post-colonial maintenance of the *Sultans'* loci of power between nine Malay states was strengthened by their continued prerogative in religious affairs. This subsequently also allowed for the development of considerable diversity in the interpretation of Islamic law and custom between the states and was ultimately to spell further problems for Islam's unification in understanding and expression in Malaysia.

Over time, however, even these powers have increasingly been rendered ambiguous as the oldest political institution in Malay society has been increasingly challenged by the ascendancy and struggle between the forces of Malay nationalism and a form of Islamic republicanism. In contemporary Malaysia, particularly under the Mahathir administration, the institution of kingship has come under severe attack and challenge. None the less, continued commitment to kingship as a significant feature of Malay culture has both added to and detracted from the development of Islam in the political process.⁴

Islam and Malay nationalism

Reformist influences on Islam in Malaya were more widely evident by the early twentieth century. To some extent, these ideas, carried from Muslim societies in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, were placed within the context of dramatic socio-economic change in the Peninsula—the large scale immigration of Chinese and Indians attracted by new economic activity, the emergence of a money economy, the spread of a modern bureaucracy, the expansion of secular education and rapid urbanization—as by-products of colonial expansion. Improvements in communication were also to indirectly aid in the infusion of new religious ideas: contact with the Middle East and Mecca in particular provided for exchange between Muslim elites and their ideas, bringing confidence and connection for a Muslim community at the furthest reaches of the Islamic heartland.

While Reformist ideas were to help inject life into the concept of a universal Muslim community—through the *umma*—in the development of Malay identity, these ideas were also germane to a strengthened synonymity between the ethnic and religious qualifications of Malay and Muslim which had held pre-colonial roots—the Malay language itself expressing the process of conversion to Islam as one of “entering the Malay community” (*masuk Melayu*).⁵ The imperatives of a Malay nationalism articulated through ethnic and religious perspectives were the recognition of a significant threat to Malay numerical predominance in the country. Rapidly reversed demographic patterns through liberal immigration policies effected by the British indicated a threat to Malay prerogative, underlined by economic policies which provided opportunities for economic initiative and prosperity (to some extent) for non-Malays without a corresponding attention to the vast majority of Malays.

Islamic Reformism as it was articulated by the *Kaum Muda* in British Malaya, helped establish a strong basis for the spread of essentially urban based “modernist” ideas, that sought a return to “the pristine purity of early Islam” while urging the development of Malays through rational, independent interpretation of religious sources and modern education and by verbalizing nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments. This movement was undoubtedly to challenge traditional religious authority located in the village based *ulama*, scholars and functionaries to the Sultans, largely constituted by the *Kaum Tua* movement whose ideals rested in the preservation of the supremacy of the Malay elites and of the royal courts.

Inevitably, Reformism was harnessed towards improving the position of the Malays, challenging any elite connection to and control of Islam and, very importantly, establishing the first linkage between religion and politics in the earliest forms of Malay nationalism. Religious cleavage between the *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua* movements in the 1920s and 1930s did not however detract from the fact that, for the Malays, Islam still provided the symbol of their exclusivity and prerogative rights to the country, invigorating intellectual and political exchange and securing significant influence in nationalist agitation by the 1940s.⁶

Instrumental in germinating its seeds, Reformism also influenced the devolution of Malay nationalism into a variety of expressions. Its earliest articulation through popular politics found some combination between Malay nationalist and Islamic ideals, supported even by the *ulama*, at least until the late 1940s. Indeed, rather than any intense struggle between nationalism and Islam as dominating political concepts (as expressed in the political history of other Muslim societies), Malay conviction in the propriety of the fusion of these ideals may be explained by the sense of particularism and cohesion that religious identity offered within an increasingly ethnically plural society.⁷ Historically then, Malay nationalism more accurately reflected an ethnic assertiveness incorporating religious identity.

Large-scale Malay political mobilization was not however possible until the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), emerged in 1946, weaving together divergent strands of Malay nationalism in resistance to the Malayan Union scheme devised by the British. This would have had the effect of liberal citizenship guarantees to all domiciled non-Malay communities, inviting drastic alterations to the country's demographic patterns while relieving the Malay rulers of even their symbolic political prerogative over religious and ceremonial matters.

UMNO's express purpose in establishment was thus for the protection of Malay identity and rights in the face of the immigrant threat. Amidst its representation of a wide spectrum of Malay nationalism its core leadership comprised a largely traditional elite with basically administrative and aristocratic backgrounds, underlining its mainly conservative expressions in particular towards religious matters. UMNO's political legendary image was assured with its success at obtaining Britain's retraction of its Malayan Union proposals to be eventually replaced by the Federation of Malaya Agreement (essentially negotiated between the British and UMNO).

Any unanimous Malay alliance under UMNO was, however, only temporarily successful as the allegiance of all Malays was fought for between parties of different political persuasions.⁸ Although Islamic reformists had been at the forefront of the nationalist struggle, their choice of an independent organization reflected a considerable Malay disapproval and distrust of UMNO's secular leadership, thus underlining a continuing division between conservative and radical political interests. In fact, Islamic Reformism had found expressly political representation through the establishment of the *Hizbul Muslimin* in 1947, aimed at achieving independence through an Islamic based society and the consequent establishment of an Islamic state (*Darul Islam*) in Malaya. Such an organization was to provide a suitable challenge towards UMNO's secular-nationalist ideology and those already oriented towards more clear Islamic objectives.⁹

UMNO's subsequent attempts at including religious leaders as an important component of the Party by 1950 could not withstand the persistence of differing ideologies and was eventually to lead to their large-scale defection into the establishment of a new party, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP) in 1951, its name later changed to *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS).¹⁰

While the leadership of that party emphasized its intent in having Islam shape the political and economic affairs of the state and serve as a guide for worship and morality, its diverse origins also ensured a periodic flux between a Malay nationalist character and that of a more purely Islamic identity. In fact, any alternative of more radical Islamic expression was denied by the experience of the Emergency in 1948, declared to fight a Communist insurgency, by British colonial policy—radical Malay politics and its collaboration with non-Malay left-wing forces are important elements of Malaysian political history but cannot be adequately dealt with here. Amidst the gradual crystallization of inter-ethnic and more secularly attuned political representation then, UMNO and PAS predominated national politics.¹¹

The legacy of religious reformism in Malaya was in its promotion of an active tradition of Islamic dissent. It was to constitute a permanent feature of Malay-Muslim politics in time to come. It brought new ideas that were to prove an important source of future religious and political debate, witnessing the further entrenchment of Islam as a significant paradigm for Malay society and of politics in general. Over time, and accompanying important structural change in Malay and Malaysian society, Malay ethnic nationalism itself has come to be re-worked—such as through the contemporary popularity of the *Melayu Baru* (new Malay) concept. Even while it has conveniently proved congruent to definitions of “modernist” Islam, it has also suffered some tension against this. Indeed, the dilemma of reconciling Islam’s universality with the demands of an environment favouring ethnic nationalism has never been entirely resolved and has been further registered in contemporary Malay-Islamic discourse.

Although UMNO remained the primary symbol of Malay nationalism for some time, in more recent years, it has had to fight more intensively for this mantle amidst the increasing fragmentation of ethnic political representation. The greater number of Malay parties fighting some combination of a Malay nationalist-cum-Islamic cause, has at any rate demonstrated the continued marriage between these elements in the characterization of Malay identity, even as that marriage is continually being redefined.

Islam in a multi-ethnic context

Islam in Malaysia’s domestic context serves as an expression of confessional (ethnic) interest in a society that is ethnically divided between Malays and non-Malays. The political perception of Malaysia as inherently Malay with special rights due to that ethnic community is balanced against the large-scale presence of other ethnic communities as an irreversible fact and by the constitutional commitment to the parliamentary process which enables communal representation. The poly-ethnic complexity of Malaysian society has been shaped against the political context of Malay dominance and by the fragile “balance” of the Malaysian population overall.

The 1991 national census notes the barest majority of Malays to non-Malays in Malaysia as a whole (50 per cent Malays, 10.6 per cent other *Bumiputeras*, 28.1

per cent Chinese, 7.9 per cent Indians and 3.4 per cent others). Their dominance is slightly more clear when considering the Peninsula alone (57.4 per cent) but in the East Malaysian states they constitute a distinct minority when compared to other “indigenes” (8.9 per cent in Sabah and 21.2 per cent in Sarawak), the ethnic pluralism of these states being more obvious. The peoples of these states were incorporated into the entity known as Malaysia in 1963. The aggregate of Muslims in Malaysia as a whole stands at 58.6 per cent of the total population, with 18.4 per cent Buddhist, 8.1 per cent Christian, 6.4 per cent Hindu, 5.3 per cent Confucian, Taoist and other Chinese religions and 3.2 per cent others.¹²

The substantial presence and heterogeneity of the non-Malays and non-Muslims makes the consideration of their presence vital in the formulation, implementation and legitimation of public policy, while underlining a Malaysian sense of the uniqueness of its character (at least until recently) within the Muslim world.

A Constitutional guarantee of Malay special rights was “bargained” against a corresponding recognition of *jus soli* rights for the non-Malay communities. The exchange of Malay political hegemony for unhindered Chinese economic activity served as the unwritten covenant, although some Malay opposition continued against such inter-communal co-operation and the “selling away of the birthright of the Malays”, led in particular by PAS. Nevertheless, the electoral success of the first inter-communal coalition party—the Alliance (a tripartite coalition representing the main ethnic communities through UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC)—in 1955 and the dominance of UMNO within that organization helped its claim to a mandate of leading Malaya to independence.¹³

Initial inter-communal political co-operation was a strategy devised for negotiating independence from the British. This ultimately proved more durable in the long run as political governance became determined by an interpretation of consociationalism—important decisions affecting each ethnic community were to be worked out through a process of inter-elite compromise rather than through democratic debate at the grassroots. While allowing for inter-ethnic co-operation, it was also strategically underpinned by Malay power.¹⁴

The consociationalist system did not remain intact through Malaysia’s political history. After racial riots in 1969, the pressures for greater Malay dominance and the subsequent structural changes to politics and government were to greatly emasculate the system of inter-elite bargaining. The term *Bumiputera* was to hold greater political validity after 1969 in the promotion of their rights by the State. The imperative of Malay unity has been based on the belief that politics represents the primary means for guaranteeing the Malayness of the country and the community’s continued dominance within the political system. UMNO’s continued ability to secure Malay prerogative and political dominance has given some support to the idea that it is ultimately the only party capable of ensuring Malay unity and hence power.

After 1969, however, the structural changes instituted in governmental policy and representation (including those at elite levels), in a more Malay oriented

direction, also significantly altered the principles and processes for inter-ethnic political co-operation. Theoretically, of course, Malay political parties do not require non-Malay support to predominate, but while the complex patterns of ethnic and religious alignment are built into the system of popular representation, any political entity intent on stable national leadership has not only to represent (and protect) the interests of its own community but in doing so must not risk alienating the other ethnic communities. Thus the national aims of political stability and economic development can only be served by a clear commitment to the maintenance of inter-communal harmony. The sizeable minority that the non-Malays represent both in overall population as well as electoral terms combined with their considerable contribution to and stake in the economy of the country stand as political facts which any ruling party has had to recognize. Thus the basic form of multi-ethnic co-operation and government first instituted under the Alliance has continued to the present day (with even wider ethnic representation) under the Barisan Nasional (BN—National Front), albeit significantly shaped by the inclinations of different national administrations, underlining an important principle in Malaysia's political process.¹⁵

The exercise of political power is further complicated by the fact that its attainment is not entirely accounted for by numerical superiority. Malay political power was also rooted in a system that provided greater political weight to rural constituencies (where the majority of Malays traditionally resided) over urban ones. In part, the ruling party's calculations of the possible effects of its intensified struggle for the Malay vote on the non-Malay communities and how this translated into electoral support must be understood within the context of unequal representation and gerrymandering in order to amplify Malay political power. In particular, new constituency delimitations considerably increased the principle of rural over-representation, while some non-Malay constituencies held up to three times the population of the smallest Malay majority constituency. In 1969, Malays constituted 60 per cent of federal constituencies but by 1984, this had grown to 74 per cent.¹⁶

In defining Malay identity, Islam is critical not only to Malay politics but also to Malay exclusivity within an ethnically divided society. However, the maintenance of communal harmony within the context of ethnic divisions is both threatened by and dependent upon the political system. The reality of a multi-ethnic context has meant that the role of Islam must be measured, to some extent, against the maintenance of the ethnic balance—which UMNO or any Malay political entity vying for leadership of Malaysian political society must ensure.

Thus the ethnic equation has continued to serve as the predominant factor shaping political alignments, determining the structure and role of institutions and defining the basic priorities in public policy in Malaysia. It has also affected the political development of Islam and served as an obstacle to the evolution of a more universal identity for that religion within Malaysian society.

It is thus necessary to situate religious identity and politics within its widest context, bearing in mind that the State, political parties, indeed all social entities and movements—even those which are more distinctly non-Muslim—are part of

any debate on the role of Islam in Malaysian society whether directly or otherwise. This debate is part of a dialogic process of politics, which consists of the interplay between all social and political variables in the Malaysian context. Ultimately, although religious politics has been directed to a large extent by the machinations of intra-Malay rivalry, it has had an important bearing on Muslim/non-Muslim relations. All actors in Malaysian religious politics have consistently been made aware of this.

Islam in the Constitution

While ensuring secular impartiality to all Malaysian citizens, the Malayan/Malaysian Constitution has added great weight to the ethnic basis of politics, entrenching Islam in Malay identity, as well as the special position of Malays within the country. Issues of religion were highly significant to Constitutional negotiations, in particular over the propriety of identifying Islam as the Federation's official religion.¹⁷ In the event, its establishment as the state religion was deemed necessary to the definition of Malay identity and towards enshrining Malay prerogative. Even so, some Muslim opposition, such as that of PAS, to the secular spirit of the Constitution was founded on its denial of the development of the religion in Malaysia and as such necessitated the party's persistent struggle for an Islamic state.

In defining Islam as the established religion of the State, the Constitution also safeguards the freedom of religious expression. Proselytization among Muslim peoples is forbidden but this does not apply in reverse, thus legitimating the promotion of Islam amongst non-Malays (the Constitution of Malaya, 1957, Art. 3, Clause (1)). On the other hand, the recommendation to officially recognize Islam was claimed not to have the intent of negating the establishment of the Federation as a secular state (Art. 3).¹⁸

Important provisions were also made for retaining the practice of each Sultan as the head of the Muslim religion in individual states (Art. 3, Clause (2)) (a qualification lobbied for by the rulers). However, the division between state and federal prerogative in Islamic affairs was never made explicit; neither was the extent to which Islam belonged in national political institutions, thus magnifying issues of authority and legitimacy in terms of religion. This has proved particularly pertinent to the position and role of Islam within the contemporary Malaysian political system where the relationship between state and centre (federal government) has been fraught with tension.

More importantly, the Constitution also guarantees the "special position" of the Malays, and in granting them certain special rights and privileges defines a Malay as one who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom (Art. 160, Clause (2)). Malay special rights are therefore recognized through the Constitution as bearing a religious qualification, further reinforcing not only the synonymity of Islam with Malay culture but also the special needs of the Malays and therefore of the Muslim community.

All told, the Constitution, in legitimating Malay prerogative through Islam, indirectly but inevitably sanctioned the place of religion in the main arena of politics. The so-called “innocuous” provision for Islam, as it stands in the Constitution, has left unresolved the precise role of religion in the contemporary state. Indeed, the conclusion that Malaysia lies somewhere between the character of a secular state and a theocracy, in legal terms at least, has contributed to confusion and unease among the Malaysian public, not to mention the institutional pressure that it has placed on the Government, in contemporary times, towards resolving this ambivalence.¹⁹

The concept of protection

The thread of continuity between these various facets of Malay and Malaysian political culture is enshrined in the concept of “protection” which continues to mediate the political elites’ operating philosophies. Ultimately Islam, as one symbol of Malay identity, has been incorporated into this concept and inevitably the “protection of Islam” has often, though not always, been conveniently substituted in political rhetoric for “protection of the Malays”.²⁰

In traditional Malay society, the Sultan had fulfilled the function of protector of his subjects whose absolute loyalty was extended in return. Malay nationalism gradually replaced the monarchs as a more substantive protector underlined by the context of tremendous Malay insecurity against the threat of non-Malay encroachment.²¹

The fundamental basis of UMNO’s role as protector is in fact enshrined in the party’s constitution (Art. 4) and made evident by its willingness in the past to repudiate leaders who attempted to breach its ethnic exclusivity.²² The emergence of political parties catering to the other ethnic communities, the introduction of electoral competition and general preparations for independence all helped to reinforce the concept of protection as a political fact, its continuing validity as a governing concept perhaps explained precisely by Malaysia’s ethnic complexity.²³

As a vital part of Malay identity, religion was also crucial to the concept of protection and the injection of Islam into anti-UMNO politics in the 1950s found resonance among the Malay community—an arena UMNO could not afford to neglect despite the Party’s basically secular nature, at the time.²⁴

The divergent demands of a multi-ethnic context and the maintenance of Malay supremacy has in fact led to UMNO’s somewhat schizophrenic existence. Its role as protector of the Malay community (instrument of its unity and promoter of its interests) has to be balanced against its leadership of the ruling coalition and its role as *de facto* national party, mindful of all ethnic interests in the country. In the absence of other integrative institutions (and considering that communal politics is usually a zero-sum game) UMNO leadership has been required to perform a constant balancing act in fulfilling these dual functions.²⁵

In fact, protection has remained crucial to the political process in Malaysia affecting all levels of national, inter-party and intra-party conflict, controversy

and debate. This has also indicated the increasing centrality of Malay politics in determining Malaysian politics and society. This is reflected in the fact that electoral success or failure for Malay political elites is considered most crucial, if not most dynamic in the Malay dominant states of the federal system, i.e. Peninsular Malaysia.

Islam, in defining Malay identity, enshrined in the Constitution, is therefore also inextricably bound to the concept of protection of the Malay community. Its resonance as a political concept has, over time, also enabled the object of protection to underwrite the State's promotion of Islam in Malaysia. It has also remained an important component of the relationship between Malay nationalism and Islam.

Even as more recent attempts have been made by national leadership at discounting the culture of protection in politics (including allowing for the membership of other indigenes and non-Malay Muslims within the party in more recent years) and in processes of social and economic development, it has demonstrated a remarkable tenacity in Malaysian political culture.

ISLAM IN MALAY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Islam and politics 1957–1969

The ideal of Islam's unifying potential within the Malay community has been perpetuated in ethnic politics even as conflict and dissension have continued over its role within that community. UMNO's primacy in Malay politics in the immediate post-war years did not liquidate significant support for an alternative—PAS. Whereas challenge from other Malay political interests proved surmountable, UMNO-PAS rivalry was marked by a fundamental difference in ideology and policy issues pertaining to the Malay community and importantly, in the multi-ethnic context, which party afforded better protection for the Malays.²⁶

UMNO's political objectives, among which were "the excellence of the religion of Islam and to propagate the same", had been outlined in its first Constitution adopted in 1949. Through the Alliance government, however, this entailed attention to building an Islamic infrastructure—mosques, education, conferences—even as the viability of an Islamic state was considered impractical. This possibly represented a bias of a predominantly Western-educated elite committed to the traditions of a secular state while underlining the imperatives of Malay socio-economic development through wider interpretations of Islam.²⁷

Indeed, although religious authority was actively recruited and by 1959 a substantive section of *ulama* were represented within the party, these were within basically secular political structures, and limits on further recruitment explained by UMNO's participation within the Alliance coalition.

PAS's initial leadership, after the first elections in 1955, stood in significant contrast, as its religious scholars and Malay nationalists mobilized Malay support through the employment of a religious idiom for the expression of

Malay interests and for the protection and preservation of Islam against “infidel” influence.²⁸

Religion did serve as a significant issue in most electoral campaigns up to 1969. Matters of state assistance towards the promotion of Islam and the necessity for vigilance against over-compromise in inter-communal relations were important, but more significantly, Islam was involved in controversy over how Malay identity should be preserved and protected.

External events also played an influential role in determining intra-Malay rivalry, particularly where it involved questions of a pan-Malay identity within the Southeast Asian region. They did so also in UMNO-PAS differences over what should, in effect, constitute the Malaysian state; namely, whether the inclusion of large non-Malay components such as Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak in the Federation concept of Malaysia would ensure the loss of Malay dominance.

Early UMNO—PAS rivalry was also, in part, a function of tensions within Federal-state relations. While Islamic matters, Malay culture and land were the jurisdiction of the state government, the vital functions of education, finance, defence and economic development remained federally administered. Thus the Federal government’s vast powers over state governments has found its authority in Islam extremely vulnerable when a state has been governed by an opposition party.²⁹ Although early campaigns for greater national co-ordination of Islamic affairs existed, UMNO had in fact insisted on the individual responsibility of the Sultans in their respective states. By 1969, however, increasing challenge from within the Party and from PAS convinced national leadership of the need to establish a National Council of Islamic Affairs within the Prime Minister’s Office.³⁰

Despite the fears of non-Muslim and non-Malay encroachment, religion remained a point of intra-Malay contention and religious appeals directed at political ends, while having the objective of unifying the community through its exclusive identity had the undesirable effect of further fragmenting it. In fact, UMNO’s symbolic attention to Islam over two decades allowed for the perception of Islam by non-Malays as simply an additional index of Malay identity—it did not yet affect them directly.³¹ The early period of Malay and inter-communal relations was also marked by a politics of ambiguity, particularly useful as electoral strategy. Subsequent tensions in the areas of social policy, however, increased over time, leading to growing support for UMNO’s and the Alliance’s competitors and by increased ethno-religious demands from within UMNO itself.

Serious inter-ethnic differences revolving around issues of language, education and economic opportunity did, however, overshadow Malay differences at this point as inequalities arising from the developmental process were compounded and made more delicate by the inescapable fact that poverty and economic inequality coincided with racial or ethnic demarcations in Malaysian society. Indeed, political dominance had ensured neither economic advancement nor social improvement for a large majority of Malays. Prior to 1969, the Malaysian economy was founded on a relatively free capitalist basis emphasising growth through trade, commerce and

foreign investment. Malays were protected by quotas and reservations as outlined in Article 153 of the Constitution but the majority of Malays remained rurally based and engaged in traditional occupations. Glaring economic disparities continued between Malays and non-Malays (particularly the Chinese) in terms of urban and rural commerce, ownership and share capital and in the general distribution of income, all of which ultimately lent support to the official interpretation of ethnic motivation in the 1969 riots.³²

Agitation over UMNO's limited success in meeting its "protector" functions, initiated from within the party by younger members constituting the "new guard" (*pimpinan baru*) against elite leadership, were representative of intensified Malay nationalist demands and of Malay frustration at what was perceived to be the neglect of Malay problems. Although lack of attention to Islam was not specifically part of their grievances, these demands inevitably accorded greater attention to Islam as a symbol of that identity. Subsequently, UMNO's incremental attention to the religion served as a response to external and internal agitation, for a more Muslim character, particularly at the level of state and regional politics.

Outside of intra and inter-party rivalry, student politics, the active organization, numbers and sophistication of which had swelled in the 1960s, was another platform for the articulation of dissent from government policy on issues of Malay economic and social backwardness and of the non-implementation of Malay as the national language.³³

The intensely communal general election campaign of 1969 heightened the polarization between the Malay and non-Malay communities and was to take its toll in the racial riots of that year. The Government response was to suspend Parliament and institute a period of emergency rule which was to provide primarily for a reassessment by Malay political leaders of the future political development of the country and for the subsequent restructuring of government.

Post 1969 structural change

The major changes to the conduct of politics through the watershed of 13 May 1969 served to highlight the quest for a Malay identity even as they continued to accentuate tensions between and within racial and religious communities. The politics of the previous years contributed in one way or another, but the most immediate catalyst of serious ethnic rioting in Kuala Lumpur was the dramatic results of the 1969 General Elections when the Alliance coalition lost its two-thirds majority in Parliament and the Opposition parties, most significantly PAS and the Democratic Action Party (DAP), made substantial gains. Radical changes were instituted in government policy and priorities as a response, many of which were to gradually alter the structures of Malaysian political society and, more importantly, to further stimulate processes of Islamic revivalism which have continued to the present.

Even as the concepts of communal incorporation and representation were widened within the new political framework of the Barisan Nasional (BN),

directed towards national unity through the achievement of new economic and social goals, a fundamental shift to greater Malay predominance and orientation within the Malaysian political system was unmistakable. Political restructuring was also directed at entrenching UMNO's standing, stymieing the erosion of popular support and implicitly the stability of the political regime it headed.

UMNO's efforts were therefore directed at Malay unity, clear confirmation of Malay political power, predominance and reaffirmation of a Malay identity for the country. Younger leadership, representative of the ascendant nationalist critique within UMNO, helped articulate this new direction. In as much as the term *Bumiputera* (and its attendant philosophy in stressing Malay prerogative as indigenes) had been supported since UMNO's birth, restructuring after 1969 ensured its institution as a norm in national politics. This was accompanied by a new national ideology, the *Rukunegara*—based on the principles of belief in God, loyalty to King and country, defending the Constitution and rule of law, good behaviour and morality.

A qualified pro-Malay emphasis—continued recognition that greater dominance also entailed the protection of non-Malay interests—rested on the assumption that UMNO would always be the ruling party, constitutionally recognized by the fact that all government policies should henceforth be initiated or approved by the UMNO Supreme Council.³⁴

Most significantly, greater attention was paid to the mediation of Malay identity through Islam, even as this continued to refer to some extent to traditional Malay culture. A National Cultural Congress held in 1971 set such guidelines through proposals that a Malaysian culture would also rely on the bases of the culture of its “natural inhabitants” (i.e. the Malays) including Islam and other “appropriate” elements. The Congress was also important for its recommendations for the provision of a suitable context for the spread of Islamic moral values, the wide teaching of the religion's significance in founding the modern era in Malaysia and the unification of Islamic and civil law under a basically Islamic structure.³⁵

Henceforth, communal harmony was envisioned as being protected by the constitutional proscription (the 1972 Sedition Amendments) of any public discussion of issues deemed too sensitive—including the special position of the Malays, the rights of the other ethnic communities and the position of the Sultans. Major changes in language and education policies were intended to raise dramatically the proportion of Malay representation at tertiary and professional levels while efforts were made to reform Islamic education, which was to be a compulsory topic for Muslim students at some universities.³⁶

The greater attention to Islamic affairs worked partly as a response to the challenge from PAS but partly also as recognition of competition from student movements in the political expression of Islam and, more importantly, in the context of a global reassertion of the religion. The semblance of greater Malay unity was in fact obtained through PAS's incorporation within the BN coalition party, further enhancing the new Government's affirmation of its commitment to Islam as central to national development. PAS's own General Assembly in 1971

had reflected its greater preparedness for “the reality of Malaysia” as wide-ranging changes to party ideology underlined its goal of uniting the *umma* “regardless of party affiliation or race”.³⁷

Significant to the coalition agreement was the recognition that Islamic values would be propagated without restriction. In fact, PAS continued to champion the creation of an Islamic state, the implementation of Islamic laws, the establishment of an Islamic university and the complete overhaul of the political, economic and educational system to reflect Islamic rules and values, throughout its tenure within the BN coalition, managing to extract concessions amounting to a recognition of its specifically Islamic role in the coalition government; PAS representatives in the Government and the Legislature were guaranteed the freedom to question any initiative or Bill on the grounds that they contravened the teachings of Islam.³⁸

Yet intra-Malay rivalry did not really abate. The political realities of two Malay-Muslim parties continuing to vie for the same basis of support (even within a coalition) in fact magnified tensions between the two, aggravated by the absence of grassroots support for PAS within the BN. Strains then continued to build over ideology and insecurities over UMNO’s commitment to PAS political representation at state and national levels, all of which were to eventually climax in a crisis in Kelantan in 1977 when a protracted struggle over state control by either party resulted in the Federal declaration of an emergency, and eventual takeover of the state that signalled PAS’s exit from the BN. Despite these setbacks, the five years spent within the Government had provided the party, to some extent, with nation-wide respectability and was to greatly lend confidence in waging more intense political competition outside traditional strongholds.³⁹

Although the PAS challenge was not initially substantially electoral, its *raison d’être* proved a symbolic enough one to UMNO. Over time, however, evidence of the growing support for PAS from the constituencies of the greatest relevance to Malay politics was demonstrated by a significant and growing shift by many Malays in the rural heartlands and regions in favour of PAS. The Party had in fact gained a 20 per cent increase in its share of the total vote through four General Elections, from 1955 to 1969. The obvious potential for a dramatic jump in these figures in constituencies with absolute Malay majorities underlined the serious challenge that PAS posed to UMNO in terms of the Malay vote—by 1978, it had obtained approximately 40 per cent of that vote in Peninsular Malaysia.⁴⁰

Structural changes were also induced by the New Economic Policy (NEP), supporting official opinion that national unity was only possible through the alleviation of Malay economic problems requiring their greater protection and that this was linked to national survival in “harmony”.⁴¹ It essentially sought to restructure society by removing the identification of race (or ethnicity) with economic function within a target of twenty years and to eradicate poverty. The NEP aimed for *Bumiputera* management and ownership, at a projected 30 per cent of Malaysia’s total corporate wealth, and sought for employment patterns at all levels and sectors, rural and urban, to reflect the racial composition of the

population.⁴² Such socio-economic redistribution was primarily to be facilitated by direct government intervention and investment in the economy.

The significance of post-1969 restructuring was that it placed urgent pressures on the attainment of development objectives, in particular *Malay* economic development, nullifying to some extent the informal exchange between Chinese economic power and Malay political and administrative strength which had sustained the consociationalist political system thus far. Henceforth, continuing economic prosperity was indispensable to racial accommodation and the expansion of basic resources an obvious prerequisite to expanding the “national pie” and increasing national wealth. Foreign investment was considered vital for such expansion.

While PAS articulated opposition to the NEP, in principle criticism from other quarters focused on its implementation; the relative success of the redistribution of wealth and resources on an inter-ethnic basis against the emerging gulf in intra-ethnic terms, as well as the continued high incidence of poverty in spite of or due to the NEP. However, criticism of the Policy held political limitations. The increasing equation of the NEP with UMNO (and therefore the economic and political fate of the Malays) meant that its protection, continued promotion or even existence, were perceived as unquestionable facts, as political survival (for all ethnic communities) was frequently determined by support for the NEP.

Politics was also determined by complementary changes in the machinery of government. As Gordon Means points out, policy changes introduced after 1969 accelerated the Malaysianization of the government apparatus (already a post-independence policy), enabling the rapid development of a largely Malay bureaucracy (recruitment and promotion preferences with Malay preponderance even more apparent at the higher administrative and policy-making levels). The growth in its scale and importance in planning and policy initiatives helped the bureaucracy function as another bastion of Malay dominance, inevitably intertwining with politics as it became exceedingly important for political elites to gain access to the bureaucratic structures of decision making.⁴³ This was ultimately also to underline the congruence of political and bureaucratic support for a greater Islamic orientation in public policy.

Islamic revivalism as political challenge

Although structural change had the temporary effect of neutralizing formal Malay opposition, fundamental social and political opposition was hardly eliminated as Islamic revivalism and the social movements that it engendered were to provide UMNO with an even greater challenge to the mantle of protector.

While Islam’s principal political manifestation in the preceding two decades was as a source of cleavage within the Malay community, by the 1970s its socio-political force and agenda had extended its role beyond the parameters of the party system. Religious resurgence in Malaysia in this period was clearly an integral part of the global resurgence that Muslims themselves had prophesied

for Islam. The fifteenth century, by the Muslim calendar (beginning 22 November 1979), was to herald a new golden age for Islam and an expansion of the faith, some reading the Iranian revolution in 1979 as one indication of this imminent glory. While the international context did hold important repercussions on domestic developments, the Islamic revival in Malaysia was also rooted within its own domestic circumstances, which shaped the development and attitude of religious revivalist currents referred to as *dakwah*.

Dakwah is a generic term that describes multi-functional realities. Reflective of a global phenomenon in the growth of Islamic activism, its primary emphasis has remained that of the promotion of Islam through missionary effort but with the contemporary qualification of socio-political activity (and movements) aimed at creating “better Muslims”, by raising the level of Islamic consciousness in everyday life reflected particularly in religious and ritual observance. Although political *dakwah* in Malaysia has emphasized both, it would appear that the intellectual foundations of the phenomenon were more slowly entrenched than the ritual.⁴⁴ As a constituent of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia, its character has been distinguished by its heterogeneity of form and purpose.

Accelerated structural and social changes through the NEP provided the background against which such developments emerged. Significant changes in social demography, the massive rural-urban shift and increased opportunities in the tertiary sector were all to mark significant changes for Malay society and therefore Malay politics, and in many ways provided a direct link to the resurgence. The brief UMNO-PAS coalition had also created a political vacuum of a kind. While proclaiming an aversion to party politics, many within the *dakwah* movement seized the opportunity for political expression in activities which were not overtly so but were carried out in the name of religion.⁴⁵

Although student politics had initially reflected the concerns of Malay ethnic nationalism, its conduct displayed a greater Islamic orientation by 1973, occasioned by the influence of the cultural and intellectual phenomenon of *dakwah*.⁴⁶ In the decade of the seventies, most associational activities linked with it were on university campuses, and many transformed student politics into “struggle” through an Islamic idiom.

The *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) or Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, launched in 1971 as an “organizational platform for Muslim graduates to play a legitimate role in building a society based on Islam”, was probably the most successful of these revivalist movements, reflected in its claim to a membership of 40,000 at its peak (between 1978 and 1982). Indeed, throughout the 1970s, under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, it was the most articulate and successful critic on all manner of government and public policy, lobbying against corruption, abuse of power, economic injustice and the failings of the education system, proposing instead Islam (in its pristine form) as an economic, political and social blueprint for Malaysian society. While the establishment of *Sharia* law within an Islamic state in Malaysia was an articulated goal, this was also perceived as being a viable solution to structural Malay disadvantage as well as to communalism.⁴⁷

Other major revivalist organizations such as *Darul Arqam* and the *Jemaat Tabligh* while sharing similar objectives, proposed different methods for their achievement. Their essentially non-political character indicated their lesser threat to the status quo, at least in the short term. Their attitude of religious quietism, however, also indicated withdrawal from the prevailing Malaysian socio-political system which in the long run was to prove as threatening to the government. *Perkim* (Malaysian Muslim Welfare Organisation), a more officially state patronized organization, was also involved in *dakwah* work, but at its own insistence remained entirely apolitical and thus peripheral to subsequent political developments.⁴⁸

More radical aims were offered by other revivalist movements, in particular among the Malaysian student population abroad, such as *Suara Islam* (The Voice of Islam) and the Islamic Representative Council (IRC) who more clearly registered grievances against the Government, denouncing UMNO leadership as infidels, envisaging ideological struggle towards the establishment of an Islamic state, and dismissing the moderation and ambiguity of groups like ABIM.⁴⁹

Dakwah activities and discourse frequently focused on theological debate over issues of Islamic justice, the Islamic state and the qualities of political leadership—sufficiently then constituting political discourse. Debate over the viability of an Islamic economy inevitably called into question official plans for modernization and development of the Malays, primarily through the NEP, rejected or denounced because of its basis of race rather than justice in the apportionment of economic aid. In lamenting the Malaysian economy's overdependence upon the international capitalist system, ABIM had also been critical of modernization processes and Western-oriented development as causes of chaos that plagued Muslim countries like Malaysia.⁵⁰

The greatest relevancy of the phenomenon of *dakwah* has been in its longer term effects on orienting Islamic consciousness towards the articulation of and search for social justice, however broadly defined. To some extent this meant that *dakwah* held a less obvious political agenda in the Malaysian context, at least for a time, but its tenure and popularity have also allowed for its long-term and wider influence. However, as social entities given to politics, whether directly or indirectly, Islamic movements have not been formed by social processes elsewhere but are shaped through the political process in which they engage, they are not independent of their context, but organic to it.⁵¹ In the Malaysian context, *dakwah* was inevitably harnessed to mainstream political processes and debate, even as some organizations remained apolitical, more concerned with individual conversion and the promotion of a more purely social agenda. In general then, as Islamic social theories informed these *dakwah* movements and were debated among them, this held far-reaching implications for the very nature and structure of Malaysian society, including necessarily the authority of the powers-that-be (an UMNO dominated government) and of the place of Islam in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society.

Challenge from *dakwah* movements also lay in structural features—their constituents tended to comprise that pool of highly educated Malay political

talent that the State might look to for its future leaders and that UMNO might eventually draw from. More precisely, in addressing Malaysia's Muslim and therefore Malay audience, their discourse implicitly challenged UMNO's role as protector of Malay interests, even as it reshaped the agenda of socio-economic discourse. The location of the main themes of such religious revivalism in the context of intra-Malay rivalry in the political domain set the scene for the Malaysian government's attempts to meet such a new challenge to its authority.⁵² Islamic revivalism even while it aided in the articulation of grievances was also constituent to the growth of a modern Malay middle class in Malaysian society. To some extent then, the discourse engendered by *dakwah* groups centred on the search for identity within "new" social contexts which invariably if indirectly attached itself to some ethnic referent, although this varied between movements. ABIM, for instance, was critical of Malay politics in its narrowness of vision and for its ethnic chauvinism in the promotion of Malay nationalism.

The popularity and influence of these *dakwah* movements continues in contemporary times. Indeed, the importance and significance of *dakwah* in general, and of organized Islamic movements outside of the electoral process, is that their heterogeneity, dynamism and perpetuity have helped shape and maintain a generalized "Islamic" consciousness (even if they remain primarily within urban confines) and they are thus continuously contributing towards the evolution of both political and social attitudes. To a great extent then, the full impact of Islamic resurgence will need to be assessed from a longer term perspective.

Party initiatives were hard to distinguish from those of the Government through national policy in the general political response to Islamic revivalism. Reacting to its fallibility, both as a party dedicated to the implicit "protection" of Muslims and as the (*de facto*) Government of a country where Islam was the constitutionally defined state religion, its initiatives at both levels as concerns matters of Islam have become increasingly interchangeable. From about the mid-seventies, UMNO and the Government initiated the sponsorship of their own version of *dakwah*, simultaneously condemning and co-opting the forces of Islamic revivalism towards their vision of Malaysian development.

A vast expansion of the Federal religious bureaucracy was projected, in part as a response to state prerogative in Islamic affairs. In 1974, the *Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah* (Islamic Missionary Foundation) was created directly out of the Prime Minister's Office. The National Fatwa Council, established in 1978 to co-ordinate state religious council activities, also held the power to issue rulings on any religious matter affecting Muslims.⁵³ The influence of Islamic revivalist discourse was to lead the Government towards a re-emphasis of its national development goals as relying on the twin tracks of material and spiritual endeavour.⁵⁴ On the coercive front, a litany of legislation was introduced that could be used against associational activity concerned with Islam. *Dakwah songsang* (false *dakwah*), projected as a serious threat to communal harmony through "extremist" and "deviationist" practices, was proscribed. While elements of fanaticism did exist and a number of acts of religious desecration gained national media attention,

these coercive measures could be and often were, also used against those with more legitimate grievances. In 1981, the Societies Act Amendment Bill was introduced, aimed primarily at restricting a new category of political association (it was therefore seen as being largely aimed at ABIM).⁵⁵

Dakwah did also help renew the vigour of Islam as an issue in electoral politics. As the original architect of an Islamic vision for Malaysia, PAS was to benefit directly and greatly from the popularity of *dakwah*. Its religious identity and its participation within the national Islamic bureaucracy from 1973 to 1977 positioned it ideally to direct the political energies of the Islamic revival and to address the question of the place of Islam in society. Its “anti-secular” image and view of Islam as *ad-deen* (complete way of life), echoed many of the central themes if not the spirit of *dakwah*.⁵⁶

Despite UMNO’s superior party machinery, the termination of its alliance with PAS renewed a fundamental challenge to its legitimacy. In order to avoid the emergence of further Malay challenge, UMNO exerted great efforts to project itself as a guardian of the religion. Islam was recognized in particular as a bulwark against other competitive (and more radical) ideologies among the Malays, in particular Communism and Socialism. Increasingly, UMNO General Assemblies were occasions for reaffirming the party’s commitment to Islam while proclaiming its moderate nature, although party members were advised to be vigilant against competition to appear more Islamic than others because it was a responsible party.

Political rivalry through Islam was significantly revived by a tacit alliance between ABIM and PAS in the 1978 General Election, following its exit from the BN coalition. Their ideological affinity was further cemented in 1980 in their combined efforts in facilitating peasant demonstrations against controlled rice prices and hunger in Kedah, which proved highly embarrassing to the Government and to UMNO.⁵⁷

PAS was itself revitalized by the influx of new, younger members between 1978 and 1982, with more advanced educational qualifications (beneficiaries of expanded educational opportunities under the NEP), frequently of a technical nature but also those more learned in the religious field. Despite the party’s overall failure in the 1978 General Elections, it still managed to secure more than one-third of the total Malay votes cast. Indeed, PAS had adopted a new strategy of expanding its support base in the north of the Peninsula, particularly in Trengganu and Kedah, which was to provide the consummate challenge to UMNO. By 1980, UMNO was increasingly alarmed by the narrower margin obtained between BN victors and PAS candidates and by record increases in votes polled for PAS in a series of by-elections.⁵⁸

Its perceived vulnerability over such developments was reflected in growing calls from within UMNO itself for the proscription of both PAS and of the term “Islamic” from the names of political parties. ABIM’s activities were increasingly regulated, its supporters in government penalized and authorization for rural public activities increasingly limited. Although couched in new language, the propaganda war between PAS and UMNO continued (particularly for UMNO) to

focus on the basis of Malay support. Seizing upon a common theme of global Islamic resurgence, that of the unity of the *umma* (the community of believers), consistent challenge and persistent “slander” by PAS against the country’s leaders were deemed to be placing this goal even further out of reach. On the other hand, UMNO’s efforts and record of achievements in promoting Islam and particularly Islamic education were proclaimed concrete against PAS lip service towards the defence of Islam (despite its nineteen-year rule of Kelantan).⁵⁹

By the end of the decade, however, the State’s record of commitment to Islam and *dakwah* remained primarily symbolic. The Government appeared no closer to any serious meeting of Islamic revivalist demands and appeared committed to the perpetuation of the political process and the State in its traditional form. The change in national leadership in 1981, however, was to significantly alter and in turn was itself altered by the Islamic challenge in Malaysian society. While political rhetoric concerning Islam had been magnified in the 1970s, this represented a continuation of past trends. The 1980s were, however, to prove that responses to increasing demands would be forced to go beyond rhetoric.

State Islamization in the 1980s

The assumption of Dr Mahathir Mohammed to the office of Prime Minister in 1981 was to herald a dynamic new strategy for both domestic and foreign policy. A policy of Islamization was among a litany of new campaigns introduced, described as the Government’s intention to inject “Islamic” values into the administration and to generally promote the role of Islam in Malaysian society.⁶⁰ Any overt Islamization process, however, remained ambiguous if intangible and to some extent reflected the UMNO-led government’s dilemma; policy was persistently qualified as being more generally oriented towards inculcating upright and moral values compatible with the Government’s plans for governing *all* Malaysians.⁶¹

Unlike the symbolic concessions of previous decades, it was apparent that the new Administration had calculated the imperatives of an offensive strategy to counter its political vulnerability in the prevailing atmosphere. This meant out-flanking and isolating PAS while co-opting elements of *dakwah* where possible. The Administration scored a major political coup in 1982, with the surprisingly successful co-option of Anwar Ibrahim, the renowned and charismatic President of ABIM, into UMNO, which helped initiate the revitalization of Islam within the electoral process. After winning a parliamentary seat, Anwar was pointedly placed in high national religious office (as deputy minister in the Religious Affairs Section of the Prime Minister’s Office). His defection from ABIM was to lose the organization much of its credibility and energy for independent action, and by the end of the 1980s it emerged eventually as an officially acceptable pressure group, restricting its leverage and criticism of Government policies. While viewing the alteration to its role as the mature acceptance of Malaysian realities, ABIM has remained somewhat divided politically between PAS and UMNO, as have some of the other revivalist movements.⁶²

The 1980s were in fact to indicate the legacy of the institutionalization of Islam, particularly at the national and federal levels and were ultimately to lay the groundwork for Islam's intensified role in public life. Much of the Administration's programme of Islamization was aimed towards the defence and promotion of the religion as one suited to the established national goal of economic modernization. A series of institutional initiatives within the Islamization process were supportive of this strategy: the establishment of an Islamic Teachers Training College (1982); an International Islamic University (1983); an Islamic Bank (1984); an Islamic Development Foundation (1984); an Islamic Insurance Company (1985) as well as the increased incorporation of Islamic education within the secular school system.

The large-scale expansion of the religious bureaucracy as well as the increasing co-ordination and centralization of all Islamic initiatives under the Religious Affairs Department (*Jabatan Hal Ehwal Islam*) of the Prime Minister's Office also came to aid the Administration's role as chief architect and patron of religious development in Malaysia. The statistics themselves demonstrated the magnitude of importance that the Mahathir Administration perceived in instituting such control: when the Department was first established in 1968, it held a staff of 8; by 1987 this figure had grown to 608.⁶³ The bureaucratization of religious authority held another vital function: its integration with the "national" establishment also allowed for the control of increasing religious diversity perceived as a challenge to the Administration's authority.

The instilling of Islamic values in the country's economic and financial systems was also given some articulation by public statements of the Government's intentions towards their eventual replacement of the current "Western-based economic system". Both the Third (1976–1981) and Fourth (1981–1986) Malaysia Plans declared an (even if only) inspirational role for Islam in Malaysian development. In 1989, Anwar Ibrahim (as Education Minister), announced the establishment of a special committee to study proposals and resolutions submitted by the Second Congress of Malay Intellectuals, implying their eventual implementation or use as bench-marks for future UMNO national policy. Included was a recommendation that nationalism be maintained as the basis of the Malay struggle, but that Islam be recognized as a dynamic complementary and catalyst factor in development.⁶⁴ Although *Shariah* law and Islamic courts had continually shared jurisdiction over Muslim lives with civil law, their loci of power was increasingly intensified against the context of Islamization. Everyday Muslim life was increasingly regulated by Islamic jurisdiction (if not government recommendation) in such matters as fasting (during the month of Ramadan), through the payment of *zakat* (the giving of alms) and other religious tithes and through prohibitions on activities such as alcohol consumption, gambling and smoking.⁶⁵

Changes in the leadership and membership of both UMNO and PAS added another dimension to the political centrality of Islam. PAS had itself been able to draw directly from *dakwah* leadership both at home and abroad. By 1982, a newly ascended party leadership dedicated to the promotion of a more pristine

version of Islam, argued that until Malaysia possessed an Islamic Constitution and was governed by the Shariah, no Islamic status could be claimed for the country. PAS support continued to be centred in largely Malay rural areas and its leadership drawn extensively from the ranks of religious specialists.

The ideological distance between UMNO and PAS was redefined by such changes. By surrendering its original Malay-Muslim-nationalist identity, PAS campaigns were more successful at discrediting the secular state and in advocating the reform of Malaysia's Muslim community as the basis for its transformation into an Islamic country. The contest of Malay nationalism, in particular, because of its focus on Malay ethnicity, was now labelled as chauvinistic and unacceptable to Islam. Ideological divergence was also reflected in PAS's restructured form and methods, recognized in its constitution first through the prerogative of the *ulama* to lead, and second through the consultative and collective nature of decision making articulated through the *Majlis Shura Ulama*. The renewed strength of the *ulama* has in fact resurfaced serious debate within Malay-Muslim society over the issue and propriety of secular over religious authority in the government of Muslim society.⁶⁶

Indeed, the continuing issue of resurgent Islam can be located in the implicit moral challenge it has posed, thus far, to secular plans for Malay modernization and development. The Mahathir administration entered office on the promise of "clean, trustworthy and efficient" government implicitly acknowledging the serious abuses and corruption that Malay politics and national administrations had thus far been subject to despite the intentions of the NEP. Yet the Government's failure to alleviate poverty for a significant proportion of its Malay constituency also fuelled the potency of Islam as a symbol of disenchantment with secular practices.

Material achievement, because it has been unevenly distributed within the Malay community and because it has been accompanied by corruption and major financial scandals involving huge losses of public funds, had also fuelled the strength of Islamic protest and dissent. Using moral categories to depict its fight against UMNO while harnessing *dakwah* themes such as equality, justice and fairness, PAS continued to attract that significant section of the Malay population that had yet to benefit from the NEP, amid continuing reports of decadence and wastage of resources by government officials and Malay (largely UMNO) politicians.⁶⁷

While it is true to some extent that manifestations of Islamic revivalism in fact seemed to indicate heightened levels of "religiosity" rather than fundamental or substantial reorientations in religious ideas and that religious politics ultimately still revolved around a politics of identity in the Malaysian context, it is necessary to take into account the substantial structural changes to both Malay and Malaysian politics (and thus political culture) that were, at least partly, introduced by the Mahathir Administration and which were ultimately to have far longer term effects on influencing religious thought and behaviour.

State prerogative in the matter of Islam over and above federal control also provided grounds for the manifestation of political rivalries through attempts to

prove which state was more Islamic. This has also involved the dimension of UMNO-PAS rivalry at state level, and increasing struggle between the Federal government and traditional Malay authority as symbolized by the individual Malay Sultans. Although every state government and *Menteri Besar* (Chief Minister) are theoretically answerable to such authority, they also represent the interests of (and are therefore also answerable to) ruling party leadership in Kuala Lumpur. This potential for divergence from central authority was reflected in a 1981 UMNO General Assembly resolution requiring action from both federal and state Islamic councils to enforce “the purity of Islam”.⁶⁸

Politically, the 1980s were also marked by increasingly bitter dispute between UMNO and PAS in mutual slander and accusation over which party represented the infidel (*kafir*) and which held practices and beliefs that were “deviant” (both bearing grave implications in Islamic terms) as political struggle increasingly centred around the presentation of oneself as the more authentic Muslim. Indeed, the centrality of Islam to the Malay political process has also been suggested by the fact that all Malay parties have increasingly found it incumbent to establish their Islamic credentials in combination with, or over, their prevailing ideologies.⁶⁹

Although UMNO and the Government have had some success in depicting and isolating PAS as extremists—even as “deviationists”—the party’s socially oriented interpretations of Islam’s contemporary relevance to Malaysian society and its greater universalistic approach placed UMNO on the defensive. In the 1986 General Elections, religion was only the second principle of the BN manifesto, promising to “guarantee” the position of Islam and prioritize Islamic education in order to make it “a way of life”, even while affirming the protection of religious freedom “as enshrined in the Constitution”. The depth of challenge that UMNO continued to perceive from PAS was perhaps best reflected in the observation by a Government Minister that PAS had been more successful than the Communists in dividing the Malays.⁷⁰

In fact, intra-Malay division was also spawned by the growing problem of factionalism within UMNO. This had already been apparent from the mid-seventies and was partly explained by the continuing uneasy marriage of disparate political ideologies in the expression of Malay nationalism. The depth of this factionalism was most significantly revealed in the watershed split in UMNO in 1987—following an unsuccessful but controversially close bid for Party leadership by a faction led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Musa Hitam, then Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister respectively. It was partly precipitated by the entry of Islamists within the Party who were increasingly favoured by top political leadership in their appointment to important portfolios, and by dissension within the Party over the appropriate degree of attention to Islam.

Political crises and change were induced by the Supreme Court declaration of UMNO as an illegal party which was followed by acrimonious battle in the courts between UMNO factions to establish political legitimacy as well as to determine ownership of party resources. UMNO’s re-registration as a new party

(UMNO Baru) and the subsequent challenge it faced from dissenting elements that formed themselves into a significant new political party (*Semangat '46*—therefore recalling UMNO's original nationalist struggle) and their coalition with three other Islamic parties, PAS, *Berjasa* and *Hamim* into the *Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah*—APU—(Movement for the Unity of The Community of Believers) comprised a series of events that suggested to some extent a new realignment in Malay politics between the variants of Malay nationalism (*bangsa*), Islam and support for the monarchy (*kerajaan*), even as they were motivated by personal rivalry and patronage issues. Its initial dissension, while fundamentally based on differences in leadership style (and personal rivalry) rather than ideology, were strategically and increasingly articulated through religious and moral idioms.

Despite the overall failure of the Opposition in the 1990 General Elections, its serious emasculation (through large scale defection to UMNO) and being practically bereft of patronage sources, (so vital to party politics) by the mid-1990s, *Semangat '46* continued to appear as an important obstacle, if not a serious threat to UMNO in the object of unanimous Malay support. The value of religious idiom continued to be represented in the discourse of political elites. Tengku Razaleigh, then President of the party, rationalized injustices spawned by UMNO's political action and economic policy as *kemungkaran* ("evil" actions that amount to religious denial of duty or disavowal). The Party's subsequent coalition with PAS in the state of Kelantan, suggested both parties' acknowledgement of the crucial political value of the Malay-Muslim nationalist platform within prevailing circumstances. UMNO Baru (now simply referred to as UMNO) was also persistently engaged, for its part, in improving its Islamic image although tension and ambiguity over the predominance of its nationalist character have remained within the Party.⁷¹

Significant change had also occurred in terms of the structural character of UMNO. Amid the "traditional" ideological divisions within the party between Islam and nationalism, a new corporate element had been gradually dominating the Party, representing professional and business interests (the rural representation at UMNO General Assemblies dropped by almost 30 per cent between 1981 and 1987). The increasing proliferation of a "new" concept of Malay ethnic nationalism—*Melayu Baru*—(referred to earlier) has been related to this structural change. The Party's present status as a major business enterprise has also heightened internal competition as control of UMNO now implies higher financial stakes—hence the advent and acceleration of "money politics". As such, intra-Malay rivalry has increasingly had as much to do with patronage as it has with ideology.

For many in the Malay community, Islam has the capacity to fill any political vacuum. Despite its stultified development due to its role in defining Malay identity and therefore its continued political ambiguity, it was also rapidly changing the relationship between *kerajaan* (Government or the traditional rulers) conceptions of the Malay polity and the *rakyat* (the people). UMNO's cause of protection predicated on loyalty was being increasingly challenged by

the equally formidable authority of Islam. For UMNO, this necessitated the co-option (if not coercion) of Islamic leaders and intensified its attempts at weaving these competing strands of Malay identity together in order to preside over some semblance of Malay unity.

Yet the competition to be more Islamic continued, in politics, to centre around the theme of protection. Indeed, the dynamics of intra-Malay rivalry is revealed in the fact that official policies of Islamization had proven primarily *ad hoc* in character rather than representing any as yet coherent long-term strategy. The impetus that the Islamic revival presented to both UMNO and PAS also presented a potential threat to the stability of the political system and to inter-ethnic relations.

Thus, while Islam has consistently played a role in modern Malaysian history, under the Mahathir administration this has been markedly different. By serious engagement in the regulation of Islamic developments within the country, the Administration in effect provided Islam greater political legitimacy, and in doing so considerably raised the stakes by inevitably involving the non-Muslim communities as well.

Islam and politics in a plural society

Religion in Malaysia has remained everywhere an index of ethnic identity. The centralization of Malay-Muslim rivalry in fact marginalized the field of multi-ethnic politics, although, this was also to be explained by serious internal differences within the non-Malay parties themselves.

At any rate, this served increasingly to divert the non-Malay communities from straight politics. Although Chinese politics has not remained completely docile in the face of greater pressures for Malay-Muslim dominance, periodic attempts at regaining Chinese rights have consistently met with UMNO pressure for the elimination of such radical interests from within the BN for fear of upsetting the balance achieved thus far. While non-Malay coalition partners within the BN necessarily muted their responses to Islamization, some opposition parties like the DAP seized the opportunity for presenting themselves as actively protecting non-Malay rights, campaigning upon the problem of religious Muslim extremism and the potential for further Malay imposition on non-Malays through religion and culture.

In 1983, a conference on National Unity and Ethnic Relations elicited strong emotions from non-Muslim participants over the perceived marginality of their position within the country. Fear and frustration were articulated over such issues as the acquisition of land for religious buildings and burial grounds and the increasing scope and implementation of *Shariah* law over non-Muslim lives and interests. The Malaysian Consultative Council on Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism formed in 1983, with the specific aim of combating the image of non-Muslim weakness due to the differences between them, deliberately excluded any Muslim organizations from participation.⁷² At an influential seminar on National Integration held in 1985, opinions and observations expressed by non-

Malay BN leaders indicated levels of polarization perceived even at elite levels and deep misgiving over widespread “bureaucratic racism” that had made non-Muslims feel “increasingly insecure”.⁷³

Islamic revivalism has, however, also been met by heightened cultural and religious revivalism within the non-Malay communities. Some studies on non-Muslim religious innovation and ethnic identity in Malaysia denote the arousal of non-Muslim sentiments as an aspect of the larger problem of ethnic identity formation, suggesting that many non-Malays retreat into diverse religious activities as convenient alternatives for ethnic expression.⁷⁴ Others suggest that it is also possible to read such heightened religious innovation as reflecting and generating new patterns of Muslim and non-Muslim “this-worldly” orientations towards either community.⁷⁵ Both arguments hold important implications for long-term social processes in determining the role and development of Islam and religion in general in Malaysian society. They also indicate the continued connection between Muslims and non-Muslims in defining and determining that role.

Even while working, for the most part, to confirm ethnic particularism the Islamic resurgence has also addressed itself to the pluralistic nature of Malaysian society. The Administration’s Islamization policy and the increasing centrality of the religion to Malay politics had engendered a debate over the legitimacy of the ideas of *Bumiputeraism* and Malay nationalism within an Islamic framework.

The PAS General Assemblies of 1981 and 1982 witnessed attempts by the party to eradicate its racial image by assuring Malaysians of the Party’s ability to “deliver the message of unity and prosperity for all”, opening its doors to all Muslims, irrespective of race and establishing programmes to inform non-Muslims of the party’s objectives.⁷⁶ Subscribing to a nonconformist view that Islam is supreme and cannot be made subordinate to narrow ethnic concepts such as nationalism (at any rate, perceived as a secular, Western idea), PAS’s own campaign against *assabiyah* (ethnic chauvinism) has also constituted an effort to recruit more non-Malays to its membership ranks.⁷⁷

Its sponsorship of a National Unity conference in 1985 aimed at addressing a multi-racial audience, proclaimed Islam as a universal religion that envisioned equality within its community and suggested the possibility for a pious Chinese or Indian Muslim to assume eventually the post of Prime Minister in Malaysia. Subsequent allegations of PAS dispensation with *Bumiputera* rights and privileges were it to come to power initiated extreme response from all Malay quarters (including UMNO and ABIM), accusing the party of treason, treachery and betrayal of the Malays.⁷⁸ These vehement reactions are perhaps best understood in the context of the imminent UMNO General Assembly at the end of the same month, where Dr Mahathir chose to sound a warning that UMNO’s willingness to co-operate with other ethnically based parties could not be taken for granted.⁷⁹

Although PAS attempted to mobilize Chinese electoral support and has been occasionally successful at arriving at co-operative electoral strategies with other Opposition parties to deter BN dominance, such as in the 1990 General Elections, there remains general fear that in spite of PAS claims, the

establishment of an Islamic state, would simply replace an ethnic dichotomy in Malaysia with a religious one. UMNO's successful depiction of potential PAS betrayal of Malay prerogative and its insistence that the objective of an Islamic state as, temporarily at least, non-negotiable, ultimately defeated its attempts at inter-communal co-operation.⁸⁰

In fact, as serious intra-Malay rivalry in the late 1980s was compounded, this also precipitated initiatives from PAS for the formation of an Islamic Front (*Barisan Islamiah*) composed of all the Malay-Muslim parties in Malaysia, in an effort to protect the interests of Islam. Indeed, the prospect of Malay (now often referred to as Islamic) unity in Malaysia, has traditionally served as a precursor to elections or as a foil to non-Malay disputes or demands.⁸¹ The 1990 elections demonstrated the political limits of even national leadership commitment to a balanced approach. At a point when *Semangat '46's* potential to wrest power from UMNO through a similar multi-ethnic coalition, (representing the first viable Opposition attempt to form an alternative government) was perceived as an imminent threat, Dr Mahathir employed brinkmanship strategy to discredit his major rival. *Semangat's* President, Tengku Razaleigh, was depicted as a betrayer of the Malay-Muslim cause because of his Party's coalition with the Christian Kadazan-dominated *Parti Bersatu Sabah* (PBS)—the implication being that only UMNO held the capacity to protect Malays, and therefore Muslims, against such threats.⁸²

Even while Government leadership has repeatedly asserted that non-Muslims have nothing to fear from further Islamization and their rights as constitutionally guaranteed, it is apparent that the concept and necessity of Malay exclusivity are often conveniently expressed in the Islamic idiom, whether intended or otherwise. Furthermore, non-Muslims have in fact been increasingly affected by legislation directed at issues of religious conversion, apostasy and Islamic reforms, even if indirectly—a product of heightened competition between states in the entrenchment of their Islamic identities as well as of the predominance and prerogative of state legislation in religious matter over that of Federal adjudication.⁸³

Another important aspect of contemporary problems in Malaysian politics, is that the myth of monolithic ethnic communities is rapidly disintegrating (the substantial presence of ideologically divergent parties within and across ethnic communities in Malaysia's thirty-eight years of independence in fact illustrates this). This has clearly been a product of structural change—the rapid economic development and modernization, in particular of the Malay community (through rural-urban migration and the rapid expansion of a Malay middle class via the NEP) has also accelerated changes in political attitudes. Such fundamental social alterations are perhaps occurring faster than the existing political structures can either understand or accommodate them.⁸⁴

The irony of the unitary depiction of Malay-Muslim identity is the disaggregation of its reality. Even as Malays claim a distinctly integrative role for Islam, the very concept of Malay-Muslim identity is being remoulded by divergent paths. The question is begged if in fact any alternative ideological

apparatus to Islam could or would effectively instill and sustain Malay unity. In as much as Islam continues to be linked to Malay identity and works primarily as an ethnic manifestation within the milieu of a multi-ethnic society, then the role of religion in political development has continued to be expressed through a politics of identity.

Clearly, its entrenchment in mainstream politics has made Islam a far less plausible solution to communalism. As political organization in Malaysia remains essentially communally bound, and politicians are ultimately divided by their ethnic origins, then Islam, as the prime component of one community's identity, has stood little chance of gaining a universal image. Furthermore, there remains to some extent at least, the vested interest of communal parties in the perpetuation of a system which has thus far enabled their continued political power. UMNO, with its essential ideology of protection of Malay interests and as the ultimate arbiter of conflicting interests in Malaysian society (as the ruling party), is corporal culprit and victim of this syndrome. In the context of the 1990s, however, the Mahathir Administration has manifested the search for a definition of Islam acceptable to all, including the non-Muslim communities.

“Authenticating Islam” in the 1990s

While intensive intra-Malay rivalry is now a fact of Malay political existence, the centrality of Islam within the political process as well as the perennial quality of the concept of protection have been accelerated by several important political developments in the 1990s, even while structural change has been accelerated. Undoubtedly, the State has become the primary determinant of the dominant discourse on Islam in Malaysia to which all alternative groups must or have necessarily responded. Within the contemporary Malaysian context, Islamic discourse on the role of religion in state and society has been directed towards four main issues: authority; the basis of politics and the State—Malayness is no longer tenable on its own (because of its rejection by universalist Islam); modernization and socio-economic development; and the future of the *umma*.

To some extent, the State's centrality to Islamization has allowed for the detailed promotion of its own agenda. In particular, the State is increasingly engaged in the re-modification and remoulding of “Islamic” values with continuous reference to a universal Islam which is deliberately re-worked towards the local Malaysian context. Engaging in a kind of missionary campaign among Malaysian Muslims on the imperatives of right thought and right action through (or as) religious duty, it is itself engaged in determining the detail of that which is “authentically” Islamic.

While it moved more cautiously over issues of religious authority and competition in the decade of the eighties, exercising co-optive strategies as far as possible, the Government has, in the 1990s, employed more coercive measures in entrenching a kind of religious orthodoxy, accompanied by the greater institutionalization of what it defines as “modernist” interpretations of the religion.

While the urgency of religious rationalization towards economic endeavour and material achievement is also a function of the shifting character of Malaysian society and the dramatic expansion of a Malay middle class, the State's programmes are also driven by the perceived potential for such religious rationalization in encouraging an inclusive attitude on the part of Malay-Muslims to non-Muslims towards their potentially shared orientation to their social reality. Thus the State's influence on the religious *Weltanschauung* has had serious effects upon both intra-Malay relations as well as on Malay/non-Malay relations.⁸⁵

To some extent this is also reflected in the changing nature of *dakwah* which, while transformed, has managed to stay socially relevant. The political development and discourse of Islamic revivalism in the 1970s and 1980s worked towards incorporating Islam into normative discussion and debate on socio-economic development in Malaysia. While social justice goals remain relevant to most *dakwah* movements, these appear to have taken a back seat to a contemporary emphasis on individual effort at change, a type of "privatization" of religious attitude, but towards public purpose. As such the discourse of *dakwah* in contemporary Malaysia appears to revolve around the idea that the achievement if not tenacity of Islamic society is ultimately based as much on aggregate individual Muslim behaviour as it is on the State's promotion of Islam.

The tenure of *dakwah*, however, has also meant that it continues to act as pressure from below on the State. Even while the Mahathir Administration has regained a directing momentum on shaping Islamic development in Malaysia, the level of personalized Islamization is not always conducive to its agenda. Raised expectations over the role of Islam in Malaysian society have not in fact entailed unified vision.

Through two General Elections (in 1990 and 1995) and several crucial by-elections, the PAS-*Semangat '46* coalition consolidated its control of Kelantan. Although the political union itself was continually threatened by tensions between its nationalist—Islamic divide, PAS domination in Kelantan has clearly allowed for its venue as exemplary Islamic state within the Malaysian federal system, underlined by the party's vision for the state serving as *serambi Mekkah* (Mecca's veranda).

In fact, the actions and precedent set by PAS in Kelantan clearly raised the ante in political rivalry through Islam, exemplified in continued conflict and competition over disbursements for religious education (in 1995, the Federal Government pledged an annual contribution of M\$10 million towards this purpose in Kelantan), institutions, authority and development not only within the State but nationally as well.

Indeed, this proved particularly problematic for UMNO and intensified the deterioration in centre-state relations. Following on its articulated programme of "putting theory into practice", the Kelantan state government introduced a number of measures to instill this Islamic character, encouraging the perception of inseparability between religion and politics and most significantly planning the imposition of *Shariah* law in the State. While *hudud* (mandatory) laws were

finally passed in 1993 by the State legislature (after much controversy) they cannot be enforced without amendment to the Federal Constitution. Obviously this has been both politically and legally provocative to the ruling party at the centre which has thus far refused to recognize the legislation.⁸⁶

This has also induced further tension and competition in religious politics. Even as UMNO (the Malaysian State) attempts to institute this unitary vision and orthodox ideal, there remain, to some extent, divisions within the Government itself over policy on Islamization. The role of *Pusat Islam* in co-ordinating policy on religious matters is underlined by the continuing competitive authority between different state agencies (religious/non-religious) in these matters. Religious departments in other states have been increasingly cornered into more radical measures in exercising their mandate including intentions to bear arms in enforcing their authority, precipitated by the Federal Government's greater willingness to prosecute religious organizations perceived as falling within the category of "deviationists" or "extremists", increasingly including PAS within this category.⁸⁷ State prerogative in religious matters in fact underlines the difficulties for national co-ordination towards standardizing Islamic interpretation.

The 1990s have thus also witnessed further political rivalry between Malay parties through Islam, more particularly the promotion and practice of its most "authentic" form. There has remained a difficulty in maintaining any unified momentum in the face of competing claims by disparate parties and movements. By 1994, the increasing symbolic and real pressures from PAS in terms of creating an Islamic society in Malaysia provoked the Deputy Prime Minister's assertion that UMNO and the government's plans for Islamization must necessarily diverge from PAS designs and pressures, working at a more cautious pace but with as serious intent.

The political manifestation of Islamic revivalism in fact represents the confluence of several "types" of attitude and behaviour—fundamentalist, radical, traditionalist and accommodationist—the lines between which are not easily drawn because no one category is entirely exclusive of the other. They are, in fact, particularly misleading as political categories in the Malaysian context because of the inherent value that ambiguity and rhetoric lend towards influencing a multi-religious, multi-ethnic audience.

Thus in political competition, "traditionalists" sometimes employ the language of "radicals" and "accommodationists" express their personal beliefs through "fundamentalist" language. Indeed, an analysis of UMNO's position on the place of Islam in Malaysia might easily draw the conclusion that it has moved from being a moderate Malay-Muslim party to a radical one—what were once considered extreme demands by PAS now, in fact, constitute Government policy.⁸⁸ Labels—political labels—of religious politics are at any rate only transiently useful if not fairly superficial. Even as this language is useful as political rhetoric it is worth bearing in mind that religious politics (including all Malay/non-Malay politics) is implicitly engaged in dialogue.

As Anthony Milner points out, political competition through Islam in contemporary Malaysia can be drawn to the historical, and continued, three-

cornered ideological struggle between the arenas and concepts of *bangsa* (race), *umma* (Islamic community) and *kerajaan* (sultanate) which since its inception at the turn of the century has increasingly aided in the “invention of politics” and the creation of a public sphere in which these concepts are debated.⁸⁹ Malay identity is thus distinctly defined by all three elements and by dialogue between them or their representatives. Ultimately, the process of politics itself has engaged discourse between different ideas/visions of Islam.

The intensification of Islamization has also been a function of significant changes to the power structure within UMNO and ultimately of fundamental significance to national leadership. The ascension of UMNO “third generation” leadership is indicative of the continued importance of Islam in domestic politics. Many of the important Islamization schemes instituted by the Government are linked to Anwar Ibrahim and undoubtedly his entry (together with other ex-ABIM members) has intensified UMNO’s greater emphasis on its Islamic character.

While having to display more aggressively the mantle of protector, top Malay leadership has also had to demonstrate some skill at meeting the divergent demands of a plural society. Leadership attitudes towards Islam and its importance towards the attainment of national leadership are therefore significant dimensions for consideration.

Indeed, Anwar’s political and national entrenchment in the primary leadership position, his assured succession to the office of Prime Minister, the increasing effacement of an older generation of leadership associated with the party’s “nationalist” history and agenda and the rapid ascent of a younger, more “modernist-Islamic” generation of leaders has not dissolved further division within UMNO, but to some extent heralded accelerated tension (where perhaps there used be easier accommodation) between “nationalist” and Islamic factions within the party. Despite *Semangat ’46*’s imminent re-incorporation into UMNO in 1996, it is unlikely that Malay political “unity” will be realized. If anything, it is likely to intensify intra-Malay rivalry.

Continued factionalism within UMNO, as with that within other ethnic parties, is, in fact, a product of such structural changes. What distinguishes the Mahathir Administration from its predecessors however, particularly in its second phase (1985-present) is that it is also representative of systemic changes in Malaysian politics and government which have affected institutions, elite structures and the political agenda itself, placing national (i.e. UMNO) leadership under more intense pressure and scrutiny.

While top Malay leadership continues to be characterized by its relatively moderate views on the ethnic “balance”, lower levels of UMNO leadership are usually only attainable by more radical or extreme postures from its candidates, which therefore also includes the articulation of a position on Islam. This has been particularly evident in UMNO Youth politics and in UMNO General Assembly campaigns for the position of Vice-President over the years. The increased importance of an “Islamic” profile for contenders to the most senior positions within UMNO, in terms of power and policy-making are further

indication of the potential power of the Islamic factor, even for supreme leadership of Malay and Malaysian politics in the future.⁹⁰

Despite increasing pressures on UMNO to fulfil its role by protecting Islam, UMNO executive leadership has thus far displayed a commitment towards safeguarding the rights of all Malaysian citizens, be they Muslim or non-Muslim and to the maintenance of Malaysia's multi-ethnic character. While in the past this may have depended on a consociationalist system, this has now come to depend on fair-minded national Malay leadership and increasingly centralized authority, under the Prime Minister, which the present administration in particular has come to symbolize. Indeed, Dr Mahathir has articulated the opinion that the particular problems that Malaysia faces in its internal structure demand such a system.

The 1990s thus also witnessed protracted attempts by the Administration to restructure Malaysian political life, first initiated in the 1980s. In this period, its singularly important challenge to the separate authority of such central institutions as the monarchy, the judiciary, Parliament, state government and indeed even the Constitution, have underlined such attempts at drastically altering the political system. All of these institutions have historically had some bearing on the role of Islam in the public sphere and have exercised significant mediating potential over the political importance of Islam in the Malaysian context. Ultimately, intensified efforts by the State to singularly adjudicate religious orthodoxy have been necessitated by Dr Mahathir's fundamental emasculation of these other sources of political authority.

Caught in the dilemma between ensuring its own survival and that of a multicultural, multi-religious Malaysia with the inherent contradictions of appealing to separate constituencies—its Malay-Muslim base and its multi-racial partners—UMNO, but more particularly its leadership, must constantly seek avenues by which these conflicting pursuits can be resolved.

Leadership

In the absence of integrative institutions, national leadership has consistently played a vital role in fulfilling some of these duties and managing the seemingly irreconcilable demands of Malaysia's plural society. All characterizations of the Malaysian political system have given implicit recognition to the importance of national leadership and of political elite co-operation in the governance of Malaysia.

The pattern of post-war religio-political developments was tempered by the politics of accommodation and inter-elite bargaining, representative of ruling elite-bureaucratic views. Consociationalism (or at least the perception of its practice) within the Malaysian political system dominated leadership strategies pursued in managing society. Indeed, the strength of authoritative over participative institutions, expressed by the powerful roles of the Cabinet and the civil service (whose similarity in views and policy direction were explained by their uniform character and training) were directed at aiding the management of communal conflict.⁹¹

The balance in ethnic representation within the Cabinet, whereas previously significant has been increasingly reflective of a virtual Malay-Muslim monopoly which has enabled the scaling back of serious inter-ethnic debate between elites over public policies and priorities. Instead, the Prime Minister increasingly became the linchpin in the bargaining process. The duplication of Malay predominance within the civil service and the growth of the Malaysian government, in size, complexity and capacity, have been additional factors in elevating the importance of his functions.⁹²

Indeed, there exists significant non-Malay feeling that while national leadership has demonstrated moderation in policy formulation, this has not been duplicated at the level of implementation where degrees of over-zealousness from a Malay dominant bureaucracy (86 per cent) over ethnically related policies, such as that of Islamization, are allegedly apparent.

Over time the office of Prime Minister has become crucial to the entire political system, underlined by his tenure of multiple and frequently contradictory leadership roles. In contemporary terms, the Prime Minister is the Malay leader, the President of UMNO, the supreme head of the BN, the leader of the nation and the supreme head of government. These offices and their contradictory objectives are of course also shaped and resolved by the techniques and individual leadership style of the incumbent Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir's strategy for the resolution of political conflict has been the increasing centralization of authority. While newer generations of national leadership have provided some indication of greater democratic inclination and toleration of civil liberties than their immediate predecessor, this will ultimately be tested under the realities of political competition in Malaysia's specific circumstances.

Without specifically rejecting pluralism, a national governmental emphasis on Malay-Muslim goals since 1969, revised the framework of consociationalism in meaning and form. Amidst the unsurpassable and overwhelming dominance of Malays through politics in contemporary Malaysia, a frequently threatened polarization between ethnic communities has been temporarily stayed by the State's ability to include all ethnic and religious communities in economic expansion and development.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the State remained vulnerable to the vagaries of the international economy, which were to have severe effects on domestic politics and on the intensity of conflict between and within ethnic communities. From about the late 1980s to the present, social harmony has been sustained by the phenomenal growth rates achieved by the Malaysian economy. This has made it possible for Malaysian constituents to participate within the same political and social framework without yet having to resolve fundamental tensions over the character of Malaysian state and society.

Significant structural change initiated in the 1970s and 1980s has seen its first flower in substantive social change in the 1990s both in terms of political ideas and processes. While the NEP has expired and been replaced by the New Development Policy (NDP) which has retained ethnic restructuring as its primary target, economic

growth and the Mahathir Administration's rhetoric on achieving Vision 2020 (the target date for the attainment of Newly Industrialized Country status) has underlined a social vision of prosperity through pragmatism which has gained substantive support from all ethnic communities. This was clearly reflected in the election results of 1995, when the BN obtained a landslide victory. A currently renewed vigour in inter-ethnic politics has been underpinned by a heightened policy of cultural liberalism which would be more inclusive of non-Malay views.

The Administration's projections for Malaysia in the twenty-first century have equally indicated a concern that debate and discussion of the country's future should not rest solely on Malay issues but within the context of a Malaysian society if national integration was to succeed.⁹³ This has been further articulated by Dr Mahathir in the mid-1990s as resting on the gradual acceptance of, if not imperative for, a *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian race) which would help entrench a national culture.

However, the current picture of Malaysian politics has also been shaped by the fact that UMNO remains challenged by its Islamic opponents both symbolically and electorally as it has continued to lose ground in Malay-dominant states. To some extent, the Mahathir Administration has attempted to promote its "modernist" vision of Islam as promoting also the new atmosphere of cultural liberalism, including efforts at achieving greater inter-religious dialogue towards obtaining a consensus on the future direction of Malaysian state and society.

Even as the position of Islam and its relevance to the domestic context is increasingly decided by intra and inter-ethnic debate and exchange it is also being influenced by developments in the outside world, in particular, the Islamic world. This also implies that the dynamics of politics and Islam in Malaysia have yet to fully manifest themselves and can never be permanently settled. As politics has increasingly assumed a more religious dimension and this has been coincident to a global revitalization of Islam, foreign policy has also been included in the arena of competition.

NOTES

1. A.C.Milner, "Islam and the Muslim State" in M.B.Hooker (ed.), *Islam in Southeast Asia*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1983, pp. 23–49.
2. Chandra Muzaffar, *Protector?*, Penang: Aliran, 1979, pp. 1–32.
3. J.M.Gullick, *Indigenous Political System of Western Malaysia*, London: Athlone Press, 1965, pp. 22–43; Moshe Yegar, *Islam and Islamic Institutions in British Malaya, 1874–1941: Policies and Implementation*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976, pp. 94–119; 187–233.
4. It is relevant to point out that this form of traditional Malay political culture and the position of Islam within it applies only to the Peninsula; the states of Sabah and Sarawak hold rather different histories.
5. Sharon Siddique, *Some Malay Ideas on Modernization, Islam and Adat*, MA Thesis, University of Singapore, 1972, p. 27.
6. W.R.Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967; Safie Ibrahim, "Islamic Elements in Pre-Independent Malaya", *Islamic Culture*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1978, pp. 185–195.

7. Mohammed Sarim Haji Mustajab, "Gerakan Islam Islamiyah di Tanah Melayu 1906 hingga 1948" in *Malaysia: Sejarah dan Proses Pembangunan*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1979, pp. 129–137; Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origins and Early Development*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1985, pp. 31–34.
8. Firdaus Haji Abdullah, op.cit., p. 88; Neil J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of the United Malays National Organization and Parti Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980, pp. 75–79.
9. Funston, op. cit., p. 92.
10. Safie Ibrahim, *The Islamic Party of Malaysia: Its Formative Stages and Ideology*, Kelantan, Pasir Puteh: Nuawi bin Ismail, 1981, pp. 24–37.
11. Safie Ibrahim, op. cit., pp. 67–107; Funston, op. cit., pp. 91, 135–150; Firdaus Haji Abdullah, op. cit., pp. 73–110.
12. *Laporan Am Banci Penduduk* (General Report of the Population Census), Jld. 7, Kuala Lumpur, Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 1995.
13. Diane K.Mauzy, *Barisan Nasional: Coalition Government in Malaysia*, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Marican & Sons, 1983, p. 20. The Alliance memorandum to the Constitutional Commission of 1957 was in fact the fruit of four months of intensive bargaining between Alliance elites under intense pressure from their respective ethnic communities.
14. Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy", *World Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1969), p. 216; Datar Kiran Kapur, *Malaysia: Quest for a Politics of Consensus*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983, pp. 14–15.
15. Ismail Kassim, *Race, Politics and Moderation: A Study of the Malaysian Electoral Process*, Singapore: Times Books International, 1979, pp. 1–8.
16. Gordon P.Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 135.
17. K.J.Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaysia Press, 1965, pp. 119–120.
18. Added at a later date, following an Alliance recommendation. The memorandum to the Reid Commission reads "...this shall not imply that the State is not a secular State". See Paragraph 169, p. 73 of the Reid Commission Report cited in K.V. Padmanabahn Rau, 'Federal Constitution of Malaysia: A Commentary', *Malaysian Current Law Journal*, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp. 13–14.
19. See Paragraphs 11 and 12, p. 100 of the Reid Commission Report cited in 'Federal Constitution of Malaysia: A Commentary', op. cit., pp. 14–15. The "innocuity" of Article 3—"Islam shall be the religion of the State of Malaya..." was defended by Mr Justice Abdul Hamid (supporting Alliance recommendations included in the Reid Commission Report) with reference to the entrenchment of similar constitutional provisions in fifteen other Muslim countries, including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria at the time.
20. This is the basic thesis of Chandra Muzaffar in *Protector?*, op. cit., where he draws substantial evidence through socio-historical analysis of Malay and Malaysian society to prove that legitimacy and authority in Malay and Malaysian political society are ultimately drawn from the capacity to protect, preserve and promote the interests of one ethnic community against another.
21. See Syed Hussein Alatas, "Feudalism in Malaysian Society" in *Civilisation*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Brussels, 1968; Shaharuddin Maaruf, *Concept of a Hero in Malay Society*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1984, both of which argue the deeply ingrained feudal character of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled linking ancient Malay history to present-day Malay society and the vital importance of the concept of protection within that relationship.
22. See Bab 4, Pertubuhan UMNO (1960)(Constitution of UMNO), Kuala Lumpur, cited in Muzaffar, op. cit., pp. 58–59; p. 79: the word "*memelihara*" (meaning to

- look after, safeguard, protect) describes UMNO's role towards the Malay community. Raj K.Vasil, *Politics in a Plural Society: A Study of Non-Communal Political Parties in West Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 7–8.
23. Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya; Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1987, p. 153. Muzaffar maintains that despite the multitudinous changes that Malay society has undergone from pre-colonial times, protection is still a valid concept due to its manipulation by the governing elite of the ethnic situation.
 24. The sensitization of politics to the religious dimensions of social conflict had already been made apparent in the Maria Hertogh trial in December 1950 which triggered serious ethno-religious rioting in Singapore. Following closely on the heels of the Malayan Union episode, the incident aroused Malay passion against an alleged abuse of Muslim rights and was instructive on the potential for Islamic political expression and mobilization in the Malay arena as well as cementing the relationship between religious pride and ethnic consciousness. For details of the trial, see Tom Eames Hughes, *Tangled Worlds: The Story of Maria Hertogh*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980, and Gordon P.Means, *Malaysian Politics*, op. cit., pp. 47–48.
 25. Chandrasekaran Pillay, *Protection of the Malay Community: The UMNO Position and Opposition Attitudes*, M Soc Sc Thesis, Universiti Sains, 1977, Penang, p. 4.
 26. Kamaruddin Jaffar, "Malay Political Parties", in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1979*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980, p. 213.
 27. The first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had been recorded as maintaining that the attainment of an Islamic state would require the drowning of every non-Muslim in the country, cited in N.J.Funston, "Malaysia", in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, p. 169.
 28. Gordon P.Means, "The Role of Islam in the Political Development of Malaysia", op. cit., pp. 278–281.
 29. B.H.Shahfrudin, *The Federal Factor in the Government and Politics of Peninsular Malaysia*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 256–257; 338–364.
 30. N.J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia*, op. cit., p. 215.
 31. Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, op. cit., p. 87.
 32. For example, by 1970, the non-Malays held a total 37.4 per cent of ownership of shares in limited companies in Malaysia from all sectors against Malay ownership of only 1.9 per cent. Foreign ownership accounted for 60.7 per cent. See *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysian Plan*, 1973, Kuala Lumpur, Table 4.9. The Third Malaysian Plan (1976–1980) estimated 49 per cent of households to be below the poverty line. Of these 78 per cent were Malay, 13 per cent Chinese and 8 per cent Indian. Alternatively, 51 per cent of Malay households were in absolute poverty compared to 15 per cent Chinese and 25 per cent Indian. This was made explicit in the *Second Malaysia Plan (1971–1975)*, Kuala Lumpur, 1970.
 33. N.J.Funston, "Malaysia", op. cit., pp. 170–171.
 34. N.J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia*, op. cit., p. 238.
 35. N.J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia*, op. cit., p. 265. While the recommendations of the Congress were not officially adopted by the Government (nor were they obliged to), they do reveal the extent to which the reaffirmation of Islam was considered by Malay elites to be central to the promotion of Malay nationalism and identity.
 36. James Ongkili, *Nation-building in Malaysia 1946–1974*, Oxford and Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 105–112; 223–227. Education and language had for long been issues that affected the development of Islam in Malaysia and divided ethnic communities. The distinct backgrounds of the administrative elite, through their secular education, together with English educated Chinese and Indians, kept the large majority of religiously educated Malays separate. A good proportion of UMNO

- leadership emerged from this administrative elite and this, in part, explains their secular orientation. A selective quota system for entrance and scholarship eligibility in favour of Malay students was instituted and government sponsorship extended to a large proportion of students both at home and abroad.
37. N.J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia*, op. cit., p. 240.
 38. Halim Mahmood, *Asri Dalam Dilema (Asri in Dilemma)*, Kuala Lumpur: Hafar Enterprise, 1983, p. 33. The coalition agreement was signed in December 1972 and among the terms agreed upon was PAS's right to a share in the Islamic bureaucracy, noted in a Memorandum of Understanding between PAS and the BN Government.
 39. Yahya Ismail, *Krisis Politik Kelantan (The Kelantan Political Crisis)*, Kuala Lumpur, Dinamika Kreatif, 1977; Alias Mohammed, *Sejarah Perjuangan PAS (A History of PAS's Struggle)*, Kuala Lumpur: Gateway Publishing House, 1987, pp. 141–164.
 40. Harold Crouch and Lee Kam Hing (eds), *Malaysian Politics and the 1978 General Elections*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1979.
 41. Datar Kiran Kapur, op. cit., p. 92, fn.71.
 42. James Morgan, "Economic and Social Trends" in Yong Mun Cheong (ed.), *Trends in Southeast Asia II*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 15; *Second Malaysia Plan (1971–1975)*, op. cit.
 43. Gordon P.Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, op. cit., pp. 298–299.
 44. Judith Nagata, *From Peasant Roots to Religious Values: The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985, pp. 99–100; 150–152 and Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among the Students*, Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1987, pp. 60–76.
 45. Lembaga ABIM (ABIM's Constitution), Kuala Lumpur, n.d. which prohibits party political activities.
 46. Mohammed Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa Menggugat (University Students Agitate)* Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1983, Chapters 4, 5 and 6. As defined by the students, loyalty to Islam was identical to nationalist belief. This was therefore reflective of the essential line of Malay-Muslim nationalist identity that both UMNO and PAS subscribed to.
 47. Anwar Ibrahim, as quoted in Zainah Anwar, op. cit., p. 17; ABIM, *The Revival of Islam in Malaysia—The Role of ABIM*, Kuala Lumpur, n.d.; Para. 2, Perlembagaan ABIM (Constitution of ABIM), n.d. ABIM's message was carried through intensive networks of lectures, conferences, seminars and leadership and cadre training courses throughout the country. By 1973, it was publishing its own journal *Risalah* which, because of government restrictions, could only be circulated among subscribers and by 1982, had its publishing licence revoked. Criticizing government policy on matters such as the economy and education, ABIM launched its own active programmes of public service such as an economic co-operative and a network of independently organized schools. In fact, ABIM's claim was that the system of Islamic law would give non-Muslims the freedom to implement their own religious laws in the context of an Islamic government.
 48. For details on ABIM, *Darul Arqam's* and *Jemaat Tabligh's* philosophy and activities, see Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, op. cit., pp. 42–48; Nagata, op. cit., pp. 104–116; 116–122; 195–203; Mutalib, op. cit., pp. 85–99. Both *Arqam* and *Jemaat* stress change through individual example and therefore remain largely Utopian. *Perkim* has been active since 1975 but it concentrates on the conversion of non-Malays and their welfare and while its first President, Malaysia's first Prime Minister relied on important international contacts, its activities within the country remain strictly religious.
 49. Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among the Students*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications, 1987, pp. 29–43.
 50. Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, pp. 22 and 49; Hussin Mutalib,

Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 83–85; 98–101.

51. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 88.
52. A variety of academic and non-academic treatises have sought to analyse the “movement” but three analyses stand out: Nagata, op. cit., analyses *dakwah* in Malaysia through the ethnic context of Malaysian society while Clive S. Kessler’s “Malaysia: Islamic Revivalism and Political Disaffection in a Divided Society”, *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, No. 75, October 1980, pp. 3–11 roots itself in a class-based analysis. Chandra Muzaffar’s *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, op. cit., is concerned largely with the effect of the resurgence on ethnic relations in Malaysia. The following discussion is based largely on these three works and several other inquiries into the nature of the *dakwah* phenomenon including Mohammed Abu Bakar, ‘Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 10, October 1981 and Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among The Students*, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Pelanduk Publications, 1987.
53. In 1979 the Government also instituted a national *Dakwah* month. Ismail Kassim, op. cit., fn. 3, p. 120. The panel was actually initiated by an UMNO General Assembly resolution adopted in 1978.
54. See Dr Mahathir Mohammed, the Deputy President’s speech to the Youth and Women’s Assembly in 1978, in *Penyata UMNO 1978*, Kuala Lumpur, 1979, pp. 361–368; and in 1979 in *Penyata UMNO 1980*, Kuala Lumpur, 1980, pp. 393–401; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 February 1979; the Prime Minister, Datuk Hussin Onn’s address to the 1980 BERJASA General Assembly in *Perhimpunan Agung Berjasa*, Kuala Lumpur, 1980. The splinter party from PAS, BERJASA (formed after the Kelantan crisis in 1977 and PAS’s exit from the Barisan Nasional), although absorbed into the coalition, provided only a minuscule base of Malay-Muslim support.
55. See the statement of the Home Minister in Parliament on the threat of religious fanaticism in *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen, Dewan Rakyat (PRPDR)*, 15 December 1980, pp. 1778–1785; interview with Encik Anwar Tahir, Secretary General of ABIM, Kuala Lumpur, 5 June 1989. ABIM itself weathered intense security scrutiny from the Government as well as consistent requests for its proscription. Religious officials considered to be promoting anti-government sentiments were also threatened with dismissal.
56. *Suara Islam*, No. 1, July 1979, p. 5. The party maintained that UMNO’s greatest fear about *dakwah* was that it would greatly benefit PAS. Islam as *ad-deen*, proposes that the religion be viewed and practised as a complete way of life instead of its assignation to a specific role (i.e. political, social) in Muslim life.
57. Salim Osman, *UMNO-PAS Rivalry in Malaysia*, Academic Exercise, Dept. of Political Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Singapore, 1979, pp. 68–71.
58. Harold Crouch *et al.* (eds.), *Malaysian Politics and the 1978 General Elections*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 293–311; Azmi Ahmad, “PAS Mengepak Ke-Utara” (PAS Heading North) in *Sarina*, June 1981, pp. 21–25; NST, 13 May 1980.
59. Jomo Sundaram and Ahmed Shabery Cheek, “The Politics of Malaysia’s Islamic Resurgence”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 1988, p. 132; *Siapakah Pemecah Perpaduan Melayu dan Islam?* (Who Sundered Malay Unity and Islam?), Barisan Nasional, Kuala Lumpur, n.d.; *Lagi Pertanyaan Untuk PAS* (More Questions for PAS), Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1978. UMNO Supreme Council member, Datuk Rais Yatim, maintained in 1980 that misunderstanding should be avoided among Muslims and parties prevented from using religion for their political ends, lest an “Ayatollah Khomeini Malaysia...emerge”.

60. See “Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam Dalam Pentadbiran Negara” (The Assimilation of Islamic Values in the Administration of the Country) in *Dasar-dasar Baru Kerajaan* (New Government Policies), Siri Pengetahuan Am, Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, n.d.; Parliamentary debates on Islamization and Prime Minister’s statement in *PRPDR*, Vol. 1, No. 89, 15 November 1983, pp. 12569–12570; Vol. 1, No. 89, 16 November 1983, pp. 12709–12711; *Dasar-dasar Utama Kerajaan Malaysia*, INTAN, 1990, pp. 91–96. The policy was described as promoting justice, respect, diligence, cleanliness, trustworthiness, efficiency, toleration and other such values.
61. See debates in Parliament, *PRPDR*, 15–18 November 1983, when the policy was first announced.
62. Khalid Jaafar, “ABIM Masih Mencari Arah” (ABIM Still Looking for Direction) in *Dewan Masyarakat*, February 1984, pp. 30–31; Norizan Muslim, “Bersama PAS lagikah ABIM bila Anwar masuk UMNO?” (To go with PAS or ABIM when Anwar joins UMNO?) in *SARINA*, September 1985, pp. 26–33; Muhammad Kamal Hassan, “The Response of Muslim Youth Organizations to Political Change: HMI in Indonesia and ABIM in Malaysia” in William Roff (ed.), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*, London, Croom Helm, 1987, pp. 99–113.
63. Hussin Mutalib, op. cit., p. 143.
64. Cited in Juust Faaland *et al.* *Growth and Ethnic Inequality: Malaysia’s New Economic Policy*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1990, pp. 200–201.
65. *NST*, 6 July 1982; Article 117, in *Third Malaysia Plan*, Kuala Lumpur, 1976; Hussin Mutalib, op. cit., p. 134, Table 1.
66. See Para 3, “The Struggle for Islam: The Islamic Party of Malaysia’s Perspective”, PAS Bureau of Information and Dakwah, Kuala Lumpur, n.d. which underlines the Party’s struggle to establish Islam as a complete way of life through (inter alia) the rulings and guidance of the *ulama*; Halim Mahmood, *PAS Pimpinan Baharu—Falsafah dan Perjuangan* (PAS’s New Leadership—Philosophy and Struggle), Kuala Lumpur: Hafar Enterprise, 1983, pp. 31–71.
67. Jomo K.Sundaram, “Wither Malaysia’s New Economic Policy?”, *Pacific Affairs*, Winter 1990–91, pp. 469–499; Ozay Mehmet, *Development in Malaysia: Poverty, Wealth and Trusteeship*, London: Croom Helm, 1986.
68. Hussin Mutalib, op. cit., p. 136; Kamaruddin Jaafar, “The Kedah UMNO-PAS Struggle: Its Origins and Development” in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1980*, Singapore, 1980, pp. 228–237, *Utusan Malaysia*, 29 June 1981.
69. *Watan*, 2 November 1989; Ibrahim Ahmad, *Konflik UMNO-PAS Dalam Isu Islamisasi* (The UMNO-PAS Conflict on the Issue of Islamization), Petaling Jaya: IBS Buku Sdn. Bhd., 1989, pp. 70–71; Suhaimi Al-Manir, “UMNO Ke-Arah Islam?” (UMNO Heading in the Direction of Islam?), in *Watan*, 25 May 1989. Even the Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia, a long-established Malay socialist party, has accepted a policy change towards a more “Islamic” direction, dropping the word Socialist from its name (now PRM). By self-definition, there are currently three Islamic parties (PAS, HAMIM, BERJASA), two Malay-Muslim parties (UMNO and *Semangat ’46*), and parties like the PRM although not exclusively Malay in membership, are led by Malays and have expressed some deference to Islam or at least religiosity.
70. *Tradisi Membela Rakyat* (Tradition Protects the People), *Manifesto Barisan Nasional*, 1986 (AGP/7/P); Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in *Utusan Malaysia*, 9 March 1986.
71. See Mahadzir Mohammed Khir, “Apakah Sebenarnya *Semangat ’46*” (What Really is the Spirit of *Semangat ’46*?) in *Dewan Masyarakat*, March 1989, pp. 35–37; Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, *Mengapa Saya Tentang Mahathir* (Why I Oppose Mahathir), Petaling Jaya: AZ Distributors, 1989, pp. 67–81; 109–117.

72. Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Koon, "Islamization and Ethnic Relations" in *The Star*, 27 April 1983; Tunku Abdul Rahman *et al.*, *Contemporary Issues on Malaysian Religions*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1984, pp. 153–171; 181–198.
73. See comments of Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Gerakan President, in Institute of Strategic and International Studies, *The Bonding of a Nation: Federalism and Territorial Integration in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1986, pp. 51–52.
74. Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman, *Heaven In Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988, pp. 58–60; Jean de Bernardi, "Historical Allusion and the Defence of Identity: Malaysian Chinese Popular Religion" in Charles F. Keyes, *et al.* (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994, pp. 117–140.
75. Clive Kessler, "'Secularization' in Malaysia?", Some Further Remarks, *Sarjana* (Special Issue, 1994), pp. 309–317; Judith Nagata, "How to Be Islamic without being an Islamic State: Contested Models of Development in Malaysia" in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 63–90.
76. Ucapan Dasar Presiden (President's Policy Speech), *Muktamar Tahunan PAS ke-27*, 19 April 1981, Kuala Lumpur; *The Star*, 20 April 1981.
77. H.T.Kamal, *Assabiyah Dalam Konteks Islam (Assabiyah in the Islamic Context)*, Johore Bahru: Thinker's Library, 1986; Mohammed Nakhaie Haji Ahmad, "*Bangsa, Assabiyah dan Nasionalisme*" (Race, Sectarianism and Nationalism), *Watan*, 11 July 1985; *Utusan Malaysia*, 13 August 1984; *The Star*, 17 February 1985.
78. *Asiaweek*, 8 March 1985. Needless to say this is how the statement was reported in UMNO-linked media (see *NST* and *Utusan Malaysia*, 18 September 1985 quoting a report that first surfaced in *Mingguan Malaysia*). Another PAS Vice-President (at the time), Haji Nakhaie Ahmad claimed Haji Hadi's statements as noting that "the question of privileges would not arise if Malaysia were under Islamic laws". See *The Star*, 19 September 1985; Sanusi Junid's (then Secretary General of UMNO) and Datuk Hussein Onn's comments, *NST*, 17 September 1985; Tunku Abdul Rahman in *The Star*, 23 September 1985 and *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* Editorials, 17 September 1985.
79. *ST*, 9 December 1985.
80. *The Star*, 3 October 1985; MCA and DAP statements, cited in Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, *op. cit.*, p. 97, fn. 14.
81. *Watan*, 25 November 1987.
82. The coalition known as the *Gagasan Rakyat* also included the DAP and a number of smaller opposition parties. Three days after PBS's sudden exit from the BN to join forces with the *Gagasan Rakyat*, *Utusan Malaysia* (the largest Malay (UMNO-owned) daily) carried a massive front page photograph of the *Semangat '46* leader being welcomed in Sabah, sporting traditional Kadazan headwear. The deliberately magnified pattern on the hat however gave the impression that it was marked by a large cross, effectively looking like a bishop's habit. The rhetorical caption asked if Tengku Razaleigh's political strategies were in fact endangering Malay-Muslims. See *Utusan Malaysia*, 19 October 1990.
83. The Islamic Administration Enactment Bill passed by the Selangor State Assembly in 1989 which allowed non-Muslim minors to embrace Islam once they reach the age of majority (puberty) was one such issue. According to Islamic law, which also allows for conversion *into* but not out of Islam, makes the new convert liable to the obligations of that law and subject to the jurisdiction of Muslim courts. The issue was hotly debated between Malay, Chinese and Indian communal representatives in the Assembly with clear expressions of non-Muslim fear that the Bill suggested a serious encroachment on their rights of religious freedom.
84. N.J.Funston, "Challenge and Response in Malaysia", *op. cit.*, p. 365; Harold Crouch,

- “Money Politics in Malaysia” in K.S.Jomo (ed.), *Mahathir’s Economic Policies*, Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 1988, pp. 87–89.
85. A.B.Shamsul, “Religion and Ethnic Politics in Malaysia: The Significance of the Islamic Resurgence Phenomenon” in Charles F.Keyes *et al.* (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994, pp. 99–116.
 86. See Maria Luisa Seda-Poulin, “Islamization and Legal Reform in Malaysia: The *Hudud* Controversy of 1992” in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1993*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993, pp. 224–242; *ST*, 31 May 1991, 16 March 1994. Since 1991, the State government has banned gambling and the sale and public consumption of alcohol and cultural shows contradictory to Islam, introduced a dress code for Muslim women, discouraged women’s night shift-work, and allowed polygamy. *Hudud* law (which imposes harsh punishment—the severance of limbs; whipping for crimes such as theft, adultery and apostasy) because of its conflict with the secular provisions of the Federal Constitution needs amendment to that Constitution which would require a two-thirds majority in Parliament before the State government can gazette the legislation.
 87. See for instance reports in *The Star*, 10–18 May 1995.
 88. Dr Goh Cheng Teik, then President of Gerakan (BN) cited in Diane K.Mauzy and R.S.Milne, “The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia: Discipline Through Islam”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 4, (Winter 1983–1984), fn. 51.
 89. See Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
 90. Election to the Vice-Presidency and Supreme Council of UMNO are vital to eventual promotion to national leadership as intense factionalism and rivalry for these positions has become de rigueur in recent years (due partly to the vast stakes in terms of patronage and power). UMNO elections since 1987 have witnessed the increasing representation or reference to some kind of “Islamic” background at these levels. See A.B.Shamsul, ‘UMNO: The Battle Royal’, *Southeast Asian Affairs 1988*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988, pp. 173–188.
 91. Mavis Puthuchery, *The Politics of Administration: The Malaysian Experience*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1978 and Khasnor Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1986; Milton J.Esman, *Administration and Development in Malaysia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972, p. 6.
 92. See Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, op. cit. Although present, Chinese and Indian representation within the Cabinet now accounts for less prestigious or decisive portfolios such as transport, communication and health.
 93. See Dr Mahathir’s address at a Congress on Malay Intellectuals and Development in 1989 in *Mingguan Malaysia*, 2 July 1989.

2 The internationalization of Malay-Muslim society

The increasingly central consideration of matters Islamic in the domestic political process was paralleled by the growth of an overt Muslim character in Malaysia's external identity. The desire of successive administrations to project an Islamic image, the growth of an Islamic bureaucracy and the catalyst of intra-Malay rivalry made this, for the most part, necessary. Even so, the impetus for this identity was not solely internal. The renewed vigour of Islam as an identifiable source of inspiration and action in international politics and the global significance of developments in the politics of the Middle East constituted the external context against which this identity for Malaysia was being shaped. The foreign policy character and contexts of Mahathir's predecessors fully demonstrate the imperatives for a "religious" identity.

ISLAM IN MALAYSIAN FOREIGN POLICY 1957–1978: GOVERNMENT AND PARTY ATTITUDES

Studies of Malaysian foreign policy regularly note the virtual monopoly of policy making by a small elite within the Government and the ruling party, due mainly to the relative weakness of the Opposition and the greater preoccupation with domestic politics within the parliamentary process.¹ Co-religionist issues, either potential or actual, have, however, been an important exception and domestic opinion has consistently had some part to play in the foreign policy process. Thus efforts have usually been made by successive administrations, to accommodate all interests, including that of Malaysia's large non-Malay-Muslim minority. The imperatives of domestic politics have made such a "balancing act" a complex task.

Foreign policy under Tunku Abdul Rahman

Foreign policy under the administration of independent Malaya's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, from 1957 to 1969, displayed the assessment that any specific alignments would be untenable, based on a reading of the divergent ethnic, religious and cultural alignments of the country's population as complex and potentially destabilizing. The regional instability and variety of territorial disputes of the period might have prompted such assessment. The Administration's earliest foreign policy priorities were in fact characterized by a pro-Western, anti-Communist ethos explained to some extent by calculations of the most immediate threats to Malaya's (and later, Malaysia's) viability as a state.²

Nevertheless, the Prime Minister himself had indicated a strong desire to institute a "special relationship" with other Muslim countries. He canvassed early on for some sort of "Muslim Commonwealth" despite little initial support from abroad and the Foreign Ministry's preference for a completely secular policy in which affective considerations like "Muslim brotherhood" would have no role. In fact, international co-operation and diplomacy guided by adherence to United Nations' (UN) principles, were of greater influence on foreign policy initiatives or decisions during this period.³

The legacy of the Emergency, during which a domestic Communist rebellion was countered with substantial help from Western allies, acted as a prime determinant. The Government recognized however, the ballast (and rhetorical ammunition) that Islam offered against the threat of Communism, both in terms of ideology and ethnic association; the insurgency was perceived by the largely rural Malay public as a pre-eminently Chinese attempt to gain control of the state. Such psychological and cultural predispositions were naturally brought to bear in the country's participation in the international politics of the region. The Tunku's preferences might also have been formulated as a counter to PAS appeal, to stem dissension from within his own party over the need for a more "Muslim" foreign policy in terms of support for national liberation struggles and for a more pro-Arab policy in the Middle East.⁴

Indeed, because of its pro-Western tilt, the Government faced consistent opposition from younger leaders within UMNO who were particularly articulate in their preference for a formal policy of neutrality and association with other non-aligned nations. The increasing dissension over Malaysia's "colonially mired" policies were to have great influence on eventually changing the direction of foreign relations. Many of the second-generation leadership within UMNO—men such as Dr Mahathir Mohammed and Datuk Musa Hitam who were representative of greater Malay nationalist sentiment within the party—actively lobbied more senior policy-making levels towards radical change in foreign policy. They were outspoken in particular in their desire for the Tunku's administration to be more supportive of Third World liberation struggles and clearly display Malaysia's essentially "Malay" character. Challenge was also provided by PAS's early search for a pan-Malay/Islamic ideal manifested in its

basic anti-colonial stance in matters of foreign policy. Its leadership articulated a strong preference for a general policy of neutrality rather than dependence on foreign powers which compromised the nation's sovereignty. This neutrality, in fact, envisioned a closer connection with Islamic states and "others steering the same course".⁵

While these combined pressures did not appear to influence the basic direction of foreign policy, they did succeed in denying official recognition of Israel. In fact, much of the early Malaysian stand on the question of Palestine and Israel was influenced by its acceptance and membership within the UN. Despite the seeming ambivalence of attitudes towards Israel (recognition of the Israeli government was first extended and then withdrawn due to domestic pressure), diplomatic relations were never established. Malaysia's official reasons for retracting recognition, appeared to be in accordance with the principles for which recognition of Israel had initially been granted: membership within the UN necessitated adherence to its principles.⁶

Malaysia's support for India in 1962 in the first Indo-Pakistani war negated any "Islamic" considerations, while the subsequent rupture of diplomatic relations with Pakistan in October 1965 (following apparent Malaysian diplomatic support for India over the question of Kashmir), seriously jeopardized any co-religionist strategy. Despite domestic dissension over the issue and the Malay press's severe criticism of Malaysia's representative at the UN, the Tunku defended the Malaysian position through the observation that despite its status as a Muslim nation, Malaysia's international relations had to supersede all other considerations. The breach was healed within a year (through Iranian mediation) by calling symbolic attention to the common basis of Pakistan and Malaysia's Muslim character.⁷

In fact, the turning point for Malaysian relations with the Muslim world which precipitated substantive changes in foreign policy was the crisis of *Konfrontasi*. While the pro-Western connection proved valuable in terms of physical defence during this period, its limitations were also displayed. The Indonesian threat between 1963 and 1966 over Malaysia's very existence as a political entity was in part facilitated by the important diplomatic support that Indonesia managed to gain from Muslim (primarily Egypt and Saudi Arabia) and non-aligned countries against the legitimacy of Malaysia. At a period in time when the non-aligned world was gaining political weight in international politics, Malaysia's exclusion from such fora required a diplomatic counter-offensive. Further challenge was provided by a concurrent claim by the Philippines on Sabah (the North Borneo territory) pressured earlier by a revolt against the Sultanate, within Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah. The Philippines' claim was temporarily shelved after peace talks leading to official Filipino recognition of Malaysia in 1966 and a rapprochement between Indonesia and Malaysia reached.⁸

Realizing that relations with the West could not be pursued at the expense of international Muslim support, efforts were made to redress the balance. Launching a successful diplomatic campaign among Muslim nations in the

Middle East and Africa, Malaysia managed to win the support of twenty-eight countries to attend the Non-Aligned Conference in Algiers in 1965. Islamic considerations were therefore initially placed within a larger strategy of non-alignment, although strict neutralism was ruled out by virtue of Malaysia's membership within security arrangements with Western powers, such as the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (later the Five Power Defence Arrangement). The success of Malaysia's diplomatic campaign and the conclusion of *Konfrontasi* in 1966, while relieving pressure, served also to highlight the imperatives for review of Malaysia's foreign policy priorities, severe domestic dissension and criticism serving, if nothing else, to underline this.

Serious regional disputes highlighted both the affinity and divisions that ethno-religious ties within Southeast Asia had engendered, and heightened communal tensions and disputes over language, culture and identity within Malaya/Malaysia. The proposal to include Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak in a federation with the Peninsula met with some resistance and the formation of Malaysia in 1963 exacerbated divisions within Malay society as the issues of Islam, the Malay language and Malaysian identity were hotly debated. The issue also greatly influenced the 1964 elections as PAS stepped up its attacks on UMNO, warning the electorate not to vote for parties (like UMNO) that worked in close collaboration with non-Muslims.⁹ In the same year, several PAS leaders were arrested under the Internal Security Act for allegedly conspiring with Indonesians in their policy concerning *Konfrontasi*. Indeed, political advantage was no doubt sought in the official Malaysian depiction of Indonesian aggression as Communist inspired (i.e. the work of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* and not that of fellow Muslims within Indonesia). The Tunku was to rationalize the eventual rapprochement between the two countries as being obtained by their common faith in Islam.¹⁰

In fact, the diversification of foreign relations was also pursued as other ties became less reliable. The proposal by Tun Ismail (previously an acting Foreign Minister) in 1968, for the neutralization of Southeast Asia guaranteed by the big powers, including China, was one that was in accord with the type of foreign policy being advocated by younger reformers within UMNO. At this point, anti-colonialist attitudes within UMNO worked in congruence with the general foreign policy stance of PAS and the attainment of true national liberation through a more independent foreign policy articulated as a priority.¹¹

Furthermore, while external events had served to change the course of Malaysian foreign policy, international Muslim opinion had emerged also as an important consideration, particularly in building consensus on recognizing the legitimacy of Malaysia as a Muslim state and of UMNO as its ruling party. The Alliance Government had already been successful in using international Muslim opinion to regain public confidence in UMNO following a *fatwa* (religious ruling) by the *Dewan Ulama* (the legislative chamber constituting religious scholars) of PAS (Kelantan) prohibiting co-operation between Muslims and non-Muslims and branding UMNO as infidel for doing so. The World Muslim Congress convening in Kuala Lumpur in 1969, openly criticized PAS and

rejected the *fatwa*. It maintained that such co-operation was inevitable if not necessary “because Muslims had insufficient knowledge and expertise in the fields of economics and politics” and was in fact permitted by Islam.¹²

Foreign policy issues had also played an important part in the election campaigns of 1959, 1964 and 1969, partly due to consistent criticism of dependency on the West but also because bitter political rivalry continued along ethnic and religious lines. Malaysia played host to important international Islamic conferences in these election years—indeed, the convening of an international Islamic conference at governmental level in April 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, the first of its kind, held primarily to discuss religious issues, was a useful part of the Alliance’s campaign strategy. At a point when the Islamic world was in serious crisis, such prestige improved the Administration’s image as an active and recognized sponsor of Islamic solidarity despite its size and its distance from the Islamic heartland. Indeed, the Conference was significant in its ability to reach concurrence between more than 23 Muslim countries over the Palestinian issue, the status of *Baitul Muqqadis* (Jerusalem) and Israeli aggression.¹³

The June 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the 1969 burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, one of the holiest sites of the Islamic world, affronted international Muslim sensitivities, worked as a catalyst towards the concurrence of international Muslim opinion within formal structures—the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) grew out of the first International Islamic Summit held in Rabat in 1969—and heightened domestic attention to the plight of Muslim brethren abroad. The 1967 War in particular, brought committed Malaysian support for the cause of the Palestinians. Malaysia was one of the first Asian states to allow the *Al-Fatah* movement facilities while the country’s stand on the Middle East was expressed in strongly pro-Arab terms.¹⁴

Promotion of the Palestinian cause as the concern of all Muslim brothers, appears to have been more a personal initiative of the Prime Minister. The Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Ghazali Shafie, maintained that Malaysian condemnation of the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories was “...not on the grounds of any religious affinity but simply because the occupation constitutes aggression”.¹⁵ While official Malaysian support for the Palestinians has consistently been predicated on these principles, the issue has continued to be popularly perceived as co-religionist, which has significantly shaped its impact and influence on domestic politics.

The Tunku’s speech at the UN in October 1969 certainly gave the impression that Islam was of great significance in Malaysia’s foreign policy. Yet, the overt expression of such affinities might have been prompted as much by his fresh impressions from the Rabat Conference and his likely incumbency of the office of Secretary General of the OIC. In the circumstances of 13 May 1969, and his eventual resignation as Prime Minister, the tasks of organizing and heading the first International Islamic Secretariat based in Jeddah surely helped towards repairing his image as a leader concerned with international Muslim issues.¹⁶

The convergence and challenge of international, regional and domestic uncertainties and crises for the first Malaysian Administration had, by 1969,

indicated the need for a clear shift in foreign policy thinking. In particular, pressure for a more nationalist-oriented agenda also meant increasing attention to a religious character, dictated in part by the fact that Malay nationalism was at least in part defined by religion, both nationally and internationally.

Foreign policy under Tun Abdul Razak

The suspension of Parliament after the crisis of 1969, entailed administration of the country by an emergency body, the National Operations Council, for a period of four years. In fact, the leadership of the Tunku's eventual successor, Tun Abdul Razak, was established in that period so that by the time of his own elected administration, from 1974 to 1977, the foreign policy agenda of a politically reconstructed Malaysia was already in place.

The new Administration was clearly at pains to regain domestic (both Malay and non-Malay) and international confidence in Malaysia's viability as a multi-ethnic state. The serious challenge to UMNO and the Alliance's ability to govern Malaysian society necessitated a significant review of policies. The introduction of new strategies appeared to represent the first overt attempts by a Malaysian administration to employ foreign policy to a domestic political purpose.¹⁷ For example, the development of more extensive contacts with international Islamic activities was part of the post-1969 pattern of UMNO/government movement towards a more Muslim character while maintaining patterns of accommodation with the other races.

The high profile of the ex-Prime Minister in the new mood of international Islamic activism was no doubt viewed as a positive aid to the new Government's restructured image. Wide publicity was given to the Tunku's appointment in the local media and there was close coverage of his earliest attempts at consolidating the OIC. He was even strongly urged by UMNO to retain his parliamentary seat (at least for a time), after assuming leadership of the Islamic Secretariat in Jeddah in 1971.¹⁸ The Tunku's active commitment undoubtedly enabled the recognition of Malaysia as being continuously involved in the international promotion and institutionalization of Islam, helping to establish organizations like the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the International Islamic News Agency.

Malaysia's decision to sign the Islamic Charter of the OIC in 1972 (unlike its neighbour Indonesia which has a far more numerous officially Muslim population), must in fact be understood within the context of benefit that such signature offered by way of affirmation, not only of state identity but also that of the new Administration and of its commitment to uphold the domestic political pecking order (i.e. Malay-Muslim political and economic dominance).¹⁹ After a significant period of instability and disorder, such external recognition was invaluable in terms of the country's international image.

In fact, pressure had been building from within the Administration and the party to jettison what Dr Mahathir Mohammed then referred to as the "apron-string complex". Argument was buttressed by the need for distance from former colonizers and towards staking out a middle ground between the two major

power blocs in order to establish significant Third World credentials.²⁰ In reviewing Malaysia's international position in 1970, the Razak Administration elevated neutrality and non-alignment as official foreign policy goals, entrenching the state in a number of multilateral bodies and pursuing a variety of foreign policy initiatives that aimed particularly at such a balance.

The Administration's term of office had also coincided with a period of turmoil in international and regional affairs. Prolonged US involvement in Vietnam, China's potential re-entry into international diplomacy and the renewed strength of Muslim states in the Middle East enhanced the perception that Malaysian foreign policy should be set on a new course. In fact, neutrality also appeared to be a safe policy, appealing domestically to all the major ethnic groups: potentially popular with Malay nationalist and student movements, being more reflective of the non-alignment of other Third World and Muslim countries, and with its Chinese community due to a new and more open approach by China.²¹ Thus, concurrent with the desire to improve Islamic credentials, concern lay with a more even-handed approach. Indeed, in the Prime Minister's scheme of things Malaysia's Muslim identity ranked as only a fifth priority in foreign policy, well behind its character as both a Commonwealth and non-aligned nation.²²

The importance that Malaysia placed on its participation within the OIC must also be understood as part of a larger foreign policy strategy—that of increased and active participation within a host of international fora, most particularly within the United Nations system. The OIC was itself reflective of traditional international organization frameworks but provided the fora for the special views of Muslim states to be articulated. As the Tunku pointed out at the Organization's inauguration, it was established “to complement and not to substitute other fora of international co-operation”, working more as a commonwealth of Muslim nations dealing with political matters rather than as a religious body.²³ In 1975, Malaysia was one of thirty-two countries that lobbied the UN to grant the OIC observer status, giving some indication of the perception of complementarity of these two bodies. Importantly this was a period of significant international events that deeply affected the Islamic world.

The Middle Eastern wars and the oil boom of the early 1970s were the contexts within which Malaysia sought more extensive linkage with Muslim brethren in the Middle East. Clearly, however, the Razak Administration envisaged a pragmatic role in registering Islamic solidarity. Malaysia's hosting of the Fifth Islamic Conference provided an opportunity for its articulation of a vision for the Organization as an international Islamic body effective through greater economic co-operation rather than politics. Addressing the Conference, Tun Razak emphasized the importance for member countries to seize the opportunity in promoting Islam as a religion of modernization and progress. Such promotion might be consolidated through the establishment of economic and technical co-operation, the expansion of trade and investment schemes, better deployment of unused Islamic Development Bank (IDB) funds within the Islamic world and through the evolution of a new system of Islamic education.²⁴

Clearly, such solidarity had already provided Malaysia with some economic pay-offs. Good relations with Arab states had placed it among the ten most favoured nations exempted from oil cutbacks during the 1973 global energy crisis. Malaysia was identified as a principal target for IDB projects and the volume of bilateral trade with Middle Eastern countries was boosted from M\$172 million in 1969 to M\$654 million in 1974 (although the trade itself continued to represent only 4.2 per cent of Malaysia's total external trade and the balance was against Malaysia). A host of bilateral initiatives, targeted at the newly wealthy "oil powers", resulted in a number of cultural, scientific and technical agreements.²⁵

Such pragmatic considerations were necessitated by radical domestic economic restructuring. The NEP made economic growth a priority and the Middle Eastern oil boom made the region an obvious source for potential loans and investment. Yet the symbolic nature of these economic ties was not lost on the ruling party and its constituents.²⁶ Muslim pride in hosting the Fifth Islamic Conference in Kuala Lumpur, coming a month after the normalization of relations with China (and the deployment of these achievements in the BN campaign in the 1974 elections), made the new Administration's object of catering to domestic sentiments highly visible.

What is more, foreign policy pursued was intended to give foreign investors confidence in the security of their investments. Thus, internal stability or its semblance was vital. Building a larger base of support from the various components of the BN was a crucial part of this image-building, given particular credence by the incorporation of PAS into the new coalition party and government. Internal Malay rivalry was thus temporarily bridged, while significant PAS participation within the growing national religious bureaucracy and in a number of foreign missions helped promote closer official attention to both domestic and international Islamic matters.²⁷

Yet, wider association with the Islamic world was occurring even as a more Malay nationalist identity was asserting itself within UMNO and Malay politics in general. While some cleavage existed between a particularistic Malay identity and a more universalist Muslim one (increasingly promoted by younger members of PAS, influenced by their own experiences abroad and, in turn, helping to change the identity of the Party) this was not as yet fully articulated and remained largely concealed by the continued twinning of Malay ethnicity with Islam.

Despite the rapprochement with China and the flux in international relations, Malaysia still faced a Communist threat along its border with Thailand. In this battle, Islam was offered as a competitive ideology, PAS's Islamic identity appearing better equipped than UMNO's nationalist ideology. Indeed, despite dissension at the grassroots, continued participation within the BN was defended by the Assembly in 1976 as being in the interest of the nation and its strength "vital to fight Communist ideology". Yet such rhetoric was also usefully employed at a point when UMNO was facing a bitter factional struggle and its own declared "purge" of "Communist elements". Islam then, not only served the

purpose of combating a “foreign ideology” but was also, almost instinctively, part of the process of inter-party rivalry.²⁸

The Communist threat at Malaysia’s border with Thailand also held some relation to Islam in both domestic and foreign policy. By 1968, it had been revealed that the Communist Party of Malaya had begun to employ the use of subversive propaganda based on a series of misinterpretations of Islamic tenets, designed to portray the Government as a betrayer of the religion.²⁹ While Malaysia’s reasons for the establishment of diplomatic relations with China (the CPM’s main source of external support) by 1974 might be understood within the context of this concern, it also gives some indication of the Government’s desire to improve its own image in Islamic terms.

In fact, PAS remained vigilant and actively critical when it felt Muslim interests were being compromised. The Party was also concerned that although belonging to the Islamic Conference system, Malaysia remained isolated from issues within the global revival of Islam. At the PAS General Assembly in 1975, the President, Datuk Asri, maintained that “Malaysia must take positive steps in the revival of the Islamic world by active participation in the activities of other Muslim countries and by helping the West Asian countries pursue their ideals”, suggesting as a first step the recruitment of volunteers to fight alongside the Arabs against Israel as agreed at the Islamic Foreign Ministers’ Conference.³⁰

The unsettled questions of the fate of Islamic minorities in neighbouring countries also elicited provocative statements from PAS. In fact, a form of pan-Malay nationalism, based on a common ethnicity, embracing (the generally Malay peoples of) Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaya had enjoyed a tradition of support within PAS and the lower ranks of UMNO. In 1977, Datuk Asri’s publicly articulated opinion that the Thai Muslim secessionist struggle for autonomy was reasonable required hasty diplomatic patching between Malaysia and Thailand. This suggested the vulnerability of the Malaysian government on issues involving co-religionists even while trying to honour the cardinal principle of territorial integrity within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a body which the new Administration had placed as the cornerstone of its foreign policy and foundation of its security.³¹

Amidst its deteriorating relationship within the BN, PAS had claimed a wider membership for itself within the Islamic world. These fraternal bonds, however, placed the party in an awkward position. As a coalition partner its contacts with foreign-based organizations were somewhat restricted and defended as conduct “through the spirit of Muslim brotherhood and nothing more”. Yet grassroots support demanded that the party should clearly articulate its stand on issues such as the plight of Muslim minorities in the Philippines and Thailand, its attitude towards ASEAN and its relationships with foreign Islamic based political organizations.³² Additionally, support for neighbouring Muslim minorities was forthcoming from Malaysian student movements, which, for instance, had orchestrated mass demonstrations against the visit of the Thai Premier to Malaysia in 1974.

Despite this dilemma, PAS leadership expressed a determination to continue monitoring political developments in the ASEAN region which was to prove

awkward for the Government.³³ Despite lobbying from PAS, a new border agreement was signed between Thailand and Malaysia in March 1977 which established the principle of “hot pursuit” in each other’s territories, ostensibly in search of Communist guerillas, not Muslim separatists, but this was to eventually emerge as an issue of some dispute.

PAS’s vocal support for regional co-religionist causes was destined to embarrass the Government at the point of its promotion of the concept of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in Southeast Asia and in its role as host of the second ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1978.³⁴ In fact, an important Thai source states that Bangkok had traditionally relied on Malaysia and Indonesia “to support Thailand in international circles against the activities of the separatist movement”, noting that in February 1978, the Prime Minister of Thailand had asked the Indonesian and Malaysian leaders to continue their support for Thailand “in containing possible damage done by the propaganda efforts of the separatist elements at international forums”.³⁵

The cause of Muslim minorities in the Southern Philippines was also supported by PAS although it was not the only component of the BN articulating independent foreign policy postures, the Sabah Chief Minister from 1967 to 1975, Tun Mustapha’s actions a case in point. Actively committed to the advancement of Islam within Sabah, he was seminal in the promotion of the Muslim cause in the Southern Philippines, harbouring Muslim refugees and actively accommodating the Moro independence struggle, all of which did much to maintain the simmering hostility of the Philippine government towards their Malaysian counterparts. More significantly, Mustapha was directly implicated, during his term, in the provision of training facilities for separatist Moro guerillas. In fact, these independent policies were tolerated in Kuala Lumpur because of the Minister’s consistent delivery of Muslim votes and his backing of the Federal government. Furthermore, his leadership allowed for state government engagement in the “integration” of Sabah within the context of (renewed) Federal emphasis of the essentially Malay character of Malaysia which involved, among other things, public emphasis on the symbols of Malay cultural identity, language and the promotion of Islam. In 1973, Islam was made the official religion of the state and Bahasa Malaysia its official language.

Despite the common cause of its ASEAN neighbour, Malaysia could not prevent the detailed discussion of the plight of the Muslim minority in the Philippines at the Fifth OIC Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1974. Yet the coincidence of domestic and external events continued to determine policy. By 1975, the Government had removed Tun Mustapha, on suspicion of his plans to secede the state of Sabah from Malaysia, while the Philippine government’s retraction of its claim to Sabah in 1977 must have been at least partial reward for the removal of Malaysian support for the Muslim rebels. The continued strength and refuge of the Moro separatists in Sabah, however, helped maintain suspicion over the state as a training ground and middleman for arms from Libya even while official Malaysian concern over developments in the Southern Philippines was repeatedly qualified as constituting humanitarian aid to Muslim refugees in Sabah.³⁶

Events in this period were to have lasting effect on the political situation in Sabah in the 1980s which was in turn to affect foreign policy. Official consensus that Malaysia's stability, both internal and external, as tied to the stability of her neighbours, has proved a stumbling block has been due precisely to the complex ethnic structure of Southeast Asian states and the attendant extra-national and regional loyalties and ties. The greater degree of importance attached to ASEAN solidarity under the next Prime Minister, Tun Hussein Onn, was in part a reflection of such philosophy—ethno-religious ties that stretched across territorial boundaries required the maintenance of external security for internal needs in ASEAN nations.³⁷

Foreign policy under Tun Hussein Onn

The brief period of leadership under Hussein Onn, from 1976 to 1981, represented for the most part continuity in foreign policy thinking on neutralization, although deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union also appeared to signal an automatic shift to improving relations with the West.³⁸ The new Malay leadership was faced with repeated political crises throughout 1976 and 1977 with the main thrust of opposition coming from within the Malay community itself. The tensions within UMNO over the revelation of pro-Communist tendencies within the highest levels of Malay leadership coupled with the imminent split in the Malay political community over internal PAS troubles and its subsequent withdrawal from the BN, indicated the challenge to the ruling party's mantle of protection of the Malay community and its leadership of the country. The burgeoning Islamic revival was another aspect that the Hussein Onn leadership had to contend with.

In fact, Government strategy was basically a continuation of Tun Razak's pragmatic initiatives: the "importance of Islam as a binding force" was milked for Malaysian development in the material sense, through foreign policy. Identified as a growing source of loans and investment capital for Malaysia, relations with the "oil powers" were upgraded, to underscore the Prime Minister's belief that Islam was indeed capable of bringing about prosperity and progress. Such ties were actively sought and provided substantial resources for the Third Malaysia Plan with wide publicity for loans and agreements signed with countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.³⁹

OIC participation itself was advantageous because of the aid that was extended through its component body, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which served as a potential conduit for investments from private and institutional investors from West Asian member countries. The deployment of such aid towards states such as Trengganu, Kedah and Kelantan where PAS held significant influence was often appropriately publicized election material, the implementation of development projects described as serving as bastions against those who were "anti-Islam". The targeting of a good portion of this finance towards specifically Malay development was also stressed with the reminder that Malaysia was viewed as a favourable investment climate because of its political stability.⁴⁰

Admittedly, material benefits were not the only rewards of “brotherly ties”. At a time when the Malaysian government was committed to the domestic growth of religious infrastructure, it was important that the financial resources for such growth would be available. To this end, official missionary activity—the construction of mosques, programmes intended for the spread of Islam, the expansion of religious education and efforts directed at the welfare of Muslims, attracted large sums of money for their fulfilment from wealthy international sources, particularly the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia.⁴¹

The Government’s attention to spiritual as well as material progress was a theme consistently highlighted at the annual international Quran reading competition which Malaysia began to host from 1969, bolstered by praise from the established centres of religious learning such as Saudi Arabia, for efforts at ensuring the prominence of Islam in everyday life and through the efforts of its leaders.⁴²

Malaysian commitment and consistency throughout the three administrations was most apparent in support of the Palestinians. Both Tun Razak and Hussein Onn consistently referred to this commitment as heads of state and in their roles as UMNO Presidents. By 1977, all Malaysian trade, direct and indirect, with Israel had been prohibited through the Customs Prohibition Act passed by Parliament.⁴³

In effect then, any Islamic element in foreign policy remained only one part of Malaysia’s external identity and rather than encompassing any Islamic principles as such, it simply signified improved relations with other Muslim countries. Leadership, training and attitude of the three Prime Ministers and of the foreign policy elite partly explain this trend, but UMNO’s nationalist philosophy above all else meant that if any ideology played a dominant part, it was that of non-alignment.

Despite pressures from PAS (and to some extent from within UMNO), Islam remained mostly a symbolic factor in foreign policy. Its promotion after 1969 was partly related to domestic imperatives for the promotion of a Malay nationalist identity and partly to developments in the larger Muslim world. One study of the role of Islam in Malaysian foreign policy in the period prior to 1976 concluded that apart from the issues of Palestine and Israel “Islam appears to affect Malaysian foreign policy only to the degree that it predisposes policy makers in favour of other Muslim states when such an attitude would not run counter to the Malaysian interpretation of the Federation’s national interest”.⁴⁴ By the end of the 1970s however, the dynamic growth of Islamic consciousness among its Malay-Muslim electorate and the greater variety and depth of influence through the global resurgence of Islam, was to affect these foreign policy attitudes and to forge a new interpretation of what in fact constituted Malaysian “national interest”.

THE EXPANSION OF THE MALAY UNIVERSE

Even as successive governments monopolized the display of a religious character in foreign policy, external contact was increasingly also the purview of the general

Malay-Muslim population. Although limited, numbers of Malay-Muslims had enjoyed forms of exchange across territorial boundaries for centuries. The fact that Islam was spread to Southeast Asia primarily through trade was one indication of contact between the Malay Peninsula and the wider Muslim world. Early commercial ties between traders and missionaries were gradually supplemented by more extensive contact through prolonged periods of exchange via opportunities for education at religious centres of learning in the Middle East and India. Through such contact, Malay society was kept abreast of important shifts and developments in Islamic thinking in these regions. In particular, Reformist shifts at the turn of the century were to have their impact on intellectual thinking about Islam in Malaya through such contact.

While the traditional deference of religious authority to the political elite in Malaysia, as in other *Sunni* Muslim societies, allowed for the consolidation of more conformist opinion on international relations and the place of Muslims within it, the monopoly of traditional social exchange across national boundaries was gradually to be supplanted. The deference of religious authority of the *ulama*, for instance, was to help consolidate the idea of the nation and the emergence of nationalism as a popular ideal for Muslims struggling to free themselves from colonial rule. Ideas of pan-Islamism and Arab nationalism had also enjoyed a measure of popularity and influence in Muslim intellectual circles in colonial Malaya as Reformist thinking in the 1920s and 1930s had reflected an affinity for such ideas. This was also occasioned by wider opportunities for Malays to travel.

In the post-colonial and post-Independence periods, dissension and debate among Muslims in Malaysia over the framework and agenda of international society was to emerge as larger numbers of people gained greater access to developments in the outside world. Even while the Government was attending to an official Muslim identity in foreign relations, the increasing exposure of Malay-Muslims to the wider Islamic world and its networks precipitated by global Islamic events, began to set the pace for future policy. Indeed, it was eventually this universalist exposure that would help challenge the narrow conception and expression of Malay-Muslim identity. Parallel developments, in terms of international exchange, occurring at the less official level, were also increasingly expanding the Malay universe into membership of a community that transcended the particularistic local and regional domain. Even on the periphery of the Islamic world and despite their numbers, Muslims in Malaysia were, by the decade of the seventies, beginning to feel a part of the impending religious, intellectual and, in particular, political developments of the Middle East. Overall, such developments were reflections of the changing socio-economic structure within Malay society, coupled with the global resurgence of Islam which inevitably worked simultaneously to raise awareness of membership within a larger community and eventually to pressure the Government.

This was partly, if indirectly, a result of governmental policies instituted after 1969. Muslim intellectual influence on the political life of Malays had begun at the turn of the century but international contact and the dissemination of ideas

gained from such contact was essentially handled by a Malay-Muslim religious elite. While such influences may have continued at a steady pace, the vast structural changes that occurred after 1969 were to accelerate and expand Malay-Muslim linkage and exchange with the Muslim world more numerous, more diversely and more directly. Events in the external Muslim world which engaged Muslim sentiments were to have an equal impact on the expanding Malay-Muslim universe.

Powerful symbolic “rites of incorporation” for Muslims everywhere were, as James Piscatori argues, induced by a series of international events in the Middle East which left Muslims in a deep sense of spiritual and intellectual malaise. The defeat suffered by the Arab nations in the Six Day War in 1967, the consequent loss of the holy city of Jerusalem and the burning of the Al-Aqsa mosque in 1969 represented the culmination of what were perceived as centuries-long setbacks and humiliations to Islam. Common Muslim outrage at Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and their belief in Israeli responsibility for the burning of Al-Aqsa, however, also made for stronger co-religionist identification. The imperatives of unity in the face of this was in fact a theme carried through Islamic discourse in the decade of the seventies serving, at least in part, to support global Islamic revivalism. Global identity that dramatically affected Muslim self-perception be it Malaysian or Middle Eastern was thus signalled by the Egyptian offensive against Israel, by a landmark Muslim youth conference in Libya and by the OPEC oil price war that shifted the balance of power to the oil-producing countries. The “oil revolution” in the early 1970s enabled more than explained the strength of Islamic revivalism, which was more frequently concerned with the dilemmas of Islamic societies commonly facing continued problems of social and political development and modernization. On the Malaysian side, this sense of common “struggle” was exemplified in the number of Malaysians volunteering their services to fight with the Arabs against Israel at the outbreak of the 1967 war.⁴⁵

Such shifts in attitude were also identifiable in the framework of inter-state relations. Unlike nineteenth century pan-Islamism which sought to restore Islamic unity, the Muslim states of the twentieth century sought to revive Islam as an international force within the concept of the solidarity of their separate states. The establishment of the OIC system, as its Charter pointed out in 1972, represented the commitment and renewed strength of Muslim states in achieving that end.

Increasing opportunities for religious travel and pilgrimage for larger numbers of Malay Muslims, intensified by the closing decades of the nineteenth century, were particularly instrumental in linking Malays to the Middle East. Radical improvements in communication in this period also enabled greater numbers of pilgrims to Mecca from Indonesia and Malaya. As administration of the *Hajj* first by the British colonial government and later by successive independent Malayan/Malaysian governments was greatly improved, more substantial numbers of Malays were able to perform the pilgrimage, helping significantly in encouraging and shaping a sense of religious universalism. Although the majority of travellers spent a limited time there, this was balanced

by the fact that improved finances also meant that greater numbers of Muslims could travel to and stay on in the renowned religious centres of learning in Mecca and Cairo for a time. Their exposure to the intellectual and political renovation of Islam and of anti-colonial nationalism in this period allowed students from Malaya to gradually acquire new language and ideas with which to oppose colonialism in their own societies as well as determine their disadvantaged position from within it.⁴⁶

Clearly, the strength of any sort of Muslim unity or pan-Islamic sentiment lies in the communication and exchange of experience in faith. Historically, the *Hajj* or pilgrimage has served this function, as a medium of intercourse and a bond of unity. Indeed, as perhaps the most central event in the Muslim calendar which gathers together so many Muslims from so many different parts of the world, the *Hajj* appears to offer great potential beyond religious duty. Although the nature and length of the pilgrimage have changed vastly the greater numbers of Malaysians travelling to Mecca must at least contribute towards a more acute sense of membership within an important global community.

Enhanced state supervision of the *Hajj* by independent Malaysian governments has been one of the most important developments in Malaysia's post-colonial history. For the majority of Malays, religious induction and education were largely restricted to the domains of the village *pondok* (Islamic boarding school), under the supervision of the local *ulama*. Positive official support for, and administration of, the *Hajj* by the Federal government from 1957 and by a centralized body, the *Lembaga Urusan dan Tabung Haji* (LUTH) since 1969 helped gradually create a centralized, more uniform religious experience for Malaysian Muslims, while the pilgrimage served as a means of exposure to the external Muslim world. The importance of this is reflected in the fact that Malaysian pilgrims were the most numerous *Hajj* performers: since 1947, fourteen times the numbers from India and twelve times the numbers from Indonesia.⁴⁷ In the postwar period and particularly since 1969, *Hajj* came to provide an overt means for Muslim self-identification and improvements in its administration, read as concrete signs of Government concern for Malay interests and Malay progress. As such it helped shape a Malay-Muslim identity within the national context.⁴⁸

What is more, as an indirect effect of the New Education Policy greater numbers of and more importantly younger Malaysians now had far more opportunities for contact with Muslims from outside the country, even the region, allowing for greater varieties of religious discourse and interpretation affecting the Muslim world, not entirely removed from the political. The clearest example of this was perhaps the popularity of religious contact and association among Malaysia's overseas students.

The global Islamic resurgence was to see its impact on Malaysian society in the second half of the 1970s primarily through the popularity of *dakwah*. While the Government could defend its domestic record on the promotion of Islam, initially, it lacked any suitable response to (or even control of) the rapid multiplicity of transnational influence and activities of these youth and religious

movements. Curtailment at any rate might have proved injurious to the Government's own image. While ideas and developments in the Middle East have historically contributed to Malay re-evaluations of society, the channels through which post-1969 revivalism was communicated to Malay society were greatly expanded—pilgrims, students, international organizations, literature, the media, diplomatic activities and visitors. Indeed, a non-governmental institutional and infrastructural basis for world-wide Islamic solidarity had also been growing since the late 1960s.

The decade of a global revivalism also saw the birth of international organizations such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), the Saudi-based *Rabita al-Alam al-Islami*, the Pakistani-based *Muktamar Al-Alam Al-Islami* and the London-based International Commission on Muslim Minorities, organizations which were increasingly concerned with the international revival of Islam as a means to secure solutions to problems such as the plight of Muslim minorities and to the Palestinian problem. As such, they challenged the legitimacy of the contemporary order of global powers and governments and their conduct of international relations more directly. Additionally, the emergence of leaders such as Muammar Gaddafi of Libya who were committed, by self-proclamation, to advancing a more radical change in the global power structure and to the international advancement of Islam—allowed for will, effort and vast amounts of finance in the powerful promotion of such solidarity.⁴⁹

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF DAKWAH

Malaysians were not isolated from such global trends. Government apprehension over the actual or potential influence of foreign ideologies on Malay-Muslim students abroad (particularly in the Middle East) had already been articulated in the late 1960s, especially in terms of the threat posed by any dissension by the religiously educated against the Government's central plan of Malay modernization and development through the New Economic Policy⁵⁰

The Middle East was not, however, the only place in which Islamic ideals were enjoying a renaissance. In part, as a result of better communication and the greater movement of peoples, the centres of ideological debates and sources of inspiration have diversified with Islamic centres of prominence flourishing also in Western capitals. The transmission of ideas from such traditional sources as India, Pakistan and Indonesia also stimulated a good ideal of Malay-Muslim intellectual activity. The potential and scope for Islamic associational activity through *dakwah* by many of the Malaysian student and youth movements was in fact borrowed from the Indonesian experience of Islamic peripheralization through the dominance of secularized party politics.⁵¹

ABIM's formation in 1974 was a case in point. Ideas and interpretations from Indonesian sources aided the movement in its earliest phases of growth and established strong bonds between revivalist movements in both countries, co-operating through mutual participation and exchange in seminars and

conferences (for instance, the Malaysian student movements of ABIM and PKPIM (*Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-pelajar Islam Malaysia*—National Association of Muslim Students Malaysia) were particularly close to the *Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia* (the Indonesian Students Movement))—a spirit of pan-Islamism grafted on to a form of pan-Malay exchange.⁵²

A major strand of ABIM ideology itself was its commitment to Islamic internationalism through “close co-operation and association based on Islamic principles” in resolving problems in all fields of development encountered by all Muslims. Declaring its fate as inseparable from “brother Muslims the world over” and depicting the “suppression and cruelty done unto Muslim minorities as unpardonable acts” directed at “weakening and destroying the Muslim community (as contradicting the UN Declaration on Fundamental Human Rights)”, the organization pledged full support for “the struggle” of Muslims everywhere to achieve “justice and freedom to practise the Islamic way of life”.⁵³

Importantly, the international acclaim that it received from several Muslim countries gave its position added significance in national politics. ABIM was by 1980 reported to have established links with numerous Muslim organizations overseas (including the Islamic Foundation of the United Kingdom, the *Aishah Bawany Wakaf* of Pakistan, the *Muhammadiyah* Youth of Indonesia and the *Rabitah al-Alam al-Islami* of Saudi Arabia) while its President, Anwar Ibrahim, had built up an important reputation in foreign circles (including non-Muslim international organizations), was constantly invited to address Muslim audiences abroad and was personally known to a number of personalities on the Islamic intellectual circuit. By 1979, he had participated actively and at high level in the Islamic Federation of Student Organizations (IIFSO), WAMY, the Institute of Islamic Thought, the International Islamic Assembly, the Asian Youth Council, the World Assembly of Youth and as Special Advisor on Youth Affairs to the United Nations.⁵⁴

ABIM’s media arm, *Risalah*, accorded great attention to Islamic developments outside Malaysia—issues such as the fate of oppressed Muslim minorities in the Soviet Union, China, Thailand and the Philippines, the Palestinian struggle and the renaissance of the Muslim world and the means for advancing this. Indeed, its banning was advocated and defended as necessary by the Government because its coverage of issues implicitly constituted “interference in the domestic affairs of other countries, in particular regional neighbours” and posed “a threat to national security”.⁵⁵

Islamic revivalism among students overseas also took its impetus from other international sources. The global growth of *dakwah* as a channel for the dissemination of Muslim ideas and the re-education of Muslims, meant that Malaysian students located at Western centres of learning were also incorporated into revivalist activity. The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), for instance, was seminal in instilling a sense of Islamic consciousness through its organized orientations and conferences where Malay students came into contact with Muslims from other parts of the world.⁵⁶

Some of the most widespread influences among the *dakwah* movements within the student population abroad, were those of the more radical *Ikhwan Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood) from Egypt and the *Jamaat-i-Islami* from Pakistan who were concerned with the establishment and supremacy of the *Shariah* in their own countries. Others, such as *Suara Islam* (Islamic Voice) and the Islamic Republic Committee (IRC) were the creations of Malaysian student populations abroad and articulated more radical ideas and more aggressive denouncements of the government's "unIslamic" character.⁵⁷

Agitation also existed over the core of Malaysian identity and increasing articulation given to a preferred national history that favoured a pre-colonial Islamic past as glorious, vital and independent with the logical conclusion therefore that a return to such Islamic dynamism would spell spiritual and material success for Malaysia.

The growth of transnational *dakwah* activity also clearly posed a problem for the Malaysian government alarmed by the "confusion" created among Malaysian Muslims through "imported" missionaries whose approach and presentation of Islam conflicted with the administration of religion in the country. Indeed, Malays were warned that the failure to practise Islam "within the context of national development" could bring about their downfall either directly or indirectly.⁵⁸

The strength and growth in international recognition of such extra-Parliamentary and non-governmental organizations continued to challenge the domestic and external policies of the Malaysian government throughout the 1970s. Despite a renewed initiative to give attention to Malaysia's relations with Islamic nations in the Middle East and Africa "in line with the present international trend", it was clear that the government had yet to work out an appropriate response to the impact of international Islamic revivalism on Malay-Muslim society. For the most part, policy remained *ad hoc*, fragmented and primarily concerned with the pragmatic aspects of the revival.

The gulf between official Malaysian priorities and the imperatives of the revivalist movements was reflected at the First Asian Muslim Youth Seminar in 1977, organized to discuss contemporary issues facing Islamic communities in the Asia/Pacific region. In his opening address, the Prime Minister, Tun Hussein Onn, used the occasion to stress the welfare aspects of Islam's role in Malaysia while defending material gains made in the economy of the country, by citing its "Islamic" connections towards Malaysian development as well as Malaysia's pro-Arab policies in West Asia. A communique issued at the close of the Seminar, however, tackled issues such as Islam's opposition to all "Western" political systems based on socialism, communism, capitalism and nationalism, the role of Muslim women in developing societies, the need for the expansion of Islamic education and for consultation with Islamic scholars on development policy.⁵⁹

The growth of a national infrastructure that was non-governmental, influenced intellectually and materially, to some extent, by contact with co-religionist organizations abroad and committed towards the establishment of an Islamic state, provided a clear challenge to UMNO as a Malay-Muslim

organization and as the ruling party, forcing a review of its domestic attention to Islam and its image within the Islamic world.

This was reflected in the increased attention given to international Islamic issues at UMNO General Assemblies from about 1977, including the growth and “threat” of foreign religious missionaries (in particular from India and Pakistan)—the dangers of independent interpretations of Islam “borne of competition among Muslims both at home and abroad” were perceived as threatening “disunity, feuding, confusion and weakness for Muslims and their nations”. For its own part, UMNO “whose own fate determined the position of Islam and the Malays in Malaysia”, depicted itself as a “responsible” party whose “moderation” had brought it recognition not just from the other communities in Malaysia but from the whole world.⁶⁰

Although never themselves decisive, foreign policy issues increasingly played some part in national elections as well. PAS’s exit from the BN coalition had allowed for its re-immersion in international *dakwah*, renewing its agitation for greater Malaysian attention to the international flowering of Islam.⁶¹ The 1978 PAS manifesto, for example, highlighted foreign policy issues, calling attention to regional security, the Palestinian struggle, the Camp David Accords, the unity of the *umma* and the plight of Muslim minorities. The Israeli-Egyptian peace forged through the Camp David Accords had in fact provided some mileage as a foreign policy issue in domestic politics because of the opposition it received from most student and *dakwah* organizations, objecting to the Government’s studied non-partisan approach to the issue, despite the fact that the Accords had “betrayed the Palestinian people”.⁶²

Nor could UMNO allow its own youth section to appear uninvolved on the international Islamic circuit. In 1979, while attending the WAMY Conference, the President of UMNO Youth, pledged his organization’s efforts to contribute by whatever means possible in aiding Muslim youth.⁶³ In fact, a series of external events at the close of the 1970s contributed further to the growing sense of Malaysian Muslim connection to Islamic internationalism while seriously pressuring a redesign of official foreign policy due precisely to the way in which domestic politics was engaged.

THE IMPACT OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

The Iranian Revolution—the first mass-based non-Communist uprising in the twentieth century and the first Islamic revolution in modern history—was in fact viewed by many in the Muslim world as a portent of a glorious new era in Islam. The overthrow of the Shah and the tumultuous welcome that Ayatollah Khomeini received on his return to Iran in 1979, was widely celebrated in the Muslim world, but the fears in the Western world of the radical change this might herald for other Muslim countries (especially those of vital strategic interest) were mirrored by the measured and cautious response of many secular Muslim governments, including Malaysia.

In fact, the Iranian Revolution was only one indicator of a generally universal

revival of Islam as a major internal and international political force. Nevertheless, for many in the Islamic world, it represented, even if only symbolically, a triumphal apotheosis: the establishment of an Islamic state with an exclusive identity, based as its leaders claimed, on the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* and governed initially, to some extent at least, by the *ulama*.

Both UMNO and the Malaysian government's conspicuously silent response to the Revolution in fact enabled non-governmental Islamic groups to take the lead in promoting Malaysia's relationship to a global Islamic identity. WAMY's declaration of 16 March 1979 as "Solidarity Day", in commemoration of the "liberation of Iran", was observed by ABIM (its President as representative of WAMY for the Asia-Pacific region), organizing exhibitions, briefings and the distribution of leaflets explaining "the struggle of Muslims in Iran". Although many ABIM leaders were to later publicly distance themselves from the Revolution, it was clear that in its initial stages, particularly in terms of international Muslim pride, it provided an important impetus and encouragement for *dakwah* groups and for PAS revitalization through its new and younger membership.⁶⁴

Indeed, the Government did not hazard a comment on events in Iran until some eight months later, when the Foreign Minister, Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen, announced that relations between Malaysia and the Islamic Republic of Iran would continue in the manner of "business as usual", describing the Revolution, somewhat ironically, as an "internal matter".⁶⁵ Caution on the part of the Hussein Onn Administration towards such revolutionary changes must in fact be understood within the coincidence of significant social unrest within Malaysia, partly of a religio-ethnic nature. The desecration of Hindu temples by Islamic vigilantes, the attack on a police station by an Islamic group and a significant peasant demonstration against impoverishment in the state of Kedah (which the government claimed had been instigated by PAS and other Islamic groups), also served to present public images of a stereotypical "fundamentalist" Islam on the rise in Malaysia. These developments, attributed to "fanatical fringes" of the *dakwah* movement elicited a reiteration by UMNO's Deputy President, at the UMNO General Assembly in 1978, of the party's duties and special responsibilities in ensuring that Malaysia's "creditable religious record remain unblemished".

Indeed, official reaction to the Iranian Revolution must also be understood within the context of general international anticipation, at the time, that such events might be replicated elsewhere. The Malaysian government's sensitivity to such anxiety and its image in international (not just Islamic) circles, held some influence over its subsequent response.⁶⁶

For its silence, however, the Government and UMNO paid the price of independent initiatives by organizations such as ABIM. The movement's support for the Revolution was underlined by Anwar Ibrahim's meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini and his participation fifteen months later at an international forum on the subject of American interference in Iran. While defending support for "the spirit of the Revolution and Iranian aspirations to establish Islamic justice", any ABIM encouragement for similar revolutionary developments in

Malaysia was denied. Significantly, from the organization's perspective, the Government's lack of elucidation on such major international Islamic events necessitated ABIM's dissemination of "true" information, in order that Muslim people would not condemn events in Iran. According to its Vice-President, Siddiq Fadhil, consistent official reference to the Revolution as "Iranian" rather than as "Islamic" belied its prejudice.⁶⁷

While other *dakwah* movements such as the *Jemaat Tabligh* believed that individual faith and piety were better avenues to Islamization than revolution, overt support was forthcoming from movements like PAS and many of the student organizations at home and abroad, expressed in Islamic and anti-colonial terms: the Islamic revolution was one that proved that even superpowers could be defeated.⁶⁸

Indeed, while post-revolutionary Iran was to elicit a more complex reaction and some degree of scepticism from those within the *dakwah* movements, it also served, in its earliest phases, as a source of inspiration and renewed confidence in terms of its potential. In pursuing its efforts at disseminating "true information" in Malaysia about the Revolution and its relevance to the Islamic world at large, ABIM hosted a number of visiting Iranian *ulama* who addressed public audiences in Malaysia. In fact, the presence and role of foreign missionaries in Malaysia had also become a matter of some debate between the Government and ABIM who insisted that the responsibility of the *ulama* towards Islam could not be restricted by borders, nations or continents.⁶⁹

The perception of a threatening momentum was reflected seven months after the Revolution in Dr Mahathir Mohammed's (then Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy President of UMNO) address to the UMNO Assembly in 1979 which took the theme of the relationship between Islam, UMNO and Government goals. Launching an implicit attack on the "extremities" of a "traditionalist" Islam, on PAS and on revolutionary Iran, Dr Mahathir redefined UMNO's overall struggle as one concerned with both the material and the spiritual spheres, whose solidarity had elevated the position of Islam in the country despite having to share power with other ethnic communities and had gained recognition from other Islamic nations. Indeed, whatever changes were wrought by time, only UMNO's "protection" could "save and improve the Malays, the religion and the Malaysian nation".⁷⁰

Suspicion however remained over the Government's apparent concurrence with Western attitudes over the Revolution. The issue of the seizure of the American embassy and the taking of American hostages by Iranian revolutionary guards in Tehran, was formally perceived by the Malaysian government as a contravention of the principles of international relations, although any American attempts to release the hostages by force were also considered a violation of Iran's sovereignty and therefore unsupportable. Indeed, when pressed on its position, the Malaysian Government underlined the complexity of the issue, and maintained that it could not simply act on the broad basis of OIC co-operative principles between Islamic countries; nor was this simply a matter of whether Malaysia prioritized its relations with the US over

those with Iran. Such issues, it was argued, had to be determined by their particular circumstances.⁷¹

This official reserve and impartiality were however distrusted by ABIM, PAS and many of the student movements which were particularly critical of the Malaysian media's primary validation of "foreign media and analyses", its "blind" replication of "biased" Western coverage of the Revolution and of the issue of the hostages, thus misleading the Malaysian public. A student representative at the UMNO Assembly in 1980 expressed such regret because "as part of the Islamic community, we should support the objectives of the Iranian Revolution in order that an Islamic country might be able to establish its policies in accordance with that of Islamic law".⁷²

THE MUSLIM WORLD IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The Revolution heralded other developments in the Muslim world that demanded the attention of the Malaysian Government, a challenge that its rivals were eager to endorse. In popular Muslim conception the 22 November 1979 was to be the critical turning point, heralding a dynamic new era for Islam with the commencement of the fifteenth century in the Islamic calendar. While Islam's initial passage through seven centuries of civilizational grandeur had been succeeded by decay and decline, the contemporary revivalist spirit was perceived as a reflection of divine design through the emergence of a prophesized third glorious era for the religion. In Malaysia, as in Muslim countries around the world, this universal reinvigoration of Islam was unanimously heralded.

A series of dramatic events was, however, to turn such anticipation into anxiety as to exactly what the new age heralded. The occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979 by a dissident politico-religious group initially met with an uncertain response from Malaysian authorities as well as from PAS and other *dakwah* organizations. As speculation grew over the Iranian origins of the dissident group, however, the Government officially declared the occupation as extremist and "deviationist" (after studying reactions from the rest of the Muslim world, particularly that of Saudi Arabia itself).⁷³

An important spin-off of these global Islamic celebrations was the impetus it gave to Islamic movements around the world, particularly non-governmental organizations like ABIM and PAS in Malaysia. Although both were nationally well established and had maintained links with the rest of the Muslim world for some time, the period and its context of activity provided an important platform for the articulation and exercise of their roles as *dakwah* movements and organizations committed to the establishment of "truly Islamic" governments. This brought them timely international validation which inevitably reflected on their status domestically.

An example of such recognition was an invitation extended to PAS and ABIM to the International Islamic Congress for the Liberation of Muslim Lands in London in 1979, organized by the Islamic Council of Europe. It provided the opportunity for their participation as representatives of Malaysia, at an international forum of major importance at a strategic time within the Muslim

world, strengthening their international reputations and links and the association of their cause with that of Islamic internationalism. For PAS, this was proof of its status, not just as a Malaysian political party but as a “representative, committed and established” Islamic movement, accorded recognition by the world-wide Islamic community. While Muslims formed the membership of many international organizations, the Congress was distinguished by the fact that only those bodies that “received Islam as a way of life and wanted Islam to govern” were invited. Information on PAS was meanwhile also being disseminated to the embassies of Islamic countries in Malaysia and to foreign Islamic organizations because the international recognition of PAS as “an Islamic medium” was considered “vital”.⁷⁴

The themes of internationalism and the spirit of global struggle were pursued further at the Party’s twenty-fifth General Assembly in 1979, with delegates calling for the pursuit of a more aggressive foreign policy to promote PAS’s cause. Indeed, the President’s twenty-six-page address made extensive reference to foreign policy issues emphasizing support for the Revolution in Iran, the struggle of the Palestinians, the Islamic model of Pakistan and the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. Perhaps in response to the Government’s continued efforts at underlining the differences between Malaysia’s *Sunni* Islamic tradition and that of the Iranian *Shi’ia*, a specific resolution (which gained unanimous support from party delegates) called for support for Islamic movements anywhere in the world, “irrespective of the branch of Islam they represent”. Regret and concern were also expressed over the Government’s inaction on the question of the fate of Muslim minorities in India, Burma and other Asian and African countries.⁷⁵

It appears that the persistent distinction in Islamic discourse between the status and role of Islamic movements and that of governments was having a deleterious effect on UMNO’s image as a Malay and therefore Muslim party. In 1979, an eighteen-man UMNO delegation was reportedly despatched to Libya and Pakistan in a move to “wrest the support of Middle Eastern governments away from opposition politicians and Islamic movements” who had through their “bad propaganda, cultivated a reputation for UMNO as being anti-Islamic”. Indeed, while relations at the inter-governmental level were good these ties were not on a par with party to party contacts due largely to UMNO’s previous neglect of such links. It is significant that the move was represented as part of new strategy drawn up by second-generation leaders within UMNO—Dr Mahathir Mohammed (Deputy Prime Minister), Tengku Razaleigh (the Finance Minister), Datuk Musa Hitam (the Education Minister) and Encik Ghafar Baba (a long-standing member of the UMNO Supreme Council)—and was portentous of the change in foreign policy that would be initiated under the Mahathir Administration.⁷⁶

It was clear that by the end of the decade, Malaysian foreign policy had to address seriously the international resurgence of Islam not only because of its global impact but due also to the manner in which it engaged domestic Islamic movements both within and without the electoral process. The Foreign Minister’s address at a colloquium on regional diplomacy for the 1980s suggested these new priorities and in outlining Malaysia’s basic foreign policy

objectives accorded Malaysia's relations with the Islamic world a higher official priority. This was claimed to be supported by the Government's long-standing espousal of Islam as a universal "moral force" and its recognition of Islamic solidarity as constructive in the creation of a more equitable international economic order.⁷⁷

THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 produced universal Muslim outrage, but the question of Malaysia's support for the *Mujahideen* was avoided for some time and when it was announced, appeared to be predicated on other principles.

In fact, when first questioned on Malaysia's official stand on the "Islamic struggle" within Afghanistan, the Government response emphasized honouring the principle of non-interference, but the Soviet invasion itself made the challenge to that very principle most apparent. While studiously avoiding the issue of vocal support or aid to the *Mujahideen*, Malaysia's condemnation of the invasion, its withdrawal from the Moscow Olympics scheduled for 1980 and its offer of humanitarian and moral support were underlined as measures in accordance with the international community's actions, in particular, those of other Islamic countries. In fact, Malaysia avoided extending recognition to the *Mujahideen* for some time, arguing that it was not bound to observe all resolutions taken by the OIC for the severance of ties between its member countries and the Soviet Union.⁷⁸

However, the lack of direct material support to the *Mujahideen*, the absence of trade sanctions, continued diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and the general lack of a clear programme of action by the Malaysian Government against both the invasion and Babrak Kemal's "anti-Islamic" government were heavily criticized by PAS as displaying the negative attitude of the Government towards Islamic solidarity. For its own part, PAS claimed that it had displayed full and consistent support, hosting a number of visiting *Mujahideen* delegations in the period 1979–1980. Indeed, in February 1980, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was quick to contradict a local newspaper report claiming evidence of the Government's lack of sympathy for the *Mujahideen* cause. Allegations of the Foreign Minister's alleged refusal to meet with two Afghan visitors was criticized as a misrepresentation of Malaysia's official stand.⁷⁹

Independent gestures of support were also organized by ABIM. A *ceramah* (informal lecture) reportedly attended by some 5,000 people turned into an anti-Soviet rally that threatened "direct, aggressive action on Soviet interests" by the Islamic community in Malaysia and led to a five-man ABIM delegation meeting with the Soviet Ambassador to convey a protest note. Such action gained further support from a seminar on the concept of *zakat* organized by the National Council for Islamic Affairs, the Federal Territory Islamic Religious Department and the Selangor Religious Council who called on the Malaysian Government to immediately allocate special donations to Muslim guerillas in Afghanistan.

Anwar Ibrahim, as ABIM's President, was also reported to have visited the Afghan border to convey a collection of M\$50,000 to the rebels and gained additional information to increase pressure on the Malaysian Government to send troops and recommend the availability of Malaysian volunteers to fulfil these duties. Such dissent from the official line was buttressed by the articulation of opposition to Malaysia's position from other political parties as well.⁸⁰

Despite these criticisms, the Government insisted that further steps would only be taken in consultation with the UN and the OIC. In fact, the Afghan issue had surfaced only a year after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the Government had every interest in drawing a common denominator between the two events: that of aggression, intervention and manipulation of a small country by a big power which could only be resolved politically, preferably via the international community and through the establishment of neutral governments in both instances.⁸¹ Nevertheless, global and domestic perception of the purely Islamic nature of the resistance in Afghanistan, increasingly forced the Government into a defensive position over its support for Islamic causes and movements, even of its authenticity as an Islamic movement itself, clearly reflected in parliamentary debates.⁸²

ABIM was equally attentive to issues involving Muslim minorities as demonstrated by its condemnation of "fanatical Hindu aggression" in India in 1980, echoed by PAS at its General Assembly in the same year. Demanding a response from the Indian authorities ABIM, in a protest note to the Indian ambassador to Malaysia, also urged the Malaysian government to use "its authority and influence to press the Indian government to guard the freedom of religion and the sanctity of Islam" there. Although the Indian ambassador maintained that the issue was "an internal matter", his two-hour meeting with ABIM leaders over the issue is illustrative of the influence and stature that the organization had come to enjoy in foreign affairs. Indeed, Malaysian foreign policy was by now under outright attack from both PAS and ABIM, as being patently "un-Islamic", an issue discussed at PAS's 1980 General Assembly.⁸³

As events from the external Muslim world increasingly impinged on Malay-Muslim society, toleration for such independent foreign policy manoeuvres grew limited. The introduction of the Societies Act, early in 1980, in effect represented a move by the Government to secure its primacy over lobbying groups, both Islamic and otherwise, by attempting to curtail their international linkages. Subsequently, in October 1980, the Registrar of Societies banned ABIM's external links. The significance of this "threat" was further revealed by the Government's decision to install Religious Attachés at its embassies in a number of Western countries in order to advise Malaysian students on religious matters and to disseminate "true" information about events in Malaysia.⁸⁴

UMNO, for its part, defended its "difficult" position as a national party having to satisfy all needs and yet the only party able to "bind the Malay people into a nation that had begun to gain respect from the rest of the world". Yet, by the Government's own admission, Islamic dissidence within the country was

problematic to Malaysian foreign policy, the appeals made by local Muslim groups to overseas Islamic organizations and governments claimed as having damaged Malaysia's relations with the world Islamic community.⁸⁵

These fears were most apparent in Dr Mahathir's address (as Deputy Prime Minister) to the Third Islamic Summit in January 1981, which acknowledged the OIC's sole responsibility for "the entire *umma*", but emphasized that this could only be achieved through an abiding respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, underlining the need for Muslims to first accept that the foundation of their solidarity should be built by their governments: "Events after all had demonstrated how Muslim solidarity could be split when a particular group in a particular country preached anti-government feelings".⁸⁶

THE ASCENSION OF THE MAHATHIR ADMINISTRATION: A NEW STRATEGY IN FOREIGN POLICY

Upon assuming the office of Prime Minister in July 1981, Dr Mahathir Mohammed, rapidly initiated and articulated a redesign of Malaysian foreign policy priorities, announcing a formal ranking of relations in the order of: (1) ASEAN; (2) Islamic countries; (3) the non-aligned community; and (4) the Commonwealth. Although such priority had been implicit since his predecessor's Administration, Dr Mahathir symbolized his own attitudes by simultaneously downgrading relations with the West and expressing Malaysian foreign priorities as constituting a system of "concentric circles of interest" which were underlined by the sequence of his first visits abroad.⁸⁷

Throughout the 1980s, Malaysia increasingly (but selectively) sought to identify itself with international Muslim issues and as an activist member of the global Islamic community. Both Government and UMNO rhetoric increasingly referred to Malaysia as an Islamic nation and to UMNO itself as the third largest Islamic party in the world.

Scholarly attention has frequently been drawn to the dynamic and innovative role that Dr Mahathir has played in Malaysian foreign policy, noting that his preferences have significantly altered the direction of and even interests within Malaysian foreign policy.⁸⁸ In fact, Dr Mahathir's influence in foreign policy was evident as early as the mid-1970s when he carved out a dynamic role as Trade and Industry Minister and later as Deputy Prime Minister, increasingly assuming many of the duties that Tun Hussein Onn's frail health and unease in foreign affairs prevented him from carrying out. Together with Datuk Musa Hitam and Tengku Razaleigh, both then UMNO Vice-Presidents and Cabinet members, Dr Mahathir played a significant role in foreign policy decisions from about 1975, setting the stage for the style and substance of foreign policy eventually exercised under his own Administration.

Dr Mahathir's individual style and thinking is at least partially explained by his significantly different background (being more clearly removed from the aristocratic connections of his predecessors) and in his professional training in medicine rather than law. Indeed, his active opposition to Malaysia's early pro-

Western foreign policy and his credentials as one of the “young Turks” who sought to institute a more “Malay nationalist” identity for the country, appeared to confirm his own attitudes as an activist Third World leader.

Certainly, under his leadership there has been a stronger emphasis on the substantive results of relations rather than the exercise of a foreign policy based on concepts of traditional balance of power and spheres of interest and influence—a style of foreign policy more clearly linked with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, Malaysia’s longest-serving Foreign Minister, widely accepted as its primary foreign policy architect preceding Dr Mahathir. His intermittent service as Foreign Minister (for a total of three years) under the Mahathir Administration, while substantiating his influence in foreign affairs in this period, is generally understood to have been less decisive than Dr Mahathir’s.

LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN POLICY

Although each administration (and Prime Minister) has demonstrated a particular style and technique, Malaysian foreign policy has not been shaped by idiosyncratic determinants. In respect of Islam, the nature of foreign policy has been particularly responsive to changes within the domestic context of Malaysia, evidenced by marked distinctions between the first and second Malaysian administrations.

Although domestic changes were reflected in the evolution of Malaysian foreign policy, Islam did not, however, constitute a directing pressure in *altering* that policy. Greater attention was paid to an Islamic image but in specific instances where it might have mattered, Islam did not direct foreign policy along any systematically precise course for purely external purposes. Conversely, Malaysian administrations have displayed a tendency to employ an Islamic “element” in foreign policy, towards effecting a domestic function.

General patterns of continuity in Malaysian foreign policy and in perceptions of Malaysian security both internal and external may also be structurally explained. Significantly, for a period of eighteen years, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were one and the same man and the Foreign Ministry therefore reported directly to the Prime Minister. Although the Government of Malaysia has had a separate Foreign Minister since 1975, most Prime Ministers have continued to take a keen if not personal interest in foreign policy. In general, the Foreign Minister has always been more than a bureaucratic official and has concurrently held important political duties. Most Foreign Ministers have held a position either as UMNO Vice-President or as a member of the Supreme Council, the policy-making body of the party.

From all evidence available, the first Prime Minister, the Foreign Ministry and the Cabinet have seen eye to eye on most issues; the Ministry largely enjoying the respect of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister—an attitude it has largely reciprocated. This, in part, reflects the similarity in background and complementarity in skills of both political leaders and senior civil servants. Indeed, as Gordon Means has pointed out, top party officials and bureaucrats

often emphasize that there has generally remained a political-bureaucratic consensus in terms of policy viewpoint.⁸⁹

Despite this general continuity it would be a mistake to assume that the policy-making context has remained undynamic. Where policy differences have arisen, before 1969, they appear to have centred around the Tunku's personal predilection for Islam as a factor in Malaysian foreign policy, against the Foreign Ministry's attitudes. The fundamental changes initiated in Malaysian politics and government after 1969 were, however, to also affect the character of and the relationship between these policy makers. This applied most particularly to the Prime Minister, whose obligation to his political base was now considerably enhanced.⁹⁰

More significant here however is the fact that although the Foreign Ministry has continued to exercise the bureaucratic functions of foreign policy, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet have demonstrated a greater sensitivity towards the increasingly complex task of building and maintaining political support for all public policy.⁹¹ Islam has become vital to that process. The growing challenge that the ruling party has come to face within Malay politics, including its own factionalism, have drawn the attention of Dr Mahathir and his Cabinet towards exercising an Islamic direction in foreign policy and towards affecting this internal challenge.

Nor has the presence of Islam in foreign policy been a matter discussed between ethnic political elites. Although it has been exercised in a manner to accommodate the interests of non-Muslims, its role continues to be defined and determined by national Malay leadership, not by policy input or bargaining on the part of non-Malay political elites.⁹² Indeed, any Islamic element in Malaysian foreign policy is also rationalized as a *national* goal and much of the evidence presented here will demonstrate that the Malaysian national leadership's vision of a religious identity in foreign policy has encompassed the capacity for such policy to aid in the task of "nation-building", especially that of a poly-ethnic nation.

This state of affairs has not been determined solely by domestic changes but also by the dynamic changes within a modernizing Muslim world in general, by sense and process of global Islamic reassertion and by the capacity of such changes to feed into the domestic Malaysian context. The latter process has been facilitated further by a number of factors, including the growing capacity of non-governmental groups to engage in transnational Islamic relations, not the least of which has been the Government's own efforts at securing Islam as a factor in the State's identity. These internal and external contexts have enjoyed a particularly intensive and interactive relationship, serving as a dynamic towards the formulation and implementation of Malaysian foreign policy.

The Mahathir Administration, in particular, is symbolic of these changes. The dominance of the Prime Minister in the policy process and within the Cabinet is not new and has been a feature of Malaysian administrations since Independence. This is, in part, aided by the fact that his authority is not explicitly defined in the Federal Constitution. As is true of most parliamentary systems, Cabinet equals government but while the Prime Minister shares power with his ministers on many issues, including foreign policy, he has the final say.

However, the Mahathir administration has been distinctive in the fact that policy-making powers have increasingly been centralized under the Prime Minister's Office and by Dr Mahathir's strong desire for Malaysia to exercise a dynamic role both globally and regionally. From 1981 up to the present, then, Malaysian foreign policy has borne much of his personal stamp, while the centralization of power and policy making coupled with the increasing link between politics and government particularly after 1985 were also to have significant bearing on foreign policy choices.

The character of the Administration itself and its political appointees was also to reflect the net result of significant changes within Malay society. Many of Dr Mahathir's younger choices for office were increasingly better educated Malays from professional or business backgrounds. Many were increasingly to hold some kind of Islamic profile or credentials, particularly those appointed to the Prime Minister's Office. Within the Administration's first phase (1981–1986), both the Prime Minister and his Deputy played dynamic roles in foreign policy. In its second phase (1987–1990), while the Foreign Minister was a less dynamic personality, Dr Mahathir assumed the role of principal foreign policy architect. The current Minister, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi—an important second generation figure within UMNO leadership ranks—has played a relatively higher-profile role in that office.

As infra-Malay rivalry has become more complex and the context of Malaysian multi-ethnic society remains a reality, the leader of the ruling party and the Prime Minister must employ all possible instruments within his means to weld some sort of unity within his own party and community while being ever cognizant of the larger interests of his multi-ethnic population. In contemporary terms, in the face of the centrality of Islamic politics at home and of its global reassertion, the Mahathir Administration has sought to harness foreign policy to these needs.

NOTES

1. Johan Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Malaysia's Foreign Policy*, Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1983 and Marvin C. Ott, *The Sources and Content of Malaysia's Foreign Policy Toward Indonesia and the Philippines 1957–1965*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1971.
2. The Tunku remarked in Parliament in 1957 that “there would be trouble from (the Malays) if we said anything about the West Irian question, there would be trouble (from the Indians) if we said anything against India and there would be trouble (from Muslims) if we said anything about Pakistan”. Cited in John Dalton, *The Development of Malaysia's External Policies, 1957–1963*, DPhil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1967, p. 74.
3. See *Tunku Abdul Rahman's Speech to the Afro-Asian Islamic Organization Conference, 6 October 1970, Bandung, Indonesia*, Jabatan Penerangan, Kuala Lumpur, 1970; Ott, op. cit., p. 58; Ghazali Shafie “Elements of Malaysian Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs Malaysia (FAM)*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1969, pp. 11–14. In 1956, the Prime Minister directed a delegation of members of Parliament to tour Muslim countries “in order to interest them in the promotion of Islamic brotherhood

- or failing that, in the study of the possibility of bringing about closer co-operation among Muslim people”.
4. C.E.Morrison and A.Suhrke, *Strategies of Survival: The Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Smaller Asian States*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978, p. 142; Marvin C.Ott, op. cit., p. 71; Ibrahim Mahmood, *Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa Melayu* (A History of the Struggle of the Malays), Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1981, p. 704.
 5. Such was the intensity of dissension that the nationalist lobby within UMNO had organized independent foreign policy initiatives in their frustration with the Tunku's foreign policy: a Parliamentary delegation, led by the Alliance MP Dr Mahathir Mohammed, attended the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization Conference in Ghana, 1965. PAS opinion sought the annulment of agreements allowing the stationing of foreign troops. See N.J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980, p. 159. PAS Election Manifesto 1959, Section 2(d), as quoted in Funston.
 6. Marvin C.Ott, op. cit., pp. 71–72; Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 50. Despite acrimonious debate at home over the issue, official recognition was extended to Israel, “because she is a member of the United Nations” (*Suara Malaysia*, 3 September 1965) but after 1967 that support was denied because “to change the political status quo of the region through force of military might is an anachronism and militates against a cardinal tenet of the United Nations” (*Suara Malaysia*, 26 October 1967). Several UMNO branch resolutions urged this in order “to keep up the good name of Malaya among Muslim countries in the Middle East”.
 7. H.J.Widdowsen, *The Influence of Islam in the Formation of the Foreign Policy of Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia*, Phd. Thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1976, pp. 141–156; *Straits Times* (ST), 27 September 1965. Pakistan objected to the speech of the Malaysian representative at the Security Council of the UN over the issue and subsequently broke off diplomatic relations with Malaysia. Widdowsen notes the existence and influence of a pro-Indian section of Malay elite opinion that admired India's general policy of non-alignment, explaining such diplomatic support. Officially, Malaysia had consistently maintained its neutrality in the Indo-Pakistani dispute and it is likely that Pakistan was as much influenced by the Indonesian position during *Konfrontasi*.
 8. Johan Saravanamuttu, op. cit., p. 70.
 9. Chandrasekaran Pillay, *Protection of the Malay Community: The UMNO Position and Opposition Attitudes*, M Soc Sc Thesis, Universiti Sains Penang, 1974, p. 31; K.J.Ratnam, “Religion and Politics in Malaysia”, in Ahmad Ibrahim *et al.* (eds), *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985, p. 146.
 10. ST, 8 December 1966.
 11. Johan Saravanamuttu, op. cit., pp. 92–95; N.J.Funston, op. cit., p. 227. Britain's gradual withdrawal as a power from the East and its refusal to continue granting Malaysia military aid meant that Malaysia's territorial integrity at least, should have new defences.
 12. Cited in Saada Buang, *Islamic Issues of Interest to the Malays in Malaysia and Singapore since Independence (1957)*, MA Dissertation, National University of Singapore, 1985, p. 45; Abdullah Ahmad, *Tengku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy*, Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing Sdn.Bhd., 1985, p. 111.
 13. See Tunku Abdul Rahman's speeches to the Muslim Summit in Rabat, in *FAM*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1969, p. 18; the Afro-Asian Islamic Organization Conference, *New Straits Times* (NST), 17 March 1970; Abdullah Ahmad, op. cit., p. 119; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, *The Question of Palestine*, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, p. iv.

14. The Malaysian Government provided an office and a piece of land for use by Al-Fatah and dispatched some US\$10,000 towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency as aid for Palestinian refugees. Widdowsen, op. cit., p. 143. While the seizure of Jerusalem offended Malaysian religious sensibilities, the Malaysians saw no alternative but the unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories to pre-1967 lines, therefore expressing support for the fourteen point Resolution of 1967.
15. Ghazali Shafie, "Elements of Malaysian Foreign Policy", op. cit., p. 13 and "Malaysia's Stand on the Middle East Problem, June 29th 1967", *FAM*, Vol. 1, No. 6, September 1967, pp. 45–49.
16. "Prime Minister's Address At UN General Assembly", *FAM*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 1969, pp. 29–35. The speech dwelt on the importance of Islam in international relations, noting that Muslim solidarity would be something that the great powers would have to reckon with in the future.
17. Tun Razak's address to Parliament in *FAM*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1970, pp. 13–19, drew attention to the fact that both domestic and foreign policy would help to strengthen UMNO's position which were viewed as being synonymous with the achievement of social justice and national survival.
18. *ST*, 19 April 1971.
19. Article VIII of the OIC Charter states that all Muslim states are eligible to join the OIC through signature to it. See Abdullah al-Ahsan, *The Organization of Islamic Conference*, Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1988, Appendix A, pp. 127–134.
20. Mahathir Mohammed, *The Malay Dilemma*, Singapore: Times Books International, 1970, p. 33.
21. Morrison and Suhrke, op. cit., pp. 157–158; *FAM*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 24–25.
22. See "Elements of Foreign Policy" in *FAM*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1974, pp. 57–59; *Malaysian Digest*, 4 September 1972, pp. 2–3.
23. See Secretary-General of the Islamic Secretariat's speech in *NST*, 3 December 1971.
24. *Malaysian Digest*, Vol. 6, No. 9, 30 June 1974. Malaysia did not entirely ignore political issues which it felt were of vital importance: Tun Razak invited the PLO to attend the Conference, emphasizing the need for Muslim solidarity and opposition to Israel "at all costs".
25. Johan Saravanamuttu, op. cit., p. 147; *FAM*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1974, p. 48; *NST*, 24 March 1976; 25 May 1976. Six such agreements were signed in 1974 with Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Between 1970 and 1975, Malaysia's trade deficit with West Asia deteriorated from \$70 million to \$440 million.
26. *Malay Mail*, 3 March and 11 April 1974.
27. The PAS President, Datuk Asri, was appointed head of the National Religious Affairs Bureau, its Vice-President, Yusuf Rawa, appointed Malaysian Ambassador to Iran and another party leader appointed to Malaysia's team at the UN.
28. *NST*, 21 June. 5–6 August 1976; Jaihadi, "*Semangat '46, Semangat '76 Dalam UMNO*" (Spirit of '46, Spirit of '76) and Yahya Ismail, "Kemana Islam DiMalaysia?" in *Dailog*, October/November 1976, p. 8; pp. 43–45. The PAS presidential address to the General Assembly in 1976 noted that in the context of Islam's development in the region, survival against Communism was aptly described as Islamic survival, as nationalism was no longer an adequate fortification. Malays particularly needed to draw strength from the Islamic faith, making its spirit pervade all development sectors of Malaysia including security and administration. PAS leaders have perceived the absence of "Communists" within their party as exemplifying Islam's entrenched basis and its invulnerability in battling Communism.
29. "The Path of Violence to Absolute Power", Government of Malaysia White Paper,

- November 1968, cited in H.J. Widdowsen, op. cit., p. 159.
30. *NST*, 29 July 1975.
 31. Marvin C. Ott, op. cit., p. 90; *ST*, 4 June 1974. Asri maintained that PAS as an Islamic party should raise “sensitive” issues affecting Thai Muslims with the Thai government. The statement induced a protest march by Thai students and the demand for an apology from Asri and the Malaysian Government (which the Thais got) but the matter did not rest until Tun Razak sent a personal letter to the Thai Prime Minister.
 32. *NST*, 20 June and 26 July 1977. Such demands were repeatedly made by party delegates at the annual Assembly in 1977.
 33. *NST*, 5 August 1976. Prior to the launching of joint operations by the Malaysia-Thailand General Border Committee to control guerilla activities along their common border, the PAS Youth Chief, expressing grave concern over such security problems, urged the Government to firmly express its policies regarding the Muslim struggle in southern Thailand and to exercise caution in drafting a new border agreement with Thailand.
 34. *NST*, 26 July 1977. The President defended PAS’s vigilance over the fate of Muslim minorities in ASEAN at the 22nd General Assembly in the face of criticisms from delegates over its silence on the plight of Moro Muslims in the southern Philippines.
 35. This information is contained in a “top secret” memorandum drawn up by Thai National Security in 1978 and is cited in Surin Pitsuwan, “The Ethnic Background of Issues Affecting Bilateral Relations Between Malaysia and Thailand” in R. Guidieri *et al.* (eds), *Ethnicities and Nations*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, pp. 319–344.
 36. Resolution No. 18/5–P, The Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Kuala Lumpur, 21–25 June 1974 in Abdullah Ahsan, op. cit., pp. 100–101; *FAM*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 1974, pp. 148–149; *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat* (PRPDR), 31 March 1978, pp. 974–975. The OIC heeded Malaysian desire for diplomatic settlement of the issue within ASEAN structures (against Libyan preference for its internationalization), acknowledging in its final resolution the sovereign rights of the Philippines Government.
 37. Then Home Affairs Minister, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, quoted in Datar Kiran Kapur, *Malaysia: Quest for A Politics of Consensus*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983, p. 178.
 38. Deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union was partly explained by circumstances within UMNO (see fn. 48).
 39. *NST*, 24 February 1975, 13 August 1976, 21 January 1977, 17 September 1977; *PRPDR*, 23 March 1978, pp. 293–294. The Prime Minister’s first visit abroad, outside ASEAN, was to Saudi Arabia. In 1977, Malaysia obtained M\$193 million from the Saudi Fund for Development and concluded several important trade, technology and scientific agreements with Iraq. By 1978, total Arab loans to Malaysia stood at M\$329 million. Under the Third Malaysia Plan, Libya provided M\$25 million towards development projects while Saudi Arabia made a M\$200 million loan pact.
 40. *NST*, 23 August 1980; Trade and Industry Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohammed in *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Negara* (PRPDN), 19 April 1978, p. 326; Mohamed Abu Bakar, “Ulama, Oil and Electoral Politics”, *Ilmu Masyarakat*: 6, p. 37. In the election year of 1978, several joint venture projects in Trengganu with the UAE, M\$70 million for projects from the Abu Dhabi Development Fund, a M\$900 million dam project, a M\$42 million loan, five Malaysian development projects and three other projects with state development corporations, all with Kuwait were all widely publicized. By the end of 1977, M\$20 million of a total M\$93.3 million worth of loans by the Arab-Malaysian Development Bank had been given to Bumiputera individuals and companies.

41. *NST*, 3 July 1976, 8 September, 17 October and 16 November 1978; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 4, Nos 5 and 6, 1979. Malaysia has been commended by the World Muslim Congress for the propagation of Islam and the development of the Islamic world and Perkim the most successful beneficiary of this form of international funding with a gift of M\$12 million from Libya. In 1978, Kuwait pledged \$15,000 to the Perak State Religious Department and Saudi Arabia pledged M\$3.5 million for a proposed religious school.
42. The competition has been a useful venue for reiteration of the compatibility of Islam with Malaysia's goals of building a progressive society looking to development through science and technology. The theme of the 1976 competition for example was 'A Progressive Society Through Islam'. See the Saudi Arabian Education Minister's comments in *NST*, 16 November 1978.
43. *PRPDR*, 26 November 1980, p. 6257.
44. H.J.Widdowsen, op. cit., p. 152.
45. James Piscatori, *Islam in A World of Nation States*, Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986, p. 26; Clive Kessler, "Malaysia: Islamic Revivalism and Political Disaffection in a Divided Society", *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, No. 75, October 1980, pp. 5–11; *ST*, 2 June 1967.
46. J.Steinberg, et al., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 256.
47. Mary Byrne McDonnell, *The Conduct of Hajj from Malaysia and its Socio-Economic Impact on Malay Society: A Descriptive and Analytical Study, 1860–1981*, PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1986, p. 363. Between 1957 and 1969 the average annual number of Malay pilgrims was 5,427 rising to 9,741 between 1970 and 1979.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 391; 401; 597. As Islam came to be viewed as a major component of Malay cultural identity, the fusion of a political and individual need to symbolize this identity was located in the *Hajj*.
49. James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, op. cit., p. 27.
50. *Eastern Sun*, 9 May 1967; *ST*, 14 January 1972. The Malaysian government articulated fears of student exposure at religious centres of learning to political ferment and anti-Malaysian propaganda during *Konfrontasi*. Indeed, as potential "national leaders or revolutionaries" they should be "agents of change" for the modernization of rural society instead of reverting to "traditional" ways when returning to Malaysia.
51. Clive Kessler, op. cit., p. 4, who argues that *dakwah* (in its contemporary manifestation) was actually born of post-1965 Indonesian Muslim political proscription, inviting new strategies of social involvement and providing an appropriate and influential model for many Malaysian youth and student movements in Malaysia discouraged by the sacrifice of Islamic interests to party politics through UMNO and PAS's coalition in government after 1974.
52. Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1987, pp. 19–22; Hussin Mutalib, op. cit., pp. 61; 79–80.
53. See "Declaration on International Issues" in *The Revival of Islam in Malaysia—The Role of ABIM*, Kuala Lumpur, n.d.
54. Muhammed Abu Bakar, "Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 10, October 1981, p. 1048; *Watan*, 16 April 1982; J.Victor Morais, *Anwar Ibrahim: Resolute in Leadership*, Kuala Lumpur: Arenabuku, 1983, p. 21. He was a prominent figure in the demonstration against the Thai premier's visit to Malaysia in 1971, over Thai treatment of Muslim minorities and against US support of Israel in the 1973 war.
55. *PRPDR*, 20 November 1978, pp. 2504–2510; John Funston, "Malaysia" in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion*, London, Croom Helm, 1981, p. 176.

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56. Muhammed Abu Bakar, op. cit., pp. 1042–1043.
57. Zainah Anwar, op. cit., p. 91.
58. *NST*, 8 August 1977. According to the Deputy Home Affairs Minister, action was to be taken against many of these foreign visitors who entered Malaysia on social visit passes but were conducting missionary activities.
59. *Report on First Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah*, Kuala Lumpur, 24 February 1977, pp. 32–3; 233–239; *NST*, 7 February 1977. The Seminar was jointly organized by ABIM and WAMY with the co-operation of the Federal government, Pusat Islam (the Islamic Centre) and Perkim with thirteen countries represented and due to partial government sponsorship, given wide publicity before the event.
60. *Malay Mail*, 2 July 1977; Deputy President, Dr Mahathir Mohammed's speech in *Penyata UMNO 1978/79*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, 1979, pp. 361–368.
61. *Suara Islam*, January 1980, p. 7.
62. Paras 1 and 2 under Dasar Luar (Foreign Policy), "Agama, Bangsa dan Tanahair Yang Sejahtera" (Religion, Race and Country that is Peaceful), *Manifesto PAS 1978*, Pejabat Agung PAS, n.d.; *Readings in Islam*, No. 6, Third Quarter 1399/1979, p. 21; *PRPDR*, 30 November 1978, pp. 3385–3386. Anti-Camp David rallies were organized by *dakwah* movements in Malaysia.
63. *Watan*, 5 March 1979.
64. *ST*, 1 March 1979; PAS, *Kertas Muktamar Tahunan Ke-25*, Mesyuarat Jawatankuasa Kerja, Dewan Pemuda 1978/79, Pejabat Agung PAS, 1979, p. 6. PAS Youth urged the Malaysian government to recognize the new Islamic government in Iran after telegramming its own support to Ayatollah Khomeini.
65. *PRPDR*, 23 November 1979, pp. 10526–10527.
66. Interview with official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 9 June 1989.
67. "Kebangkitan Islam Mesti Menyeluruh" (Resurgence of Islam Must Be Universal), *Dewan Masyarakat*, July 1980, p. 18; President's address to the 1979 ABIM Assembly in *Ucapan Dasar Muktamar ABIM Sanawi ABIM ke-8*, Kuala Lumpur, n.d., p. 29; *Watan*, 25 January and 7 November 1980. In an interview, Anwar Ibrahim attempted to allay the fears of the authorities by likening ABIM's struggle to that of the Government's support for the Mujahiddeen in Afghanistan or the freedom movements in South Africa: "surely support for these movements did not imply support for all their actions".
68. Datuk Mohammed Asri, "Tiga Wajah Cabaran" (Three Kinds of Challenges), *Ucapan Dasar Muktamar PAS Ke-25*, 1979, Pejabat Agung PAS, p. 18.
69. *Watan*, 9 May and 7 November 1980; Editorial, *Utusan Malaysia*, 5 November 1980. At a press conference in ABIM offices, the Special Representative of the Ministry of Information of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed surprise and dismay that Malaysians did not know the "true situation" in Iran. ABIM had been campaigning for the Government to relax its control over foreign missionaries preaching in Malaysia. Heated debate broke out over an incident of a visiting Iranian *'alim* allegedly denouncing the Malaysian government in public but ABIM maintained that these *ulama* visited Malaysia of their own volition and in order to present the "true picture" of events in Iran.
70. *Penyata UMNO 1979/80*, Kuala Lumpur, 1980, pp. 386–390. Dr Mahathir referred to "those who prefer a religion with a system of clergymen who not only interpret the religious teachings but are also closer to God...who want to be the shadow puppeteers behind the scenes though others officially rule...to whom, what is happening in a Central Asian country where the government is under the thumb of a clergy empowered to mete out sentences...appeals tremendously".
71. *PRPDR*, 9 June 1980, p. 2016; 11 June 1980, pp. 2256–2257; *PRPDN*, 24 June 1980, pp. 1174–1175.
72. See for instance, "Revolusi Iran Dari Mata Media Melayu" (The Iranian Revolution

- in the Eyes of the Malay Media), *Dewan Masyarakat*, 15 October 1980, pp. 20–21; “Pergolakan di-Iran Membingungkan Barat” (Events in Iran Cause Anxiety to the West), 15 January 1980, pp. 22–23; *Watan*, 25 July 1980; *Readings in Islam*, No. 7, Fourth Quarter 1399/1979 focused two-thirds of its magazine on Iran, to counter the local press’s “shameless campaign of deceit and slander against the Islamic Revolution, appearing to be seized by a mortal fear of Islam”. A London UMNO Club representative reporting on *dakwah* activities among Malaysian students in England to the UMNO General Assembly, expressed hope for the local press’s future vigilance over news received from the “Jewish” media to ensure more “truthful” information on events in Iran to the Malaysian public.
73. *NST*, 25 November 1979.
 74. Datuk Mohammed Asri, “Tiga Wajah Cabaran”, op. cit., pp. 16–19; PAS, *Kertas Mukhtamar Tahunan Ke-25*, Pejabat Agung PAS, 1979, pp. 10–14; *Suara Islam*, No. 6, December 1980, p. 20. The Information Bureau of the party dispatched pamphlets (in both Arabic and English) describing the “history of the *ummah* and Islamic movements in Malaysia, of PAS, its policies, principles and organization.”
 75. Datuk Mohammed Asri, “Tiga Wajah Cabaran”, op. cit., pp. 21–23; *ST*, 11 September 1979; *Suara Islam*, No. 2, September 1979, p. 5; Resolution 4, *Deklarasi 17 Syawal 1399* (9 September 1979) in *Suara Islam*, No. 3, 21 November 1979, p. 4.
 76. See interview with senior UMNO official cited in *ST*, 21 October 1979.
 77. Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen, *Meeting the Challenge of Change, Fraser’s Hill*, 2 November 1979, Kuala Lumpur: External Information Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1979, pp. 3–5.
 78. *PRPDR*, 5 December 1979, pp. 11483–11484, 19 June 1980, p. 3091, 28 November 1980, pp. 6483–6486; *Malaysian Digest*, 15 January 1980, p. 8.
 79. *PRPDR*, 10 April 1980, pp. 436–452.
 80. See extensive debates in Parliament over the issue in *PRPDR*, 18 March to 10 April 1980, 26 November 1980 and 28 November 1980; *FAM*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 1980, pp. 56–57; *Suara Islam*, February 1980, p. 8; Morais, op. cit., pp. 14–15; *Perspective*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1979, p. 1; *Watan*, 25 January 1980; *NST*, 21 February 1980. Indeed, the ABIM President’s reported travel itinerary was illustration of the extensive nature of ABIM’s foreign network, scheduled to meet with Islamic representatives in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, before attending a WAMY Conference in Saudi Arabia.
 81. *PRPDR*, 18 March 1980, pp. 85–87, 24 March 1980, p. 630.
 82. *PRPDR*, 2 and 14 April 1980, pp. 1523–1524, 751–753; 28 November 1980, pp. 6484–6487.
 83. *Watan*, 4 and 19 September, 10 October 1980; *Suara Islam*, September 1980; interview with Anwar Ibrahim in *Dewan Masyarakat*, 15 July 1980, p. 21. ABIM was protesting the violence in Moradabad, India where the release of pigs into a mosque where thousands of Muslims were praying, allegedly by Hindu youths, caused the wounding of children and the arrest of 300 Muslims including the leaders of two large Islamic movements. ABIM launched a fund for the purposes of providing moral and material support to the Islamic community in India and called on Malaysian Hindu organizations to launch their own protests against the Indian government’s action via the Indian embassy in Kuala Lumpur.
 84. The Act, for instance, gave the Registrar of Societies ultimate power to deregister any group challenging (1) the Government, (2) Islam and other religions, (3) the National Language, (4) the special position of the Bumiputeras, and (5) the legitimate interests of the country’s other communities. Lobbying without official registration as a “political society” ran the risk of deregistration as did international affiliations without permission. No official reason was provided for the ban and ABIM protested, noting that most of its international activities had been conducted with the full co-operation of the Government. Ironically, ABIM’s own Constitution

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- states as a matter of policy that the organization cannot hold links with any foreign organization. See Aliran, *Issues of the Mahathir Years*, Penang: Aliran, 1989, pp. 22–23; *Watan*, 24 October 1980; *PRPDR*, 25 March 1980, pp. 709–710; *PRPDN*, 5 January 1981, pp. 2450–2451.
85. *NST*, 1 December 1980; *Berita Harian*, 25 May 1981.
 86. *FAM*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1981, pp. 2–3; J. Victor Morais, *Mahathir: A Profile in Courage*, Kuala Lumpur: Eastern Universities Press, 1982, pp. 210–220.
 87. *Berita Harian*, 17 December 1981; interview with senior foreign policy advisor to Dr Mahathir, Kuala Lumpur, 12 April 1989; interview with ex-Cabinet colleague, Kuala Lumpur, 30 April 1990. Dr Mahathir's re-prioritization announcement appears to have been a personal initiative rather than a Cabinet decision while the pattern of "concentric circles" were apparently never meant to be equidistant and relations with Islamic countries in fact perceived as a "very distant" second priority.
 88. M.Pathmanathan and D.Lazarus (eds), *The Winds of Change: The Mahathir Impact on Malaysia's Foreign Policy*, Kuala Lumpur: Eastern Universities Press, 1984; Chamil Wariya, *Dasar Luar Mahathir* (Mahathir's Foreign Policy), Petaling Jaya, Selangor, 1989, Aziz Zarisa Ahmad, *Dr Mahathir Mohammed: Fasa Kedua* (The Second Phase), Taman Melayang, Selangor: Firma Publishing, 1988.
 89. Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, op. cit., pp. 293–306.
 90. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
 91. *Ibid.*
 92. Interview with Michael Yeo, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) policy advisor and strategist, MCA Secretariat, Kuala Lumpur, 24 April 1990.

3 Mahathir, moderation and modernization

“Right” Islam

The projection of a religious identity in Malaysian foreign relations is reflective of the Mahathir Administration’s validation of a singular approach to Islamic interpretation: a “right” Islam. Domestically, Islamization has focused on a distinction between “moderate” Islam deemed more appropriate in the context of Malaysian society against more radical expressions which are unacceptable to the Government. The conflict between “moderate” and “extreme”, in effect, encompasses intra-Malay political rivalry and has helped intensify debate over the role of Islam in Malaysian society. The projection of such distinctions also reflect the Administration’s calculations of the impact of international Islam (actual or potential) on Malay and Malaysian society.

Governmental response to political challenge at the close of the 1970s, to directly engage in Islamic competition (“to fight Islam with more Islam”), was in the 1980s more specifically designed towards the promotion of a “right” Islam. As a broad concept, it essentially constitutes an interpretation of an Islamic value system: of what Islam does or does not encourage, what it prohibits and what it allows and of an Islam that remains, for the most part, in positive relation to the West. Religious thinking and values predominant in state discourse are attuned to UMNO developmental goals within the context of the NEP (now NDP), openness to the West and to learning from it, to foreign investment and technology; an Islam that is progress-oriented; in harmony with preceding and existing leadership ideas of development; a modernist and reformist Islamic image, sanctioned and acknowledged by both the Muslim world and the West.

Fidelity to “right” Islam has also allowed for UMNO’s performance of its protective functions towards the Malay community through the promotion of Islam, even while the Administration ensures its acceptability to Malaysia’s non-Muslim or non-Malay constituents. Significantly, it is also a reflection of Dr

Mahathir's own philosophy on the imperatives of Malay and Malaysian development and of the role of religion in the attainment of these objectives.

BUILDING AN IDENTITY

Following the increasingly explicit challenge from non-governmental sources in matters of foreign policy, the new Administration was intent on preserving its exclusive authority in this area. Maintaining control over the influence and impact of these Islamic movements and their activity was based on the fear that foreign influence, even interference, would have an incalculable impact on the political and social equation at home.

Dr Mahathir's own vision of what this identity meant was articulated early in his premiership. After winning a landslide victory in the Administration's first General Election in 1982, he articulated his belief that Islam was "a pragmatic and flexible religion" which in fact formed "the basis of our every action". While the Government's policies took into account "current realities, the situation in the country", they were defended as being "in no way, contrary to Islam". Religion was projected as being a "strong stabilising factor" whose teachings, "if followed properly", would ensure Malaysia's status as a powerful, disciplined and learned nation that could defend itself and Islam. This identity was underscored in his first address to the UMNO General Assembly as President, declaring Malaysia's inseparability as an "Islamic nation", from the rest of the Islamic world.¹

While articulating support for Islam as a positive factor in contemporary international relations (and in terms of rhetoric at least, as encompassing the broadest principles of political existence), policy makers have also been wary of the negative connotations that such a broad and generalized association has entailed. The articulation of its beliefs also reflect a sense of Malaysia's uniqueness and therefore of its sense of mission among the international Muslim community of states. This is explained in part by the complexity of its domestic constituency, which observed no particular models of other Muslim states because these were inapplicable. In addressing the concept of an Islamic state, Dr Mahathir noted that the institution of Islamic government depended on the specific situation of each country, that the assimilation of Islamic values in Malaysia, where Muslims were not an overwhelming majority, was not comparable with the experience of other countries and would necessarily be a long-term process.² In fact, in explaining the intentions of the Prime Minister's Islamization policy (introduced in 1983), the importance of external Islamic recognition, partly necessitated by Malaysia's special circumstances, was implicitly expressed by a government minister: the Malaysian Government would attempt to reconcile its seemingly "secular" structure with its desire to be an "exemplary Islamic nation", through the promotion of Islamic projects which would "provide an example to other Islamic countries".³

The depth of this "declared" identity is perhaps best measured against the evidence of Malaysia's relations with other Muslim countries, at both multi and bilateral fora.

POLITICAL ISLAM AT THE MULTILATERAL LEVEL

Since 1969, Malaysian involvement within the UN and action on issues with an Islamic dimension have generally been guided by the position of the OIC. The Mahathir administration appears to have retained Malaysian commitment to membership within the Organization, even attempting to carve a niche for itself as an activist member on political, economic and technical issues affecting the Islamic community. The principle of association has also been of some value to UMNO and to the Government: one official noted that the OIC's acceptance of Malaysia as a member proved that it was an Islamic state.⁴

The central theme emerging from the international resurgence of the 1970s was that Muslims were weak because they were disunited and while Islamic solidarity had been promoted, unity of the *umma* was still lacking. Malaysia's continued membership within the OIC has gone some way, at least in terms of rhetoric, towards reinforcing the image of its commitment towards this goal, while insisting on strict adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, as is consistently highlighted in the annual address of the Malaysian Foreign Minister to this forum.

Possibly the greatest coup for the Malaysian Government, in highlighting such a role within the OIC, was its appointment to the International Islamic Peace Committee (IPC) aimed at resolving the Iran-Iraq war in the early 1980s. According to the Deputy Prime Minister, Malaysia had offered to undertake long-term efforts to find a solution to the conflict, believing its non-Arab, OIC founder-member status and its close relations with both countries as standing it in good stead for the task. Such effort, and the ready acceptance of Malaysian mediation to both Iran and Iraq was of substantial benefit to the Mahathir administration, particularly in the light of suspicions articulated, on the part of certain domestic Islamic activists, over the veracity of Malaysia's neutrality (based largely on the assumption that the close relations between the Malaysian and Iraqi regimes were founded on their mutual pro-secular attitudes).⁵

Malaysian neutrality was, however, repeatedly emphasized at all meetings of the IPC as was the desire to exclude religious sentiment from the conflict, reflected in its consistent abstention in voting on UN General Assembly resolutions concerning the Iran-Iraq war. However, the benefits accruing from Malaysian mediation were not entirely indispensable. In keeping with Dr Mahathir's tradition of "plain-speaking", Malaysian frustration at the continued impasse and its anxiety over Iran's continued depiction of the War *as jihad* (holy war)—a concept that Malaysia did not wish to encourage—prompted the public articulation of desire to resign from the Committee by 1987, although it was eventually persuaded to stay by the Organization.⁶

Malaysia had also played an active role in facilitating the re-admission of Egypt to the OIC in 1986, expelled after its signature to the Camp David Accords with Israel in 1978, explained in part by a desire to enable the re-inclusion of a moderate Arab state into the OIC fold.⁷ Similar mediatory roles were exercised between Pakistan and India, at the invitation of President Zia al-

Haq in 1987 (although this did not bear any concrete results). Highlighting the Malaysian capacity for the performance of such roles has undoubtedly been of tremendous symbolic value to the Administration, particularly at a time when intra-Malay rivalry and chronic factionalism within UMNO were to cause great concern to immediate neighbours in terms of regime image and general political stability. The Deputy Foreign Minister declared such mediatory roles as proof of recognition and admiration for the Government's friendliness to all Islamic countries and of its commitment to the development of Islam in Malaysia, despite "false portrayal" by certain elements.⁸

Considering the broad range of political inclination within the OIC, however, the Organization has tended towards internal division which has also prompted the articulation of Malaysia's desire to stay clear of political affiliations. Indeed, intra-Arab and Arab-Iranian (sometimes depicted as *Sunni-Shi'ia*) rivalry within the OIC has posed a great problem for Islamic countries on the periphery. At the 1984 Casablanca Conference, for instance, Malaysia was among a number of Asian countries articulating fear of inter-Arab rivalry and its related problems impinging on African and Asian regions, through the OIC, hurting potential Muslim solidarity; a point that Malaysia felt important enough to re-emphasize at the 1987 Summit. Despite established patterns of assuming the Arab lead on most issues within the OIC, under the Mahathir administration, Malaysia has in fact increasingly identified with non-Arab states such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁹

Thus, active participation within the OIC system has not in fact, precluded Malaysian criticism over the Organization's ineffectiveness: Dr Mahathir has expressed disappointment in the Organization serving as a mere "extension of the Arab League" and of the lack of concrete results from Malaysia's involvement. Indeed, by 1987, in expressing disappointment that its substantial regular contributions were not accounted for, Malaysia was calling for the reorganization and restructuring of the OIC in order that it might be a more powerful and effective Islamic force.¹⁰

While conceding the fact of Malaysia's active role within the OIC, the Administration's opponents have argued that the Organization itself is more representative of a gathering of "Muslim" countries rather than an *Islamic* organization *per se*. PAS's thirty-fifth General Assembly in 1989, resolved to urge the international community to establish an International Islamic Council (*Majlis Syura Islam*) that would "guide humanity under the umbrella of Islam as a way of life (*ad-deen*)". PAS headquarters were also proposed as serving as more frequent host and participant at the international conferences of Islamic movements. The urgency of such initiatives have been explained by the OIC's (and its associated bodies') failure in exemplifying Islam to the non-Muslim world. Indeed, there has also been the perception that if anything, East-West economic solidarity in Europe (through European Community initiatives) at the close of the 1980s, reflected the West's growing fear of the resurgence of Islam as a global force, in the vacuum created by the demise of Communism.¹¹

Official association with fellow Muslims has not, however, been entirely for Malaysia's benefit. The Administration has also worked actively towards

promoting the interests of other Third World countries who are co-members of the OIC, particularly through the promotion of more intensive efforts at economic and technological co-operation between countries of the Southern hemisphere (“South-South” co-operation), and which is a general policy initiative linked to Dr Mahathir himself. For Malaysia’s foreign policy makers, the OIC is as significant for its status as a forum for developing countries as is its co-religionist identity.¹² Over time, Malaysia has continued to extend its capacities for such cooperation through other forms of regional and international groupings.

Generally, policies of neutralization and non-alignment have been important towards the maximization of international contacts and favourable world public opinion should an international or regional crisis threaten to spill over into Malaysian territory. To this end, participation within the OIC and well established relations with other Muslim countries has helped secure support for its views on a variety of issues in international politics. Malaysia has increasingly come to act as a liaison between the OIC and the Non-Aligned Movement. Support from Islamic countries for the Malaysian and ASEAN stand on Kampuchea at the UN in the 1980s was significant, as was winning broad backing from Islamic states at the 1987 Summit for a plan to co-operate in fighting the spread of narcotics and drug-trafficking. Malaysia has furthermore persuaded individual Muslim countries to support its stand on Antarctica while obtaining inclusion of the issue on the OIC’s agenda.¹³

Indeed, despite its dissatisfaction with internal disunity, Malaysia has more recently sought the means to make the OIC a more effective organization. In 1993, it proposed the formation of an Eminent Persons Group to look into ways by which the Organization could be made a more cohesive and effective association for Islamic countries and more relevant to a post-Cold War global context.¹⁴

POLITICAL ISLAM AT THE BILATERAL LEVEL

Another significant feature of the Administration’s foreign policy has been its clear preference for bilateral relations because, as Dr Mahathir explained, they allowed for greater “intimacy, understanding and results than multilateral relations”. In fact relations with other Muslim countries, most particularly those in West Asia (the Malaysian government’s preferred geographical term for countries situated in what is commonly referred to as the Middle East, in particular the Gulf States), were pursued, at least initially, with great vigour and on a scale more ambitious than overall Malaysian efforts within the OIC.

Such association and exchange also held political benefit. Between the period of Dr Mahathir’s assumption of his duties as Prime Minister and UMNO’s first General Election under his Presidency (approximately a year), a series of foreign policy moves helped to reinforce this identity. More to the point, in the months leading up to this election, the Malaysian King, Dr Mahathir and much of his future Cabinet made several trips to West Asia, visiting Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Saudi Arabia. While these visits were important in obtaining

material reward, they were clearly also prime campaign material in affirming the new Administration's Islamic credentials and daily media reports of the praise and recognition extended by these countries, towards the Government, invaluable in impressing the Malay-Muslim electorate at home.¹⁵

Malaysia's contributions to Islam and the Islamic world were praised by Bahrain's Prime Minister, Saudi Arabia promised to strengthen and intensify economic, political, social and cultural co-operation with Malaysia "to reflect the strong Islamic bonds between them" and Malaysia considered setting up diplomatic representation in one or two Gulf States due to the benefit of direct representation towards development and co-operation in the religious field. Indeed, the announcement of the establishment of an Islamic Bank and of the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur with sponsorship and aid from many of these countries were presented as substantial benefits from these trips and rationalized as an honour conferred on Malaysia by the Islamic world "in recognition of the capability of the National Front government in improving the economic lot of the Malays and in upholding the sanctity of Islam".¹⁶

The benefits of foreign policy for domestic political advantage were articulated more obviously by the Deputy Prime Minister prior to his visit to Egypt and Jordan in April 1982: "Muslim countries throughout the world recognize Malaysia as one of the leading Muslim countries which champion the Islamic cause but only PAS does not want to accept this fact. Countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran and those Muslim countries in Africa, had confidence in Malaysia that it would continue to be known in the world as a Muslim country which would achieve more progress according to the principles of Islam."¹⁷

In political and economic terms, Malaysia's closest allies in the Muslim world have proven to be the monarchies of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Jordan and those Arab states with a post-colonial history of more "secularly" oriented government such as Egypt and Iraq. These are in part based on a traditional connection established between Malaysians and Arabs in terms of religious education and exchange, but they probably also reflect a perception of greater commonalities in terms of attitudes and outlook between policy elites and the political contexts in which they operate.¹⁸

Over time, however, there has been a certain unease with over-reliance on these ties and impatience with Arab ideological divisions, which, for the Mahathir administration at least, has also been translated into a search for more diverse Muslim contacts, with other countries on the Islamic periphery. To this end, Malaysia's growing relationship with Turkey in the 1980s, described by the Malaysian press as being linked to "cultural and political commonalities, similarity in structures and problems, the commitment to industrialization, modernization and progress" and in the fact that neither Malaysia nor Turkey could "afford Islamic fundamentalism" was significant.¹⁹

Turkey appeared, for a time, to provide a convenient model of a modern country with an Islamic tradition yet with a "secularly-oriented" administration and commonalities in global outlook and perceptions, particularly those facing Islamic countries, outlined by Dr Mahathir himself. Indeed, Foreign Ministry

elites articulated a highly positive and hopeful attitude towards relations with Turkey because it held the advantage of providing an alternative Islamic example to that of the Arabs and was relaxed about its Islamic tradition which was well entrenched in its culture.²⁰

Such parallel perceptions are believed to have contributed greatly to the comfortable development of ties since 1983. Turkey is one of the few Muslim countries with whom Malaysia's joint commission agreements were extended by the Mahathir administration to include political matters. The Commission (also proposed at ministerial level) has dealt with issues such as Cyprus, Turkish-Greek relations, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, and the plight of Muslims. By 1987, Malaysia indicated its willingness to act as mediator in the dispute between Greece and the Turkish Cypriots while lobbying for a more conciliatory approach to the Cyprus issue at the Commonwealth heads of Government meetings.²¹ Even in the 1990s, amidst the shifting political contexts within Turkey and the emergence of a ruling party with a greater Islamic identity and agenda, Malaysia has continued to focus on the economic benefits to be gained from its relationship with such countries.

The only other non-Arab Muslim country with which Malaysia has built up a significant relationship is Pakistan, although under the Mahathir administration, this appears to have been based more on personal rapport (an important part of the Mahathir foreign policy arsenal) shared between Dr Mahathir and the then Pakistani President, Zia al-Haq than with any specific Islamic affinity. This has not, however, prevented the benefit of rhetoric on their mutual interests, such as in co-operation towards laying the groundwork for an Islamic resurgence. In 1983, Pakistan announced the bestowal of its "Great Leader" awards to both Dr Mahathir and former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn and in 1984, in the course of his visit to Pakistan, Dr Mahathir was awarded the country's highest civil award.²²

While bilateral relations with other Muslim countries have been useful to the Administration in legitimating its own "Islamic" character in the face of challenge from domestic Islamic opposition, they also serve as appropriate fora for promoting the Administration's vision of what the "right" Islam constitutes. Like its predecessors, the Mahathir administration has been concerned with promoting the practical developmental and economic aspects of these relationships, although Dr Mahathir himself has perhaps been more preoccupied with pragmatic results, than others. The vision and promotion of such an orthodoxy for Islam might be better understood if some attention is given to Dr Mahathir's own views on the religion and of its necessary relationship to Malay and Malaysian development.

ISLAM, MALAY DEVELOPMENT AND THE MAHATHIR PHILOSOPHY

Dr Mahathir Mohammed's ideas on Islam appear indivisible from his critiques of Malay underdevelopment which he perceives as culturally produced. His

personal and political philosophy evidenced in his books *The Malay Dilemma* and *The Challenge*, provide some insight in particular on the relationship that he draws between the economic advancement and wealth creation of a people and their socio-cultural values, largely dictated by religion. As such the ideas he has articulated in these books also serve to underline his attempts at rationalizing Islam towards the socio-political and economic context of the project of Malay development.

Citing religion as an unchallengeable force in Malay society, Dr Mahathir noted in 1970, that Islam would have to be “further propagated” if “the quest for Malay progress” was to succeed, even while bemoaning what he perceived as Malay fatalism, a disinclination for competition and a preference for spiritual over material pursuits, claiming these as derivative of a “Malay-style” Islam. As such he attributes the structurally weak socio-economic position of the Malays, at least partially, to their “incorrect” interpretation of Islam and to their lack of understanding of the real message behind the religion. From Dr Mahathir’s perspective, Islam has ironically been invoked to promote regression bringing weakness and the eventual collapse of Muslim societies and ultimately Islamic civilization. Nevertheless, he cites spiritual values as fully capable of withstanding the pressures of the material world, maintaining that wealth is not disapproved of and certainly not forbidden in Islam, and that religious faith will be neither weakened nor destroyed by the mastery of such fields of knowledge as science and technology. He argues instead that Islamic values and ideas would in fact help Muslim societies to hold their own in competition with others, ultimately safeguarding the position and security of Muslims. He advocates organization, discipline and the value of exposure to foreign systems for the sake of “progress” (each society itself setting the limits beyond which it will resist the influence of a foreign system). In his view, the persistence of any such obstacles would ensure that “Malays always lag behind and cease to have their own identity”.²³

Dr Mahathir’s earliest prescriptions for Malay-Muslim progress, particularly within the context of domestic Chinese economic competition, in fact essentially reflected the thinking of the new post-1969 nationalist identity of UMNO. Aspiring towards a secularist, psychological transformation of Malay society, Dr Mahathir has been concerned with replacing what he perceives as the traditional fatalistic tendencies and low aspirational levels of the Malays with a competitive spirit.²⁴ While his success at implementing this radical programme on Malay society will be decided over time, his attitude towards “traditional” interpretations of Islam as essentially, a “cultural hindrance to progress” and his Administration’s policies (including foreign policy) have continued to reflect such thinking.

Clearly, much of Dr Mahathir’s thinking has been shaped by the context of vigorous Chinese economic competition for the Malays within the domestic Malaysian context. Although initially perceiving religion as being important to the cultural identity of the Malays and as better reserved for the private sphere, Dr Mahathir appears to have been increasingly convinced that the renewed interest in

Islam politically as well as in terms of social development, both collectively and individually, would increasingly challenge secular visions for Malay modernization and its attendant socio-economic impositions. He may well have himself been increasingly convinced by Islamists (domestic and international; within his own Administration and those in opposition to it), that the religion might yet prove conducive to his visions of economic development for Malaysia.

UMNO's need to convince its own Muslim electorate that it is in fact the legitimate guardian of their Malay-Muslim identity (their protector) and therefore actively promoting Islam, was made more urgent when the NEP—its most fundamental policy and programme for restructuring Malay and Malaysian society and for governing Malaysia—was increasingly subjected to criticism from its major political rival PAS, as well as student groups and *dakwah* movements, who rejected it as materialistic and un-Islamic.²⁵

UMNO attempted to appropriate religion in its own defence, by the end of the 1970s, by arguing that the party's championing of the accumulation of wealth, power and knowledge were necessary for the defence of Islam. Dr Mahathir's first address to UMNO as President recalled UMNO's "just" rule as being responsible for Malay development in line with modern Islam and the task ahead as being that of "enhancing Islamic practices and ensuring that the Malay community truly adheres to Islamic teachings"—a task bigger than all the Party's previous "struggles" but which had to be pursued because this was its "real cause".²⁶

Much of Dr Mahathir's exhortations towards the compatibility of a modernist Islam with national development goals must also be understood within the context of his articulated policy objectives after assuming power in 1981 and of his Administration's accelerated economic programmes towards reasonably achieving (at least partially) some of the projected targets of the NEP, later the NDP and through his grander programmes such as that of Vision 2020. Prime among these was his desire to accelerate the pace of industrialization and secure Malaysia within the ranks of Newly Industrializing Countries, such economic transformation perceived as a vital component of government policies designed towards restructuring Malaysian society.

In fact, much of the earlier half of the Administration was spent in reinforcing this "modernist" image of Islam to both domestic and international audiences. On the domestic front, it became a mission to convince the Malays that the programmes and ideas of PAS would ultimately act as an obstacle to their modernization, away from progress. On the international front, the same strategy assumed a more defensive tone concerned with the stereotyping of Islam, recognizing it as a problem of image. It therefore became necessary to re-emphasize Islam's harmony with Malaysia's programme of economic modernization. In fact, it was officially argued that Islam demanded "good work ethics and a systematic and organised approach to the task of strengthening and rendering Muslim countries more self-dependent" as a sacred duty of all Muslims.²⁷

The "modernist" vision was however also vital in ensuring the success of Dr Mahathir's other major programme for transforming Malaysian society—the

Look East Policy, adopted in late 1981, aimed similarly at changing the work ethics, attitudes and values of all Malaysians and more particularly the Malays. Formulated in the wake of the Administration's attempts to untie Malaysia from its traditional Western moorings, particularly with the United Kingdom, the policy although aimed at more fundamental purposes, met with resistance, even condemnation, from a variety of Muslim quarters. In January 1982, Anwar Ibrahim, then still President of ABIM, warned against foreign economic dominance, criticizing the Look East Policy of the Government as unsuitable because "efficiency in exploitation" (which was Japan's greatest success) was not a policy Muslims should emulate.²⁸

Despite the Administration's emphasis of Islamic sanction for its (essentially secular) development policies, the pressing realities of intra-Malay rivalry and UMNO's vulnerability in that process meant that the Administration would also increasingly have to co-opt the rhetoric of its Islamic opponents. The Party's increasing sacrifice of a secular character, however, also meant that the Mahathir Administration's goals were increasingly determined by events and developments beyond its control as it was increasingly drawn into defending its policies *through* religion.

The Administration's heightened sensitivity to charges of secularity was notable in a changing emphasis on development objectives: in 1984, the Deputy Prime Minister emphasized spiritual regeneration and the maintenance of a society's Islamic values as vital for its modernization and economic development. By 1988, the Government's efforts at Islamization were described as essential in creating a nation and individuals mindful of their roots while stressing the practise of values that mirrored "the true Islamic personality". As part of the inescapable religious responsibilities and duties of leaders, UMNO would ensure this so as to avoid the pitfalls that had assailed many developed countries.²⁹

In more recent years, the Administration has increasingly attempted to promote this desire for an economically dynamic society through its encouragement of economic pursuit through religious rationalization, even as religious duty. Its exhortations towards economic advancement and industrialization, even everyday work activity as being perceived as *ibadah* (worship or religious duty) frequently pepper policy speeches. These messages have increasingly also been taken up by the state-sponsored media particularly through its expanding religious programming where such rationalization is frequently encouraged by state-sponsored *ulama* and by some Muslim intellectuals as right Islam. While traditional perceptions of *takdir* (fate) are increasingly discouraged, a reorientation is advocated towards "this worldly" activity so that every Muslim's life does not simply serve as preparation for *dunia akhirat* (the after life) but as enterprising activity that is religiously sanctioned. The Mahathir Administration has thus been seriously engaged in enabling if not encouraging the development of a kind of "Malay-Islamic" work ethic that might power the spirit and growth of its own definitions of capitalism in Malaysia.

Increasingly, the conception of *Melayu Baru* (new Malay) and its characterization of the qualities "necessary" for Malay economic

advancement—corporate attitude and an “achievement” orientation—are also depicted by the Mahathir Administration as being fully congruent to such “modernist” imaginings of Islamic values.

Domestically, some effort has been made to integrate this rhetoric with policy. In 1981, the National Seminar on the Concept of Development in Islam was convened, to provide guidelines for development efforts in Malaysia “in time to come”.³⁰ The Government has also instituted moves aimed at bureaucratizing the potential role of Islam in the economy through organizations such as the *Badan Perunding Islam* (Islamic Consultative Body), headed by Anwar Ibrahim, which was, by 1983, co-ordinating policy involving community, economic and social development under the Prime Minister’s Office.³¹ The *Yayasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Islam* (Islamic Economic Development Foundation) was also relaunched by the Mahathir Administration in July 1984 towards collecting and re-processing charitable donations for the economic welfare of the Islamic community and towards sponsoring and encouraging Muslim small traders and businesses.³²

Such strategy has not however been without problems with dissension arising from within the Government itself. In 1990, the opinion was expressed that some Malay elites were concerned that increasing emphasis on Islamization implicitly questioned the idea of refashioning Malays in order to make a success of the NEP programme while potential conflict was also cited over Islamic injunctions against *riba* (the earning of interest) or Muslim employment in businesses that depend on interest. These were problematic from the perspective that the Government could not remain a trustee of overall economic development and growth indefinitely and would depend increasingly on the growth of a dynamic business sector dominated by (it was hoped) an expanding pool of Bumiputera businessmen as well as the building of a “business ethic”.³³ This was considered vital if Malays were to be able to compete with the economic vigour and standing of their Chinese counterparts.

State support for the rationalization of religious principles towards economic endeavour are also reflective of the growing strength of a Malay middle class in Malaysia and of the need if not desire to maintain the spectacular national economic growth rates of the last eight years through encouraging active Muslim this-worldly orientation, productivity and consumption through religious sanction. This appears also to reflect Dr Mahathir’s personal fear that any overly transcendent orientation of Muslims would deny the religion’s capacity to positively influence material activity. As such, material development, while necessarily going hand in hand with spirituality, is also steadily rationalized as its pre-condition.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF ISLAM IN FOREIGN RELATIONS

In the light of the Mahathir Administration’s articulated ambitions towards these ends, one might expect some evidence suggesting that Malaysian foreign policy

has worked some way towards integrating its economic system (including trade, finance and development programmes) with the rest of the Muslim world.

Certainly, relationships based on trade and investment, and general economic exchange have been more clearly preferred and pursued since 1981.³⁴ Re-prioritization of links with Muslim countries was also in line with Dr Mahathir's frequent condemnation of the North-South divide within the international economy and what he terms as the developed world's indifference towards the problems of Third World economies.

But there has been another aspect to the Administration's emphasis on the practical, tangible effects of Islamic co-operation. The Government's responsibility and sensitivity to its non-Muslim electorate (particularly of the Chinese who hold sizeable stakes in the economy) has meant that it has had to emphasize that the measure of Islam in Malaysian foreign policy held direct benefit to and included all communities (Muslim and non-Muslim), so as to avoid charges of discrimination.³⁵ This of course takes into account that any effective Islamization of the economic system would meet resistance from the Malaysian Chinese and Indians. In fact, as Dr Mahathir has pointed out, no Islamic system should be unjust towards non-Muslims and official domestic efforts at Islamization of the economy have thus far indicated the establishment of a parallel system for Muslims that would avoid any impingement on non-Muslims.³⁶

Even though official Malaysian views on this new foreign policy have suggested that interests towards this kind of Islamic co-operation were articulated at multilateral and bilateral fora, its measure of success was limited for some time.

Multilateral relations

Dr Mahathir's vision for the role that the OIC might effectively play to the benefit of Malaysia and other Muslim countries, and his impatience with the gulf that existed between potential and actual co-operation between Muslim countries, has been clear from the start. Arguing that the OIC's establishment was intended for economic co-operation as much as for religious unity, he has persistently called for "a mutuality of benefits", the promotion of greater trade and investment, education, training and technology and for the deployment of unused IDB funds within the Muslim world.³⁷

Participation within the system has, however, brought Malaysia some economic benefit. From the commencement of its participation within the Bank in October 1975 up to the end of 1989, the IDB had extended assistance to the country totalling US\$93.1 million. While such loans have been granted for religious as well as non-religious projects, they have also helped cater for the country's general development plans. Indeed, the seriousness of Malaysia's prioritization of economic links with this region has been underlined by the increasing inclusion and highlighting of Malaysia's relations with the Muslim world, particularly West Asia, in official economic reports from about the 1980s.³⁸

Malaysia's economic participation within the OIC has not been in singular search

of self-benefit. In as much as the Administration has displayed a clear sympathy for other Third World and developing countries, in its economic aspirations it has also attempted to promote “South-South” co-operation as a significant component of its foreign policy agenda, expressing similar concerns within the OIC. Committed to the idea of aid to poorer Islamic countries, it has urged the OIC itself to play a bigger role in such schemes. As a member of the Islamic Committee for Solidarity with the People of Sahel, Malaysia continued, for instance, to provide assistance to such member countries in an effort to alleviate their socio-economic difficulties and has launched a number of joint technical co-operation schemes with less developed members. In 1984, Malaysia urged planning for private and individual contribution towards the region, including the possibility of contributing *zakat* (alms-giving) towards food aid for these countries.³⁹

Bilateral relations

While extensive efforts towards economic co-operation and exchange with other Muslim countries have symbolized the Administration’s efforts at building Islamic solidarity, these have not been matched by evidence of substantial bilateral economic solidarity. Certainly there appeared to be little difference from the sort of economic foreign policy towards Islamic countries that the Tun Razak Administration had initiated in the 1970s.

The earlier phase of the Administration was marked by a great deal of enthusiasm and expectation over these linkages. In 1981, large Malaysian trade missions were despatched on extensive visits to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States to “sell” Malaysia, serving also as important campaign strategies for the 1982 general elections, when the Prime Minister himself undertook an extensive tour of the Middle East.⁴⁰

Described as the most important steps taken by Malaysia to secure an equal economic and financial footing for historic and religious relations with the Arabs, these visits were given extensive coverage in the press and other media. Malaysian traders, manufacturers and exporters were encouraged to intensify their trading activities in West Asia, especially in the Gulf region as a means to diversify markets as prospects were touted for combining Western technology, West Asian financing and ASEAN materials in economic co-operation. The Ministry of Trade and Industry went so far as establishing a Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA) office and a Tourism Development Corporation office in the Middle East to attract potential investors to Malaysia. Emphasizing this priority, the Ministry of Finance in trade co-operation, noted that Islamic countries represented potentially good markets for Malaysia’s primary commodities and manufactured products, reflected in their increased total trade with Malaysia over recent years.⁴¹

Expectations were not however met by reality. Although there were individual successes in specific areas of economic exchange, overall trade with other Muslim countries remained only a small sector of the total volume of Malaysian trade with the world and appeared strikingly minuscule compared to

trade with developed countries (as well as with countries within the Southeast Asian region). Tengku Razaleigh, the former Finance Minister and then President of *Semangat '46* expressed the opinion that such prioritization of relations with Islamic countries and the manner in which these had been pursued held little substantial benefit for the country's economic growth, merely confirming Malaysia's solidarity with these countries.⁴²

While in 1981, commodity trade with West Asian countries (comprising Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE) constituted just 2 per cent of Malaysia's total exports and 8 per cent of Malaysia's total imports, these figures did not see any significant growth through more than a decade under the Mahathir Administration. Trade actually steadily dropped for the most part (with the exception of Saudi Arabia), due largely to the world recession and by 1989, stood at 2.4 per cent for exports and 1.3 per cent for imports.⁴³

On the other hand, in terms of overall trade, non-Arab Muslim countries appeared to be more promising trade partners. Pakistan alone accounted for slightly more than 1 per cent of all Malaysian external trade by 1984, becoming its largest Muslim purchaser, constituting 25 per cent of all Malaysian exports to Muslim states (accounted for partly by the fact that it is the largest single buyer of Malaysian palm oil). In the same year, Turkey accounted for 0.5 per cent and Indonesia and Brunei 0.4 per cent each of Malaysia's total external trade.⁴⁴

Although a visiting Iranian trade delegation in 1982 had indicated Iran's interest in increasing trade with other Islamic countries, buying Malaysian palm oil and offering technical training for Malaysia's petroleum industry staff, not much progress was made, partly due to the cautious approach of the Mahathir administration towards the revolutionary government (and its fear of any domestic impact). In recent years, however, the otherwise guarded relationship has greatly improved, with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini and the projected hope for the ascent of less radical Iranian leadership. Indeed, hopes for closer economic relations were based on Iran's special foreign policy towards Islamic countries which had existed since the Islamic Revolution but was gradually enjoying "greater will on both sides".⁴⁵

By January 1987, a long-term trading arrangement was established between the two countries, greatly aided by the lifting of an Iranian ban on the import of palm oil in 1988 and a further trade agreement in 1989. In the same year, Iran invited Malaysia's private sector to participate in its economic reconstruction programme. While Malaysia was apparently identified by Iran as a priority country in economic co-operation on Islamic and Third World grounds, it was also acknowledged that such belief and principles had not been enough and that real commitment was necessary from both sides in order to expand trade.⁴⁶

Malaysia does in fact also hold joint economic commission agreements with a number of Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, the UAE, Iraq, Turkey and Mali, which have been representative of Malaysian policy in general towards developing countries, as a means for improving economic exchange and technical expertise.

However, even taking the more positive indications into account, overall trade with Muslim countries remained very small for at least a decade, if practically non-existent in certain cases, (see Appendix, Table 1). In dramatic comparison, Malaysian trade with the developed world and with regional neighbours has been far more extensive (as evident from Appendix, Table 2). Indeed, from among the 140 countries that it trades with, ASEAN, Japan, the United States and the European Community have remained Malaysia's largest trading partners, absorbing an annual average of 75 per cent of total trade. Even the Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs) of Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and in particular, China, have shown more substantial growth in trade with Malaysia from the period 1980 to 1992 than the countries of West Asia and are rapidly becoming of fundamental economic importance to Malaysia's drive for expanded trade and investment opportunities.⁴⁷ In fact, the primary obstacle to a greater volume of trade with Islamic countries has been described as the problem of direct shipping (much of Malaysia's trade directed is through the port of Singapore due to its more economically viable shipping facilities and arrangements).⁴⁸

Although trade figures show less evidence of economic integration, Malaysia does appear to have significantly benefited from relationships with Islamic countries in terms of aid, and as sources for external loans particularly for development plans. Once again, however, the reliance or dependence has been on Arab sources and has represented continued patterns set by the preceding administration.

By 1986, Malaysia had secured eight loans from the Saudi Fund for Development amounting to some M\$390 million, a good deal of which was used for education and health projects. Such financial assistance from the Saudis has been described as being "in the true spirit of Islamic brotherhood" and in line with OIC efforts towards a more equitable international economic order through collective action within the Muslim world. Similar help was procured from the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development which by 1982 had provided loans totalling M\$121.6 million financing such prestigious Islamic projects as the *Pusat Islam* (the Islamic Centre) and the *Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah* (Islamic Dakwah Foundation).⁴⁹

Investments have been another projected avenue for Muslim co-operation with Malaysia. An International Guarantee Agreement with Kuwait invested in several large private corporations, reinvesting profits from share investments in the country. Yet, despite the Malaysian Government's relaxation of normal investment guidelines in 1986 for foreign investors, Islamic investment as a percentage of overall foreign investment remained low. More importantly, Dr Mahathir announced in 1987 that much of this investment had not significantly helped enlarge the Malaysian economic pie. Indeed, despite high expectations, Malaysian Industries Development Authority (MIDA) representation in the Middle East in its failure to attract substantial Arab investments was subsequently discontinued. On the other hand, Malaysia's reliance on foreign investment from Western and Japanese sources has grown decidedly in the 1980s, and has continued to provide the lion's share of total investment.⁵⁰

In fact, the re-orientation of Dr Mahathir's foreign policy and its apparent lack of success, came under critical scrutiny by 1987, precisely because it was deemed to have contributed to an exacting economic recession in the mid-1980s. The recession took its toll on political and communal relations, easily becoming crucial to intra-Malay rivalry. The 1987 UMNO General Assembly witnessed intense debate over the advisability of the Administration's then anti-Zionist, anti-Western assertions in the light of Malaysian dependence on foreign investment from these sources. However, some Islamists and "Team A" members (the Mahathir faction) within UMNO and the Cabinet, such as Anwar Ibrahim, defended the "new" foreign policy, arguing instead that its detractors were representative of a "neo-colonial" mentality. In fact, pointed criticism was also forthcoming from bureaucratic quarters. At a Seminar on the Directions of Malaysian Foreign Policy conducted for civil servants in Malaysia in 1987, the severe cost and relative ineffectiveness of pursuing relations with the Islamic countries of West Asia was criticized even while it was claimed that no substantial evidence of a particularly "Islamic" foreign policy could be located.⁵¹

Nevertheless, renewed interest in the potential for economic links with Middle Eastern countries emerged from the situation of deep recession, partly reflective of ascendant political interests within UMNO. Furthermore, Malaysia badly needed foreign investment from whatever sources and the advantages of renewed foreign confidence in domestic political stability were attractive. Considerable adjustments were made to investment guidelines under the New Economic Policy. It is perhaps of little coincidence that the Arab Trade and Investment Conference held in November 1987, was due, at least to some extent, to the then Education Minister, Anwar Ibrahim's international Islamic contacts, the Malaysian-Arab Trade Investment Council (MATIC) inaugurated in January 1988 and Jami, a joint investment company with Arab and Malaysian interests registered in Malaysia with a paid up capital of \$100 million, being direct results of this Conference.⁵²

The new economics of foreign policy has in fact been a hallmark of the Mahathir administration of later years. Particularly following the experience of the recession in 1986 (as well as the increasing connection between the direct benefits of economic growth and levels of political rivalry and factionalism within UMNO), Mahathir was determined to overhaul the functions of Malaysia's diplomatic missions abroad, enlarging diplomacy to the process of "selling Malaysia" (or its economic potential) and threatening to recall ambassadors who were not "effective". Aggressive foreign investment drives were therefore continued in the hope that Gulf petro-dollars would finance Malaysian development projects, now strapped for funds. Renewed drives for greater economic links with the Arabs did apparently bear some results although this has yet to be extensively measured.⁵³

More recent trade and commercial investment figures suggest some improvement in Malaysia's relations with certain Muslim countries, reflecting both the vastly altered economic imperatives and context of the post-Cold War period as well the considerable adjustments to economic policy within

Malaysia, indicating greater economic liberalization. The Gulf States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Yemen appear to be increasingly important to Malaysian trade while Pakistan remains the most substantial Muslim trade partner. There appears also to be evidence of growing opportunities with the Central Asian republics, particularly Uzbekistan.⁵⁴

Although there has been some interest in investment from a purely Islamic perspective, the Administration's foreign economic policy towards these countries appears to be founded as much on the practical search for funds from a diversity of sources. Undoubtedly, there has been some reliance on their common religion as a means of attracting these investments, but the Administration itself has also sought to establish other bases for relations with Muslim countries. This is in part an acknowledgement of the "bottom line" approach of business attitudes on both sides—the search for the best economic benefits beyond religious affinity. Nor have there been radical initiatives on the part of West Asian countries for direct foreign investment on such bases in Malaysia or indeed in the region. Indeed, more than the effects of an "Islamic identity", the Government continued for some time to weather criticism from its opponents on development and economic policy ties that exposed the country to the ravages of export dependence and indeed on the increasing social effects of rapid industrialization, economic growth and inflation.

Despite the Administration's attempts to co-opt Islam in the 1980s as the basis for government, economic development policy making at the federal level remained "unofficially" secular, based on the post-Independence ruling political partnership's continued reliance on the economic tools of dualistic development and resource exploitation as well as a trade-oriented environment that is highly dependent upon foreign investment and technology transfers.⁵⁵ Defensive about the role that Islam plays in its policies, partly because of its dependency on all foreign investment, it has needed also to convince its own Muslim electorate that it is actively promoting Islam in Malaysian economic development. Increasing political competition and response have also meant that the Administration is consistently cornered into legitimizing its policies and actions through Islam which has had the circular effect of creating greater expectations.

PAS in particular continues to criticize UMNO and the Government's "overly materialistic approach" in its relations with these countries, arguing that this cannot be the basis for Islamic relations of any depth.⁵⁶ Indeed with the installation of the *PAS-Semangat '46* coalition government in Kelantan, competition and debate over appropriate development strategies, for the nation as well as the state, became more acute and increasingly involved issues of foreign economic policy. The PAS dominated the government's agenda for Kelantan as a model Islamic state within the Federation, working as a direct challenge to the Administration's own attempts at Islamization, and also symbolically resisted Dr Mahathir's agenda for the acceleration of industrialization efforts towards his Vision 2020 scheme. The party has been particularly articulate on the repercussions of rapid economic development on sectors of the population (particularly in the rural areas and the urban poor),

linking the Administration's over-emphasis of economic growth rates to increasing social malaise in the urban areas. The issues of continued corruption, kick-backs, and the wide-scale wastage and mismanagement of public resources in several large development projects in the 1990s amidst the privatization policy of the Government have also come under attack for their immorality.

In the face of continuing criticism by extra-governmental religious sources of the Government's continued reliance on "secular" development policies, it has also become vital for the Administration to assert its authority over the interpretation of what in fact constitute desirable and correct policies that are in keeping with Islamic tenets. To this end, foreign policy has also been employed to legitimate and articulate the Mahathir administration's vision of the "right" Islam.

***IJTIHAD* AND THE "PROBLEM" OF AUTHORITY**

A serious obstacle to the promotion of "right" Islam has been the dynamic of conflict and contention within Malay-Muslim society itself over the issue of interpretive authority in religious matters. The determination and success of "right" Islam is clearly dependent on its acceptance as being authentic to the religion, its tenets, values and its scriptural basis. The absence of any definitive spiritual authority or mediator between an individual and God is compounded in Islam by the fact that the textual sources of the religion invite interpretation. This has complicated the problem of who holds the authority to interpret. Although not an ordained class as such, the *ulama* (as religious scholars) have traditionally been assigned the task of interpretation by reason of the depth of their religious knowledge and familiarity with the texts. Significant to their authority has been their capacity to exercise '*ijtihad* (independent reasoning, inquiry and assessment) above and beyond the records of the *Sunnah*.

The closing of the "Gate of '*Ijtihad*'" in the tenth century of Islamic history is frequently cited as having dealt a staggering blow to Islamic civilization because of the stultifying effects it is said to have had on Islamic advancements in scientific knowledge and progress in the fields of education and learning through religion. While non-uniformity in '*ijtihad*' was for some time accepted as unavoidable by Islamic jurists, serious limitations were placed on interpretive licence, for fear that continued '*ijtihad*' would be confusing and harmful. Leaving no room for independent judgement and rational inquiry, Islamic knowledge became institutionalized around the *taqlid* (blind-imitation) system and allowed traditional religious authority (primarily in the person of the '*alim*') a monopoly control of public education and opinion until about the nineteenth century when Islamic modernists called for the freeing of religious knowledge from dogma in order that Islam might adapt to the modern world. In contemporary times, discourse and debate also centre around the increasing division made by Muslims between spheres of knowledge that are spiritual and non-spiritual, their prioritization in Muslim societies and how an integration of these spheres might be achieved without detriment to Islam.⁵⁷

Whereas *ijtihad* was considered the prerogative of the *ulama* in classical theory, the concept has itself been transformed over time. As a legacy of major shifts in the historical and political context of the seventeenth century, critical and independent judgement, interpretation and opinion were frequently exercised by Muslim intellectuals who cited this principle in their defence. The intellectual response of the nineteenth century further promoted a return to *ijtihad* with the important direction of reinterpretation of the sources in line with the modern world. While the matter of exactly who can exercise *ijtihad*, when or through what rules is unclear, the great sea-change taking place in attitudes towards religious authority was clearly to threaten the supremacy of the *ulama* who have battled to retain their positions and prerogative in Muslim societies.⁵⁸

The issue of interpretive religious authority has thus constituted central debate in contemporary Muslim societies. In as much as the Mahathir Administration has been concerned with the propagation of “right” Islam, the promotion of *ijtihad* and the precise role of the *ulama* in Malaysian society have served as increasing foci of government policy. Ultimately, a debate over what are “authentic” Islamic values—over who is entitled to interpret these values—as well as conflict between what an Islamic intellectual tradition represents, what it advocates and what this means for modern Malay culture have served to challenge the Administration’s agenda for the propagation of “right” Islam.

As in other Muslim societies, the *ulama* have traditionally played a central role in Malay society and have enjoyed deep veneration as much for the depth of their knowledge *on fiqh* as for their strong cultural and political ties with the Middle Eastern centres of Islamic learning, particularly Saudi Arabia.⁵⁹ They have traditionally been revered as the most pious and knowledgeable defenders of the faith, particularly in periods of great danger and challenge to Islam, precisely through their conservatism if not quietism. As Chandra Muzaffar points out, the continued influence of the *ulama* is explained, to some extent, by Muslim perceptions and their roles as historic guardians of Islam and its divine texts even under the long and arduous period of colonial rule to which most Muslim societies were subjected.⁶⁰

The creation and expansion of a massive religious bureaucracy vested with legislative and judicial authority throughout the country in the colonial period helped entrench the prerogative authority of the *ulama* as the official interpreters of Islamic doctrine, teachings and legal principles.⁶¹ The continued expansion of this religious bureaucracy by the post-colonial state further entrenched the position of the *ulama* in a diversity of religious functions. To some extent, current debates are reflective of the earlier divisions over the agenda of Islamic Reformism in Malay society between the *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua* constituents (referred to in Chapter 1) indicating the tenacity of fundamental but unresolved tensions within Malay society and politics. They are also part of wider debate in contemporary Muslim societies over central concepts in Islam and proposals for their dynamic application.

The conformism and deference of the *ulama* has been a tradition common to the experience of *Sunni* Muslim countries like Malaysia. In modern times,

however, this has been coupled with the phenomenon of greater numbers of Muslims acquiring a voice on Islamic matters, breaking the monopoly of traditional religious authority. In fact, concern for precisely who can exercise such religious influence as *ulama* has become a significant preoccupation for the Federal Government. While making some effort to assure the *ulama* that they would continue to play important and complementary roles to those of Malaysia's national leaders, the Administration has increasingly come to qualify such authority as encompassing only those who are "truly versed in Islam and have given ample proof of their adherence to and reverence for the teachings of Islam".⁶² Dr Mahathir has in fact urged the *ulama* to stay out of politics, due to their potential for easy exploitation, claiming any attendant division as detrimental to the religion's intellectual energy. He has also criticized the focus of even the "modern" and organized *ulama* on ritual and has attempted to encourage instead their contribution toward knowledge and its "correct" utilization. Indeed, he has suggested that "allowing one's political interests to influence one's religious actions might lead to deviation and the impairment of faith".⁶³

Dr Mahathir's persistent identification of self-styled *ulama* as problematic in Malaysian society somewhat belies his Administration's sensitivity to the issue of religious authority and authenticity. The former deputy Prime Minister, Encik Ghafar Baba, in addressing the UMNO General Assembly on the Party's "holy" struggle in 1990, criticized Malay society's preference for accepting "those who speak Arabic, who graduate from universities abroad" as "ready-made" *ulama*: "Such a culture must be done away with. We must produce more people who are knowledgeable and useful to society. Who possess the capacity to develop the country."⁶⁴ Indeed, the title of *ulama* was too easily bestowed on "any one with a smidgen of religious learning or knowledge". Moreover, "being an '*alim* simply for purposes of the afterlife is inadequate.... The real meaning of the word *ulama* is to my mind, those who are knowledgeable and are successful at using that knowledge to lead and raise the standard of living of society for both this world and the next."⁶⁵

Through its exhortations towards Islam's intrinsic compatibility with development and economic modernization, the Administration has attempted to situate itself within reformist currents, advocating dispensation with the "static traditionalism of some Muslims whose taqlid-orientation goes against the dynamism of the *Quran*" and urging Muslim scholars to "exercise an open and flexible approach in the implementation of Islamic codes and methods to suit the modern world". Since 1981, Dr Mahathir has sought to legitimize his policies by appeal to a notion of '*ijtihad*, acknowledging the imperatives for such an approach within Malaysia's unique circumstances as a Muslim society and by appeal to the argument that "people embrace Islam through various means". Indeed, in Dr Mahathir's view, no one government should be condemned for being un-Islamic as there were numerous interpretations of what this entailed.⁶⁶

Despite this orientation, and until recently, UMNO, as a political party, has been bound by its own ethno-religious conservatism, and incapacity if not unwillingness to actively challenge and inevitably divide its own political base, i.e. the Malay-

Muslim community. In fulfilling its protector image the UMNO-led government has found any potential alienation of its religious bases of support, in particular that of the “establishment” *ulama* (or those occupying the state’s bureaucratic religious offices), politically unaffordable. Basically conservative in their approach, they have proved somewhat pliable on some of the Administration’s modernist injunctions, while remaining resistant to others. While the attitudes of the variety of Malaysian Islamic movements (be they political parties or Islamic voluntarist movements) cannot be easily generalized, the prevalence of overt attention to ritual rather than dynamic *‘ijtihad* within Muslim society in Malaysia is partially explained by the continued importance of the ethnic equation in domestic politics. Indeed, debate between religious and secular authority has paralleled increasing intra-Malay rivalry and political tension.⁶⁷

Inevitably the issue of *‘ijtihad* has come to revolve around the political divide between UMNO and PAS. In fact, the intensification of UMNO-PAS rivalry by the middle of the decade escalated this religious tension and highlighted the unresolved issue of religious authority. PAS has renewed its “struggle” for leadership by the *ulama* in order to regain its authority (in political and Islamic terms) and the Party has challenged the dearth of traditionally trained religious authority in senior policy-making positions within UMNO, thus rendering it as essentially secular.⁶⁸

The support extended by a number of Muslim intellectuals towards Dr Mahathir’s re-registered party, UMNO Baru, in 1988, also drew criticism from PAS, but has been reflective of continuing divisions among Malay-Muslim society. A former PAS Vice-President expressed the opinion that intellectuals had to be able to analyse and lead the *umma* on political issues in a proper manner, outside of their political interests in and affiliations with UMNO’s survival as the ruling party. By stressing the danger to the spiritual community of Muslims if UMNO was destroyed, these intellectuals were, in fact, neglecting the welfare of the *umma* and of Malays who had no such links with UMNO, such as *Semangat ‘46* and PAS supporters.⁶⁹

Within the context of Islamic revivalism and debates over the roles and limitations of religious authority in modern Muslim society, the notion, articulated by PAS but echoed by the state’s religious personnel, has been reinforced that the *ulama* must retake their position of importance within Malay society, to advise, comment and participate on national issues, on science, technology, the humanities, on international relations, on the validity of secularism, pragmatism, nationalism and liberalism and not just on religious matters. Arguing essentially that the current divisions in Malay politics are necessary for the greater development of religion in Malaysian politics and that the *ulama* and the secularly educated might administer the country jointly, such opinion perceives the particular advantage of having the religiously trained set the moral example in politics—a role which the current PAS-dominated government in Kelantan has seized with some vigour.⁷⁰

Amidst daily reports of corruption and abuse of power by some of these secular elites and the by now entrenched influence and excesses of patronage

and money politics in Malay political culture, UMNO and the Administration remain extremely vulnerable to political challenge from the religiously trained and sanctioned, acute in the light of the fact that the Administration had campaigned on a ticket of “clean, trustworthy and efficient” government in its first national election. Indeed, the Administration has more recently acknowledged the severe problems of financial corruption (partly reflective of efforts by ascendant political interests within UMNO, including Islamists, to prove their moral credentials) within the political system, calling a Special UMNO General Assembly to discuss the issue in 1994, amending the Party Constitution in an attempt to check money politics and by providing the Anti-Corruption Agency with renewed zeal for its scope, methods and work.

The Government has faced dissent from its own *ulama* as well, who have claimed a wider role for themselves. Although by 1982 the Federal Government had over 100 *ulama* in the Prime Minister’s Office and some 715 in the Ministry of Education itself in its employment, the *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia* (PUM—Malaysian Ulama’s Association) demanded a more representative role for religious scholars within the policy-making machinery of government, resorting to self-financed media to present its own views on “important matters affecting Muslims in Malaysia”.⁷¹ The establishment of the *Pusat Islam* (Islamic Centre) or the collective term for the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister’s Office and its associated bureaucracies has gone some way towards centralizing the functions and authority of *ulama* at the federal level.

The centrality of this issue to Malaysian political development in fact mirrors the experience of other Muslim societies. Increasingly, the new keepers of religious knowledge in Malaysia are secular elites who dispense religious knowledge or at least attempt to articulate opinion on it. The expression of tension is partly attributable to the increasing authority of Muslim thinkers who have not had the traditional training or experience of the *ulama* yet have impressive educational qualifications and the ability to articulate their views which in contemporary times, can be and often are eventually translated to “authority” (through what James Piscatori calls “the consensus of speech”), i.e. the ability of national leaders with the expensive apparatus of state and modern communications at their disposal to mould opinion and to engage in political education, particularly of the young.⁷² Indeed, the notion of *‘ijma* (consensus) is naturally and intimately linked with the notion of *‘ijtihad*, and in contemporary times has increasingly shifted away from the prerogative of the *ulama* towards the domain of “secularized” but learned lay intellectuals. The latter, through their education and exposure (and frequently their political standing) have come to shape mass opinion, through a pattern of what Muslim thinkers say and write on a subject (speech) and by what Muslims do with regard to it (action), or indeed non-action as in the case of the “consensus of silence” often indicating assent.⁷³

The Mahathir Administration has clearly perceived the urgency of building such intellectual consensus through its support for the establishment of and teaching within institutions such as that of the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur (Universiti Islam Antarabangsa—UIA). The objectives of the

UIA have been depicted as the promotion of Islamic philosophy as the basis of education even as it is particularly attuned to the needs of modernity (by, for instance, teaching scientific concepts and theories through Islamic principles). Significant to the Administration's underwriting of the training of Muslim intellectuals of the future is the fact that the UIA is heavily supported as a joint venture between Malaysia and other Muslim countries.⁷⁴

As evidenced by their action and rhetoric, many of the younger, second-echelon leaders in UMNO and within the Mahathir Administration, particularly those linked with some kind of "Islamic identity", are representative of these new "secularized" keepers of religious authority. In 1985, for instance, Datuk Abdullah Badawi, then Education Minister, emphasized that the younger Islamists in UMNO were committed to the re-invigoration of the concept of *'ijtihad* which was vital in reorienting Muslim society in the twentieth century. In the same year, Datuk Sanusi Junid, then the National and Rural Development Minister, criticized Islamic theologians and intellectuals for imposing their interpretations of Islamic rules and regulations over governmental and private Islamic projects, as a hindrance to both development and the solidarity of Malaysian Muslims. More significantly, it was argued that such interpretations would make the non-Muslim community in Malaysia unreceptive to Islam and its teachings.⁷⁵

The current Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, and his political career is another clear example of the ascent of this kind of authority. Despite his clear association with UMNO's Islamization and the Mahathir Administration's increasing attention to Islam in both domestic and foreign policy, he remains somewhat "secularly" tainted partly due to his continuing support for UMNO's brand of Malay-Muslim nationalism but also by the fact of his lack of formal training in religious knowledge.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Anwar also has the prestige of connection to and sanction by many important personalities on the international Islamic circuit. Following the challenges in the 1970s, it became crucial for UMNO to be able to parade its own activist leaders of calibre and capability in Islamic movements both nationally and internationally. To this end, Anwar's co-option into UMNO in 1982 was vital towards boosting UMNO's and the Government's Islamic image, not only domestically but in the foreign arena as well. His close rapport with many internationally renowned Islamic scholars and leaders has represented a vital asset to the Administration and has been instrumental in cementing Dr Mahathir's relationships with a number of international Islamic personalities and scholars invited to Malaysia to offer their consultative expertise on Islamization. Anwar has also frequently served as "ambassador" on missions to various Muslim countries and at various international Islamic fora.⁷⁷

As a government Minister, Anwar has consistently articulated a growing concern over the "division" between secular and religious authority, while insisting that the Administration did, in fact, usually consider the opinions and views of the *ulama*, both local and foreign. By 1985, however, as political rivalry intensified, he warned against the dangers of "neo-conservative"

thinking and of a new “Islamic clergy” (who were not themselves infallible and therefore not exemplary) who claimed exclusive knowledge of religion, identifying this as a “worrying” development rapidly finding root in Malaysian society. Anwar has also been closely associated with promoting *ijtihad* through the media, noting such exercises as vital in dealing provocatively with Islam and as being of benefit to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Anwar argues that the exclusivity demanded by the *ulama* instils Muslim fear in debating Islam, preventing their awareness of deeper currents within Islamic revivalism and, if this trend of religious monopoly went unchecked, it would ensure the entrenchment of an Islamic faith of “merely rituals”.⁷⁸

Despite the Federal Government’s avowed approval for the legitimation of this type of “secularized” authority through *ijtihad*, it has also been cautious, if not defensive, about more open discussion of such matters at the national level for fear of unavoidably drawing reaction from both foreign and domestic *ulama*.⁷⁹ Indeed, the Government’s ambiguous support of (and vulnerability over) this concept can be gleaned from the position it was at pains to take over the publication in 1986 of a controversial book questioning the validity of the *Hadiths* (the sayings of the Prophet). The book prompted a major religious controversy (led by certain PAS leaders, Muslim academics and other Muslim groups) over its supposed challenge to the integrity of Islam and as a repudiation of the faith itself, with the Government eventually caving in to pressure to ban the book.⁸⁰ More recently the Administration has moved against the author and his intellectual supporters identified by the media as the “*anti-Hadith*” group. It demonstrates the strength of continued conservatism among traditional religious authority in Malaysia and acts as a significant hurdle to the Administration’s attempts at entrenching its view of “right” Islam. Indeed, any capacity for the system as it stands, to tolerate any real or critical evaluation of Islam and its scriptural sources appears virtually impossible in the short term.

Ijtihad poses problems at another level. Like all its predecessors, the Mahathir Administration has been hampered by state prerogative over Islamic matters in the Malaysian federal system. The Administration’s opinions and desire to act for or against doctrinal stances must therefore gain the concurrence of state religious authorities. While previous Malaysian administrations have displayed considerable tolerance of religious diversity in their maintenance of Islam as a state prerogative, they were less challenged by the impact of international religio-political processes and influence on Malay-Muslim society. The significant challenge that degrees of religious independence and diversity enjoyed by individual state authorities has posed to the agenda of promoting “right” Islam is demonstrated in increasing support from political elites for the further centralization of religious authority. In line with continued campaigns by the Administration for the uniformity of Islamic interpretation, practice and opinion throughout Malaysia, the Deputy UMNO Youth chief, Datuk Nazri Aziz, proposed, in 1996, the centralization of Islamic affairs under federal jurisdiction in order to improve the image of Islam, as long overdue, associating State prerogative over Islam with colonial legacies. Proposals have even been made to initiate a kind of standardizing of *ulama* and religious officials involved

in Islamic administration by ensuring only “graduates with proper qualifications” are admitted to these professions.⁸¹

Furthermore, the legitimization of socio-political Islam by the contemporary state to strengthen Malay identity has in fact imposed limits on its control of the religious field. In upholding its Islamic credentials *vis-à-vis* its Malay electorate and the wider Muslim world, the Federal Government is unable to entirely suppress neither the great variety of Islamic voluntarism and activity nor its dissent and competition. While in more recent years, employing more coercive strategies in an attempt to obtain what it calls less “confusion”, the Administration’s effectiveness in this matter has yet to be fully measured.

Although a realignment of the administrative political unit with that of the religious directed at eliminating discrepancies between different standards and sources of authority is not new, the methods chosen by the Mahathir Administration to achieve this are. Under the circumstances, the Federal Government’s best options have lain in engaging in a competition of ideas and by receiving continuing support and sanction for its interpretations of and approach to Islam from international sources. “Right” Islam has therefore been increasingly promoted through the Administration’s courting of opinion, advice and consultation from certain international Muslim intellectuals. In the face of decentralized control over Islamic affairs, even regional challenge, the prestige of international Islamic consultation has afforded the Government the opportunity to regain some authority by centralizing and controlling religious opinion.

Since 1981, the Government has actively sponsored numerous international conferences, seminars and expositions annually, that have addressed issues and problems in the Islamic world. The general themes carried in these fora (invariably stressing the importance of the acquisition of knowledge for progress even if it is of the non-spiritual variety) underline the Administration’s agenda. Within the first decade of the Mahathir Administration, Kuala Lumpur hosted major international conferences almost annually, on such issues as an Islamic Approach Towards Technological Development (1983), Islamic Civilization (1984), Islamic Thought (1984), an International Islamic Symposium (1986), Islamic Management for the Asia-Pacific Region (1987), Islamic Economics (1987), the Media and Islam in the Modern World (1987) and Islam and the Philosophy of Science (1989).

The convening of these conferences has also been symbolically beneficial: the prestige of consensus from important and respected scholars and intellectuals in various Islamic fields, allowing for the Islamic world’s recognition of Malaysia as being part of a great intellectual tradition and involved in the promotion of the religion. Furthermore, through increasing reliance on those not necessarily trained in more orthodox forms as religious scholars, but who are nevertheless able to provide opinion, direction, advice, and stimulation in matters spiritual and mundane, the Federal Government is also implicitly challenging, perhaps even gradually removing, the idea of the monopolization of authority by the *ulama* and the traditional religious establishment.

Yet they have also provided important fora for the Administration's articulation of its vision of "right" Islam: as a "balanced, moderate and modernising force that would not impede foreign investment, that was accepting of certain secular Western forms and that has taken account of current political realities in the Muslim and outside world". In the Prime Minister's view, "true" *dakwah*, unlike "the wrong interpretation of Islam", is distinguished by its reason, logic and sound argument. A real resurgence of Islam needed a solid foundation of contemporary ideas and analysis derived from the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, which could only emerge if there was "true" *ijtihad*.⁸²

This has been particularly crucial in the Government's attempts to effectively influence debates on the Islamization of knowledge project—an argument extended by some Islamists for a rejection of the secularization process and its impact on learning and for the return of religious experience and spirituality into knowledge by means of the sacralization of academic discourse in order for Muslims to better understand the problems that beset their societies.⁸³ While the Malaysian government has attempted to treat this argument seriously, it has also articulated fear that such endeavours, when misunderstood by some Muslims, might lead to a total rejection of Western learning and technology—means by which Dr Mahathir himself envisions the advancement of the Malays and their ability to compete with the Chinese in Malaysia as well as the outside world. Bemoaning the decrease in the number of Muslim intellectuals in science, technology and mathematics, he has articulated regret over what he perceived as a campaign among Malay-Muslims against "secular" knowledge in favour of knowledge of the hereafter (*dunia akhirat*)⁸⁴

The development of a suitable Malay society to meet these goals, however, also meant that the field of education has increasingly come under review. It was estimated in 1980 that 14 per cent of a total student population of 3.5 million was engaged in distinctly "Islamic studies".⁸⁵ In Dr Mahathir's view, the traditional preference of Malay students for religious studies and the arts should, instead, be more heavily weighted towards educating and building a more technocratic society. This was however to meet some resistance from his domestic Islamic opposition as inevitably major debates arose over issues concerning the perceived imperatives of the Islamization of knowledge.

Reinforcing its attempts to entrench positive thinking on *ijtihad*, the Administration has embarked on a strategy of institutionalizing "modernist" Muslim opinion supportive of its socio-economic development programmes. The International Islamic University, the International Institute of Islamic Thought and, since 1992, the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) have all been established through primary sponsorship from the Government. The saliency of the representation of official views in the development of such intellectual thinking is displayed in the fact that many institutional personnel serve concurrent roles within the Mahathir Administration (the head of IKIM, for instance, is also a Government Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office). Thus these institutions serve as important religious "think-tanks" for the Administration in its campaign to the sanctify the imperative of *ijtihad* for modern Muslim societies.

Acting to counter a “narrow” interpretation and ideology on knowledge and its acquisition (despite the fact that some of these fields had been pioneered by Muslims themselves), these institutions have also been officially aimed at developing a core of Muslim intellectuals as an alternative to the intellectual dependency of Muslims on the West.⁸⁶ Like other Government bureaucracies, IKIM research and literature are ultimately focused on emphasizing values of modernity and modernization within a larger Islamic world-view, warning against the excesses of capitalism even while encouraging the imperatives of discipline, diligence and a work ethic as religiously demanded if not inspired.⁸⁷

Since much of the challenge that UMNO and the Government has faced, at least in terms of Islamic discourse, has been critical of reliance on Western and secular ideals of development the Administration has had to address criticism that even while it was promoting greater Islamic values in society, this was “contradicted” by its pursuit of an intensive pace of economic growth and development that continues fundamentally to be based on secular Western models and to be over-concerned with material acquisition.⁸⁸

Thus, much of Dr Mahathir’s philosophy has also been preoccupied with the effects of Islamization on the world-view of a society and its attitudes in foreign relations. Perhaps pre-empting what he has feared to be a kind of anti-Westernism as a by-product of Islamic resurgence and of a nation as yet uncertain of its identity, Dr Mahathir has also sought the means to impress the Malay-Muslim constituency of its need to look outward and to accept rather than reject, at least initially, Western knowledge.

Dr Mahathir has also reminded Muslims that Islam permitted the acceptance of teachings outside of the Islamic system as long as these were not contrary to the religion. However, if Muslims were not to be backward, cheated and eventually dominated by non-Muslims, then the Administration would have to correctly allocate time and money on religious instruction and *dakwah* that would fortify Malay development. Indeed, the desire to practise an Islamic economic system should not mean isolation from the world economy, dominated by the West.⁸⁹

In the third phase of his Administration, Dr Mahathir’s grandest scheme for Malaysian development through his Vision 2020 programme has aimed at ensuring Malaysia’s status as a fully industrialized nation by that date. Its formal programmes give further emphasis to the inculcation of certain “key (moral and ethical) values” in the creation of a business ethic, detailed as national unity, psychological liberation, democracy, tolerance and liberalism, science and technology, compassion, social justice and competitiveness.⁹⁰ Indeed, if Dr Mahathir’s articulated programme is to make headway, the imperative for a scientifically and technologically advanced population in terms of education is undoubtedly vital.

At a national post-1990 review of the New Economic Policy a senior economic policy adviser, did articulate some apprehension over the movement for more intensive Islamization, particularly with regards to the role of *Bumiputeras* in the economy, suggesting that patterns thus far indicated in fact

great difficulties in attempting to integrate Muslims in economic ventures concerning the non-Muslim world.⁹¹

To help counter this, IKIM has hosted a series of conferences and workshops for multinational companies, local and foreign investors explaining Malaysia's commitment to development, although distinct in its "Islamic" approach and of the "Muslim" ethics of Malaysian workers. By the same public relations token, it hosted an international conference in 1993, aimed at creating a "positive Islamic world-view" and correcting Malaysian and American misperceptions of Islam. The conference was promoted as part of IKIM's agenda of involving non-Muslims in discussion of international issues likely to affect Muslims.⁹²

The relative success of the Malaysian economy and its rapid turn around since the recession of the mid-1980s enabled, if not demanded, the further pursuit of "right" Islam towards supporting the Mahathir Administration's economic agenda for the 1990s, underlined by greater moves towards privatization of the economy, accelerated drives towards external trade and foreign investment and attempts at initiating its own ideas on regional and international economic blocs, all of which necessitate the enthusiasm and participation from the "right Muslim".

None of the above, however, is to suggest that the Mahathir Administration has not in itself been impressed by the power of Islam and of Islamic revivalism. Indeed, Dr Mahathir clearly has himself been attracted to aspects of a renewed and revived Islam and as such can be counted among those who support one of the many "streams" of Islamic development and resurgence in general as can many of the younger Malay members of his Administration.

The desire to project a modernist Islamic image fits in particular with the Administration's renewed efforts at playing an activist and prominent role both within and for the Third World and with Dr Mahathir's personal belief that these countries have much to offer the industrialized West within relationships that desperately require readjustment. Indeed, his Administration has made some attempts to correct uninformed Western judgements and misperceptions of the significance of Islam and of Islamic values to Muslim societies, including Malaysia. As a response to a frequently easy equation between all religious activism and the negative connotations of religious fundamentalism, Dr Mahathir and others within his Administration have argued that "fundamentalism *per se*" is in harmony with basic and universal fundamental needs and values.⁹³

Much of the Administration's interest in active participation within the OIC and in building relations with other Muslim countries is reflective of Dr Mahathir's perception of a need for a new international economic order through a redistribution of the world's economic and political power which might be obtained through effective Muslim solidarity—an aim conducive to Malaysian goals articulated within its status as a non-aligned, Third World nation. "Right" Islam has thus also been perceived as supportive of Malaysia's active participation in the ubiquitous "Asian values" debate between the West and developing countries in Asia, particularly in the post-Cold War phase of international relations.

In as much as the pursuit of “right” Islam is motivated by the general tone and concern that an expansive gulf remains between Islamic ideals and Muslim realities, it is also clear that there exist different perceptions within the Administration as to how the ideal of Muslim regeneration is itself to be achieved. While agreeing that a prolonged period of Muslim civilizational decline explains the contemporary ineffectuality of Muslim societies, Dr Mahathir perceives a need for all Muslims to meet the challenge of modernization head-on. He appears personally convinced that an Islam that allows Muslims to demonstrate their capacity for economic advancement that mirrors Western achievements is not only acceptable but warranted. In an important address to the 1996 Pacific Basin Economic Council, for instance, he underlined his belief that the Cold War had not been won by the West through diplomacy or war but “by the workers with their Chevys and Plymouths, and by well-stocked supermarkets and shopping malls”. His current deputy, Anwar Ibrahim however concedes that the ideal itself is sometimes difficult to visualize clearly; in part because the world-view of Islam itself cannot be reduced to an ideology. Any reliance on such “totalizing” faith is in fact a product of secularization and therefore to be avoided by Muslim societies.

THE LIMITS OF “RIGHT” IDENTITY

The concept of *‘ijtihad* itself has not of course been the prerogative of contemporary Muslim societies. In fact, its dynamism as a concept and process might in part be explained by the nature and character of the religion itself—of Islam as being in permanent or cyclical reformation. While *‘ijtihad* has acted as a singular determinant of the challenge to existing doctrines, it is important also in proposing that various ideas and interpretations of doctrine can co-exist with each other. While discourse and debate engendered by the issue of *‘ijtihad* is not exclusive to Malay society, it is also questionable whether less extreme forms of dissent, resistance or debate represent a problem (except for those whose authority it threatens) and could more usefully be considered as unavoidable tension that might contribute positively towards the development of that religion’s role in society.⁹⁴ Islamic revivalism can and has produced debate within Muslim societies that in conjunction with political and economic change creates a continuous dialectic of self-renewal and social transformation.⁹⁵

“Right” Islamic identity even in foreign policy also poses inherent dangers as a strategy. In distinguishing between, and internationally associating with, a “moderate” and therefore acceptable Islam against an “extremist” and therefore unacceptable form, policy makers also run the risk of reflecting the “jaundiced” view of Islam as generally perceived to be held by the West while insisting on uniformity of interpretation that might ultimately spell disunity within the *umma*.⁹⁶ There remains the perception that political elites in Third World states and Muslim societies have often reflected a kind of “Europe-centredness” of Islamic identity—i.e. reflecting the West’s tendency to portray Islam’s belief structure and Muslim societies as being thoroughly incompatible with modernity.

Responses on the part of these elites to counter such ideas often also underline, however, their singular depiction of modernity and of modernization. This has worked further to the marginalization of Islam itself and of the more “deviant” Islamic practices within Islam. The rhetoric of “right” Islam—in particular the Administration’s frequent inclusion of labels such as “traditionalist” or “modernist” towards distinguishing itself from its political (and religious) opposition—underlines a frequent tendency to itself view Islam as static or as singularly interpreted despite claiming to be promoting the opposite. Yet the historical application of religious ideas to the social reality of Muslim societies indicates that Islam is anything but static (or singularly interpreted). Certainly even in the experience of Malaysia, religious, political and social ideas where they concern Islam have been shaped frequently as much by the implicit discourse existent between “traditionalists” and “modernists” as they are by the context in which this discourse is carried out.

Indeed, it is important to recognize that the growing role of religion in Malaysia’s domestic politics does not imply that it is Islam—its “traditions”, doctrines or philosophy—alone which has dictated the actions of political actors. Religious politics—as Sami Zubaida notes—are as much products of modernity—of mass society and mass politics. They should as such be recognized as very modern phenomena whatever their manifestation or interpretation. Indeed, modern ideas, modern models of politics, modern political forms inform and remain central to Islamist discourse. Although often represented in political definition and language as static, Islamist politics and discourse should therefore not be treated as *sui generis*.⁹⁷ Related importantly to this is how a developmentalist discourse in Malaysia has elicited Malay-nationalist, Malay-Islamic and Malay-corporate contributions in political terms.

The problem for Malaysia is that all dynamics within Malay politics and society ultimately also affect the position and role of the other communities and there continues to be doubt about the viability of an Islamic system in Malaysia, moderate or radical (whatever the generation of those terms implies), because of the persistence of its connection to ethnic politics.

To some extent, encouraging association with the international Islamic community has also enhanced the impingement of the external Muslim world on domestic Muslim society whether positive or negative, which has thus held potentially adverse effects. Such association has, in fact, increasingly cornered the Administration into reacting to developments elsewhere in the Muslim world, over which it often has little influence, and little direct connection beyond the larger symbol of a shared religion. At the height of intra-UMNO rivalry in 1986, Dr Mahathir drew attention to this disadvantage, suggesting its deleterious effect on domestic politics.⁹⁸ Clearly, an association with a universal identity in Islam is not always appropriate to circumstances which have demanded a more parochial or local emphasis. In fact, the persistence and power of “wrong” Islam has also demonstrated that UMNO’s efforts have been only partially successful and that the Administration’s plans remain significantly challenged.

NOTES

1. *New Straits Times (NST)*, 17 July 1982; *Penyata UMNO 1982*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, pp. 379–390. In his opinion, this would be a more preferred strategy than one of “welfare” for co-religionists.
2. Presidential address to the 1984 UMNO General Assembly in *Penyata UMNO 1984*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1985, pp. 415–428; *NST*, 21 July 1983; *Era*, 9 March 1985, pp. 28–31; *Utusan Malaysia (UM)*, 23 September 1985. Dr Mahathir maintained that current developments in the Islamic world had to be understood as actions towards the consolidation of “political freedom, economic justice and cultural identity”, and as proposing universally acceptable values. The Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, emphasized Malaysia’s differences from “the United Kingdom, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan...or Iran. Malaysia is unique because it is complex”.
3. *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat (PRPDR)*, Vol. 1, No. 89, 15 November 1983, pp. 12569–12570.
4. Rajmah Hussain, *Malaysia at the United Nations: A Study of Foreign Policy Priorities 1957–1987*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1988, p. 206; *Malaysian Digest*, January 1983, p. 12. In refuting a PAS claim that Malaysia was not truly an Islamic state, Haji Dusuki Haji Ahmad offered a comparison with India which had far more Muslims than Malaysia but was not granted admission to the OIC. It is revealing that this statement was highlighted in a publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ External Information Division.
5. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 9 and 10, 1982, p. 42; *Watan*, 12 January 1981.
6. *UM*, 13 January 1987; Rajmah Hussain, op. cit., p. 209; *Mingguan Malaysia*, 25 January 1987.
7. Malaysian address to the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Fez, Morocco in January 1986 in *FAM*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 1986, pp. 17–21.
8. *UM*, 1 February 1987. The Minister was in fact speaking within the context of a then recently concluded incident that had caused serious damage to Malaysia’s relations with Singapore (detailed in Chapter 6).
9. Interview with Tan Sri Zakaria Ali, former Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia (1976–1983), Kuala Lumpur, 9 June 1989; *PRPDR*, Vol. II, No. 3, 15 March 1984, pp. 501–504; *UM*, 26 January 1987.
10. *Arabia: An Islamic World Review*, August 1985, pp. 12–16; *UM*, 17 January 1987; *Mingguan Malaysia*, 25 January 1987. As one of the 11 members that contributed to the Islamic Solidarity Fund of the OIC (which has a total membership of 45 states), Malaysia wanted to know how its annual contribution of US\$900,000 was spent (particularly since, unlike Malaysia, many of the richer members had not met their payments).
11. Interview with Haji Hadi Awang, Vice-President PAS, Marang, Trengganu, 27 August 1989; *Harakah*, 4 April 1989. Haji Hadi maintains that despite its laudable aims, the OIC’s status as an Islamic organization is questionable because its programmes towards Muslim wealth and education do not confront the fundamental question of their acceptability to Islam. As such the organization differs little from other international bodies such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity and is more usefully described as *Muslim* rather than Islamic.
12. *FAM*, December 1984, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 359; *NST*, 25 May 1983.
13. Interview with Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, former Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia (1983–1987), 6 June 1989; *NST*, 1 March 1982; 26 January 1987; *UM*, 27 January 1987. This is however viewed as an additional advantage rather than as a specific aim of building close relations with Islamic countries.

14. See statements of Dr Mahathir Mohammed and Foreign Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, at the OIC Conference in Casablanca, 1993 in *MD*, November/December 1993.
15. *NST*, 29 January 1982, 2 February 1982.
16. *NST*, 1 March 1982, 2 February 1982; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 and 2, 1982; *UM*, 15 April 1982. After returning from a 10-day visit to the Gulf States and Jeddah, Dr Mahathir announced the Saudi government's assurance of full co-operation with Malaysia, in setting up the Islamic Bank for launch in 1983 by facilitating the training of staff at Saudi-owned Muslim economic and banking institutes in Cyprus, Sudan and Egypt and the co-operation of five foreign co-sponsors for the proposed International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur.
17. *UM*, 12 April 1982.
18. *NST*, 9 May 1981, 14 May and 13 July 1982; 4 and 5 November 1982. Egypt and Iraq were important in educational exchange, particularly for religious studies. In 1982, Anwar Ibrahim gained an initial allocation of M\$ 100,000 from the Islamic Secretariat, (after a trip to Jeddah) for the establishment of an International Islamic Youth Centre to be jointly financed by the Malaysian government and WAMY and a Saudi promise to finance the training of staff for the International Islamic University.
19. *NST*, 17 May and 17 September 1983.
20. Interviews with Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, op. cit.; Datuk Musa Hitam, former Deputy Prime Minister, 21 June 1989; Encik Ben Harun (Deputy Secretary General and former Ambassador to Pakistan/Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia), Kuala Lumpur, 20 June 1989; Encik Kammaruddin Jaffar (Political Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and former ABIM Vice-President), Kuala Lumpur, 6 April 1990; *FAM*, Vol. 16, No. 3, June 1983, p. 152. According to Tan Sri Zainal the Malaysian government wanted its public "to know that there is more than one kind of Islam. Malaysians think there is only one type of Islam—that of the Arabs."
21. *NST*, 30 November 1983; *FAM*, Vol. 16, No. 3, June 1983, pp. 152–153; *Malaysian Digest*, June 1987, p. 9.
22. Interview with Encik Anwar Ibrahim, Education Minister, Kuala Lumpur, 27 December 1990, who put Dr Mahathir's personal relationship with Yasser Arafat into the same category; *NST*, 26 March 1984; *FAM*, March 1984, Vol. 17, No. 1. In 1982, Tunku Abdul Rahman had also been awarded Pakistan's "*Hijrah*" award for outstanding contributions in promoting Islam.
23. Mahathir Mohammed, *The Malay Dilemma*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1970, pp. 104, 162. In his perception, "no plan or ideology which runs counter to the religion of the Malays can succeed". The book, written after his expulsion from UMNO, offers a radical prescription for curing traditional Malay underdevelopment; *Cabaran* (The Challenge), Kuala Lumpur: Eastern Universities Press 1978, pp. 13, 15, 21, 36, 43, 81 and 103. He cites development and progress found in West Asia, North Africa, Spain, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South Asia after Islam had spread there, as lacking in the lands of the Malays.
24. Ozay Mehmet, *Islamic Identity and Development*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 53.
25. See allegations by the Malaysian High Commissioner particularly about Malaysian Muslim students in London in *Straits Times* (*ST*), 17 May 1980.
26. See *NST*, 1 June 1979; *Penyata UMNO 1982*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1983.
27. Interview with Datuk Musa Hitam, op. cit.; *Malaysian Business*, July 1983, pp. 28–29; *NST*, 16 October 1984; Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), *Malaysia—Past, Present and Future*, Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1987, pp. 6–7; *FAM*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1981, p. 7. Although Datuk Musa expressed concern about Islam's "backward image", he argued that the *Quran* could serve as a "guide towards any programme that could suit the Malaysian scene", defending the Islamic values that

- the Government wanted to inject in Malaysian society as honesty, anti-corruption, public trust, efficiency, diligence, moderation, tolerance and thrift.
28. Presidential address to the UMNO General Assembly in 1982 in *Penyata UMNO 1982/83*, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, pp. 387–388; Johan Saravanamuttu, “The Look East Policy and Japanese Economic Penetration in Malaysia” in K.S.Jomo (ed.), *Mahathir’s Economic Policies*, Kuala Lumpur: INS AN, 1988, pp. 4–28; Just Faaland *et al.*, *Growth and Ethnic Inequality: Malaysia’s New Economic Policy*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1990, p. 187.
 29. *NST*, 26 September 1984; Presidential address to the 1988 UMNO General Assembly in *Penyata UMNO 1988*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1989, pp. 209–216.
 30. *Proceedings, Papers and Resolutions of Seminar Kebangsaan Konsep Pembangunan Dalam Islam*, 10–12 March 1981, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor. Nearly 200 participants including religious leaders, senior government bureaucrats and professionals discussed subjects such as *Ibadah*, Science and Technology, Economics, Education, Culture, Government and *Dakwah* at the Seminar organized by the Prime Minister’s Office which pledged serious governmental consideration of the 64 resolutions reached.
 31. *NST*, 25 December 1983. Initiated in 1981, it was entrusted with the task of finding ways of drawing up strategies to ensure that the Government’s development projects were in line with Islamic precepts.
 32. *PRPDR*, 27 November 1984, No. 61. It was first established in 1976 under the Trustees (Incorporation) Ordinance of 1952 with 15 members from the *ulama*, Islamic intellectuals and professionals in trade and industry on its Board of Trustees. In 1984, it was claimed to hold approximately 20 per cent civil servant participation.
 33. Datuk Malek Merican in “Review of the NEP from the Private Sector Perspective”, delivered at a conference on the NEP after 1990 in March 1987, cited in Just Faaland *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 190–191.
 34. *NST*, 17 July 1982. Although Dr Mahathir has insisted that his Administration had not forgotten “the need to subscribe to certain ideals like the concept of neutrality and all that”, he has also expressed the need to “get down to the nitty-gritty” in foreign relations which yield “more positive results”.
 35. Interview with Datuk Musa Hitam, *op.cit.* He explained this as crucial to the character of the Administration’s foreign policy emphasis on Islam.
 36. *NST*, 17 September 1985.
 37. *FAM*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1981, pp. 8–9; *NST*, 28 January 1981; *Malaysian Digest*, 30 June 1981, p. 1. OIC inter-economic co-operation has been described by Dr Mahathir as “a mere drop in the ocean” compared with total economic investments and activities in and from the Islamic world despite the fact that “Muslim money” had supported European and American industries with impressive results.
 38. Ministry of Finance, Government of Malaysia, *Economic Report 1981/82*, Vol. 11, Kuala Lumpur, 1982, p. 36; *1988/89*, Vol. 17, Kuala Lumpur, 1989; *1990/91*, Vol. 19 Kuala Lumpur, 1991, p. 63; *Malaysian Digest*, September 1988, p. 2. The OIC Conference in 1981 in fact made substantial proposals towards Islamic economic co-operation, including a Trade Co-operation Programme, an Islamic Centre for trade development in Tangiers, an Agreement on Promotion, Protection and Guarantee of Investments of OIC members, an Islamic Shipowners’ Association in Jeddah, special consideration of the problems of the Sahel and the Least Developed Islamic countries and a general document towards strengthened economic co-operation. The bulk of IDB participation in Malaysia has financed foreign trade and granted project loans and technical assistance towards promoting palm oil use among OIC countries.
 39. *Economic Report 1981/82*, *op. cit.*, p. 42. Malaysia has for instance contributed rice and technical aid to Mali to help alleviate the food shortages and raise production

- levels, while exploring potential Malaysian assistance towards its long-term economic recovery.
40. *NST*, 2 February 1981. The high-level export promotion mission (also representing 21 local companies) visited Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, and reportedly returned with M\$ 10.34 million worth of orders and M\$13 million worth of potential orders.
 41. *NST*, 10 March 1981, 6 March 1982; *FAM*, Vol.15, No. 2, December 1982, pp. 379, 381, 382; Ministry of Finance, Government of Malaysia, *Economic Report 1984/85*, Kuala Lumpur, 1985, p. 42. Such strategy was underlined by subsequent trade missions to Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia by government bureaucrats and senior business professionals.
 42. Interview with Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, President of *Semangat '46*, Kuala Lumpur, 30 April 1990.
 43. Ministry of Finance, Government of Malaysia, *Economic Report 1984/85*, op. cit., p. xvii; *1990/91*, op. cit. p. xxi. *Malaysian Digest*, May/June 1988, p. 3. For a time, Saudi Arabia proved the exception, with bilateral trade having increased 25.7 per cent between 1979 and 1983.
 44. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 March 1984, pp. 60–61. Until palm oil became an important trade item for Islamic countries such as Iraq and Pakistan, timber from East Malaysia was the most important export commodity.
 45. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 11 and 12, 1982; interview with the Iranian Ambassador to Malaysia in *Malaysian Business*, 16 July 1988, pp. 23–26; *ST*, 21 March 1989.
 46. *NST*, 13 January 1987; *Malaysian Digest*, February 1987, p. 10; *Malaysian Business*, 16 July 1988, pp. 24–26; *ST*, 14 February and 24 March 1989; *Business Times*, 15 February 1989. As the world's largest producer of palm oil, Malaysia lobbied since 1983 for the lifting of a 40-year Iranian ban on palm oil, complicated by Iran's desire to link the issue to Malaysian import of its crude oil. Traditional Malaysian reluctance over business with Iran is explained by inadequate trade financing schemes, partly alleviated by a banking agreement signed in 1988.
 47. *Economic Report 1989/90*, op. cit. Indeed, Japan and Singapore alone accounted for some 40 per cent (on average) of annual Malaysian exports. Trade with the NIEs in that period jumped from 7 per cent to 10.1 per cent of total trade.
 48. Both Malaysian officials and politicians have noted that if trade with and investment from Muslim countries effectively measured a country's religious identity in foreign policy, then Singapore was far more "Islamic" than Malaysia. Indeed, Malaysia's beneficial trade relationship with Pakistan is in part explained by their joint shipping agreement.
 49. *ST*, 13 December 1981, 23 December 1983; *NST*, 9 and 11 December 1981, 25 January 1986; *Business Times*, 9 March 1982; *FAM*, Vol.16, No.1, March 1983, p. 29. In 1982, the Saudi Arabian Fund agreed to provide M\$400 million for carrying out 13 development projects. In 1983, Malaysia obtained a total M\$20.1 million loan and in January 1986, a M\$132.3 million loan from the Fund. In 1981, Malaysia proposed Kuwaiti participation within the Fourth Malaysia Plan.
 50. *FAM*, December 1987, Vol. 20, No.4., pp. 6–9; *Malaysian Digest*, February 1988, p. 10. To prolong foreign investment staying power of investors, the Malaysian Parliament passed the Promotion of Investment Act in 1986 and introduced a series of incentives for investors. By 1987, Arab investments only accounted for 5.7 per cent of total investment while Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and West Germany accounted for 47 per cent of that total (Japan's share of that being 30 per cent and Singapore's 18 per cent).
 51. *Malaysian Business*, 11 November 1987, pp. 14–15.
 52. *Malaysian Digest*, May 1987, p. 9 and February 1988, p. 10; interview with Kammaruddin Mohammed Noor, 1 June 1989. MATIC was proposed to matchmake Arab and Malaysian businessmen and enhance general Arab investment in the

- country. It is perhaps no small detail that Encik Kammaruddin, the former Vice-President of ABIM, WAMY representative for Malaysia, UMNO member and Anwar Ibrahim ally was (in April 1989) one of Jami's Company Directors.
53. *UM*, 13 and 14 January 1987; *Business Times*, 13 November 1987; *Penyata UMNO 1988*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1988, pp. 209–216; *The Middle East*, February 1988, p. 3; *Malaysian Digest*, May-June 1988, p. 3. Such strategy was emphasized at the 1987 UMNO General Assembly, where Dr Mahathir explained Malaysia's recession as unavoidable due to a deteriorating world economy and to Malaysian dependence on foreign trade particularly with developed countries.
 54. See International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics*, 1995 (Annual), pp. 548–549; Ministry of Finance, Government of Malaysia, Economic Report 1994, Kuala Lumpur, 1995.
 55. See Jomo Sundaram, "Economic Crisis and Policy Response in Malaysia" in Richard Robison *et al.* (eds), *Southeast Asia in the 1980s: The Politics of Economic Crisis*, London, Sydney and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 113–148; Ozay Mehmet, *Development in Malaysia: Poverty, Wealth and Trusteeship*, London: Croom Helm, 1986.
 56. Interview with Haji Hadi Awang, *op. cit.*, who criticises the "unislamicness" of Mahathir's foreign policy because it is based on the "pure pursuit" of material gains.
 57. James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986, pp. 5–19; Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982, pp. 30–49, 82–101. This reopening of the "gates" was pioneered by such men as the pan-Islamic activist Jamal al-Din I-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Iqbal and virtually every major intellectual regardless of whether they were *Sunni* or *Shi'i*, while their proposals on reform centred around the political and social aspects of public policy rather than the economic.
 58. See Hamid Enayat, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 82–101.
 59. *Ibid.*
 60. Chandra Muzaffar, "Reformation of the *Shari'a* or Contesting the Historical Role of the Ulama" in Noraini Othman (ed.), *Shari'a Law and the Modern Nation-State: A Malaysian Symposium*, Kuala Lumpur: SIS Forum, 1994, pp. 21–26.
 61. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan, *From Saints and Bureaucrats: A Study of the Development of Islam in the State of Kedah*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Cornell University, 1985.
 62. See for instance comments by Dr Mahathir, Datuk Musa Hitam, Encik Anwar Ibrahim and the Chief Minister of Trengganu at the Conference of Ulama held in Kota Baru, Kelantan in November 1982 in *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 9 and 10, 1982. pp. 40–41 and the text of Dr Mahathir's speech in Kelantan, *NST*, 21 April 1983. The Conference itself was explained as a means of "strengthening the bond between the leaders and the *ulama* to enable the Government to implement their advice more effectively".
 63. Presidential Address to the 1986 UMNO General Assembly in *Penyata UMNO 1986/87*, Kuala Lumpur, 1987, pp. 557–567; *Watan*, 11 August 1988.
 64. See Encik Ghafar's address to 1990 UMNO Youth and Women's Assembly, in A. Karim Haji Abdullah (comp.), *Perjuangan Suci UMNO (UMNO's Holy Struggle)*, Kuala Lumpur: Goodmark Enterprise, 1993, pp. 237–244.
 65. See Encik Ghafar's address *ibid.*, pp. 245–255.
 66. *FAM*, Vol. 20, No. 2, June 1987, pp. 5–8; *NST*, 17 September 1985.
 67. Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1987, pp. 74–82; Noraini Othman, "The Sociopolitical Dimensions of Islamisation in Malaysia: A Cultural Accommodation of Social Change", in Noraini Othman (ed.), *Shari'a Law and the Modern Nation-State*, Kuala Lumpur, SIS Forum and Friederich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1994 pp. 123–143; Ibrahim

- M.Zein, "The Impact of Religion" in Murugesu Pathmanathan and Robert Haas (eds), *Political Culture: The Challenge of Modernisation*, Kuala Lumpur, Centre for Policy Sciences and Friederich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1995, pp. 189–212.
68. "Penterapan Nilai Islam diMalaysia" (Injection of Islamic Values in Malaysia) in *Panji Masyarakat*, January/February 1983, pp. 12–16; "PAS:KeArah Pimpinan Ulama" (PAS: In the Direction of Ulama Leadership) in *Panji Masyarakat*, May/June 1983, pp. 21–23; *Watan*, 31 March–3 April; 11–13 April and 23–25 May 1987; *Suara Islam*, No. 8, June 1981, p. 6; *UM*, 28 March 1983. According to PAS, the highest position achieved in UMNO and the Government by any religious scholar was that of Parliamentary Secretary and Deputy Minister, thus proving that UMNO does not "truly value" the religiously educated. Since then, Datuk Dr Yusoff Noor (trained at Al-Azhar) and Datuk Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Menteri Besar of Trengganu (educated in religious studies in the Middle East) have served in the capacities of full Minister and UMNO Division Head and Vice-President respectively. Dr Mahathir has implicitly ridiculed PAS *ulama* who claimed such status even though some of them "had been trained in English law in London!"
 69. Ustaz Nakhaie Haji Ahmad, "Intelektual Melayu dan Perpaduan" (Malay Intellectuals and Unity) in *Harakah*, 28 October 1988, who has since joined UMNO.
 70. *Watan*, 13 June 1989.
 71. See the comments of the President of the Malaysian Ulama's Association at a seminar on "The Role of the *Ulama* In Society" *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 9 and 10, 1982, p. 41; figures cited by the Deputy President of the Islamic Dakwah Foundation of the Government, Ustaz Haji Dusuki Haji Ahmad; see also comments made in the first issue of *Ummah* (the PUM's monthly broadsheet), August 1989.
 72. Piscatori, op. cit., pp. 15–21.
 73. Ibid. Piscatori argues that statesmen have always had the "consensus of action" but very often, they also have prominent influence in shaping the "consensus of speech" or the intellectual consensus of the times (witness leaders such as Indonesia's Sukarno and Egypt's 'Abd al-Nasir).
 74. Mokhtar A.Kadir, *Keamanan Sejagat: Peranan Malaysia dalam Politik Antarabangsa* (Global Security: Malaysia's Role in International Politics), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991, pp. 105–108.
 75. *NST*, 17 September 1985; *NST*, 21 September 1985. According to the Minister, non-Muslims who liked the idea of financial transactions based on the profit-loss sharing concept instead of interest charges would immediately change their minds if they knew that such a concept was Islamic.
 76. Anwar first came to national prominence as the President of the Malay Students Association at the Universiti Malaya (from which he graduated in Malay Studies) fighting for Malay nationalist causes and went on to attain an international reputation in the Islamic world as the President of ABIM. He has gradually and forcefully established an international Islamic reputation, holding positions such as on the Supreme Council of the World Council of Mosques and as President of the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur.
 77. See H.M.Jajuli, "Ulama Menasihati Politik?" (Should the *Ulama* Advise Policy?) in *Dewan Masyarakat*, December 1982, pp. 28–31; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 10, No. 6, 1986, p. 44; Hussin Mutalib, op. cit., p. 70, p. 140; *NST*, 4 January 1981 and 7 December 1982.
 78. Interview with Encik Anwar Ibrahim, Kuala Lumpur, 21 December 1990; *PRPDR*, 14 March 1983; *NST*, 14 September 1985; Ziauddin Sardar and Merry Wyn Davies (eds), *The Faces of Islam—Conversations on Contemporary Issues*, Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1989.
 79. *PRPDR*, 25 July 1983; *NST*, 17 September 1985 and Editorial on the necessity for 'ijtihad' in *NST*, 19 September 1985.
 80. See Kassim Ahmad, *Hadis: Suatu Penilaian Semula (The Hadiths: A Reappraisal)*,

- Petaling Jaya: Media Intelek, 1986; Chandra Muzaffar, *The Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, op. cit., pp. 77–78 and the numerous debates in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* in the period July–August 1986 over the issue. Arguing for a different kind of scripturalism, Kassim Ahmad, the author, has questioned the generally accepted ranking in importance of the *Hadiths* as a source of Islamic law next to the *Quran*, maintaining instead that Muslims should primarily if singularly honour the *Quran* and the Prophet Muhammad as the human Messenger of God who transmitted the *Quran* to mankind and as nothing more.
81. *NST*, 15 and 19 April 1996.
 82. *FAM*, September 1984, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 226–230; March 1986, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 15–20; December 1986, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp.36–40; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 5, No. 9, 1981, p. 6; Vol. 8, No. 3, 1984, p. 8.
 83. Syed Farid Al-Attas, “The Sacralization of the Social Sciences: A Critique of an emerging Theme in Academic Discourse”, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 1995, 91 (July–September), pp. 89–111.
 84. Dr Mahathir Mohammed, “Islam: UMNO’s Contribution”, President’s Address to the UMNO General Assembly 1993, Kuala Lumpur, reproduced in *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1994, pp. 4–5.
 85. Department of Religious Education, Ministry of Education cited in Ahmed S. Hussein, *Islam and Politics in Malaysia 1969–1982: The Dynamics of Competing Traditions*, PhD Thesis, Yale University, 1988, p. 96.
 86. *Berita Harian*, 24 May 1981; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 5, No. 9, 1981, p. 5; Vol. 7, No. 3, 1983, p. 46; Vol. 8, No. 3, 1984, pp. 6–7; *Watan*, 1 December 1988. The Islamic Institute of Thought has aimed to “appropriate Islamic solutions to face the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world and the various schools of thought, religion and ideology alerting the authorities on anticipated changes in society”.
 87. See for instance numerous articles written by researchers at IKIM which have been published in the Malaysian daily press (both in English and Malay), collated in Hamiza Ibrahim and Hasnan Hakim (eds), *Quest for Excellence*, Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), 1994.
 88. See criticisms contained in the presidential address to the 1984 PAS Congress, citing the failure of the NEP due to its basis of materialism, waste and corruption, warning that its blueprint would eventually lead to more serious repercussions than 13 May 1969 in *Ucapan Dasar Muktamar Tahunan ke-30* (Policy Speech for the Thirtieth Annual Congress), Kuala Lumpur, 1984, pp. 9–11; Halim Mahmood, *PAS Pimpinan Bahru: Falsafah dan Perjuangan-nya* (PAS’s New Leadership: Party Philosophy and Struggle), Kuala Lumpur: Hafar Enterprise, 1983, pp. 18–31. For an ABIM viewpoint on the shortcomings of the NEP see its pamphlet, *The Revival of Islam in Malaysia—The Role of ABIM*, op. cit.; Hussin Mutalib, op. cit., pp. 81–82.
 89. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 5, Nos 11 and 12, 1981, p. 45; *Penyata UMNO 1982*, Kuala Lumpur, pp.379–390; Presidential Address to the 1988 UMNO Baru General Assembly in *Penyata UMNO 1988/89*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, pp. 209–216.
 90. See Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid (ed.), *Malaysia’s Vision 2020: Understanding the Concept, Implications and Challenges*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications, 1993, pp. 89–96.
 91. Datuk Malek Merican cited in Faaland *et al.*, op. cit., p. 192.
 92. See for instance, Abdul Monir Yacob and Ahmad Faiz Abdul Rahman (eds), *Towards a Positive Islamic World-View: Malaysian and American Perspectives*, Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 1994.
 93. Prime Minister’s address to the Thirty-Ninth UN General Assembly in *NST*, 12 October 1984; Foreign Minister’s address to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in *FAM*, Vol. 20, No. 4, December 1987, pp. 40–45.

94. Zaini Ujang, "Arah Baru Gerakan Islam" (New Directions for Islamic Movements) in *Dewan Masyarakat*, June 1989, pp. 18–19, which argues that the very number of Islamic movements in Malaysia has in fact acted as a dynamic instrument towards the development of Islam in Malaysia.
95. Dale F. Eickelman, "Changing Interpretations of Islamic Movements" in William Roff and Dale Eickelman (eds), *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*, New York and London: Social Science Research Council and Croom Helm, 1987, pp. 12–30.
96. See *Harakah*, 11 March 1988. PAS likens the Mahathir Administration to colonial masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, employing a policy of divide and rule implied by their persistent differentiation between *Sunni* and *Shi'ia*, Arab and Iranian, encouraging disunity of the *ummah*, while support from outside powers, particularly foreign investors, keeps Malaysian leadership weak at the country's expense.
97. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*, London: Routledge, 1989.
98. Presidential address to the 1986 UMNO General Assembly in *Penyata UMNO 1986/87*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1987, pp. 557–567. Arguing that their potential for Malaysian benefit was now less promising due to their declining wealth, their tendency for conflict, their ideological differences and their subjection to superpower influence, he noted their capacity and attempts at influencing Malaysian domestic politics: "There are those that seek to cause disorder in other Islamic countries, even trying to influence the politics in our country."

4 Extremism

“Wrong” Islam

The future of the Malays and of Islam in particular, of our nation, our country and the other communities of Malaysia in general, depends on UMNO. Other parties are extremists or chauvinists or too small to protect the nation and to cope with all kinds of challenges. UMNO is the binding force, that attracts other moderate parties to co-operate. This approach is UMNO's own choice. Otherwise the people in this country would be split like some other nations with multi-racial societies.¹

Dr Mahathir Mohammed, 1986

The Administration's projection of the interpretation, form and ideas of Islam which it considers appropriate for Malaysia clearly possess a reverse image—“wrong” Islam. Broadly subsumed under the category of extremism, it has been identified as problematic to Malaysian socio-political development and largely assigned to the ruling party's political opponents (including, increasingly, any religious movements expressing dissenting Islamic interpretation). To some extent, UMNO's strong domestic political showing has been explained by its relative success in portraying its opponents as extremist in character and agenda while itself avoiding any radical measures in realizing its objectives in religion.

The domestic challenge of religious extremism is however importantly shaped by the perception that, as one manifestation of contemporary global religious revivalism, it is also a product of international Muslim contact and exchange. The threat of religious radicalism is thus perceived as being determined, to some extent at least, by an impinging Islamic world which in some instances provides moral and inspirational support and in others, active influence over UMNO's political competitors specifically, and its Malay-Muslim population generally. The expression of “extremism” has, however, been shaped less by inter-state relations than through channels which lend themselves less easily to conventional state regulation. As such, the Malaysian

government's efforts at countering "wrong" Islam have involved an intense interaction between domestic and foreign policy.

The determination of "wrong" Islam and its easy association with "extremism" is also increasingly linked to the federal government's attempt to institute an orthodoxy of belief if not of ortho-practic behaviour as a means of rationalizing Islam towards a particular socio-economic but also political agenda. As attempts at curbing "extremism" have gradually involved questions of religious authority and the toleration of divergent interpretation, they have ultimately also had a significant bearing on intra-Malay rivalry. Frequently then, foreign policy has been employed precisely towards the management of domestic politics.

MALAYSIA AND ISLAMIC RADICALISM

Throughout its tenure, the Mahathir Administration has not always enjoyed even relations with those states in the Islamic world which have displayed a more distinctively radical character and approach to international relations. While the Malaysian Government has frequently publicized its long-standing relationships with more conservative regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, its relations with countries like Iran and Libya have been less well documented. Overall, Malaysia's diplomatic exchange with these countries since the 1980s has tended to remain cautious, explained in part by their expression of a more radical political agenda frequently channelled through religion. While Malaysia has often supported the official foreign policy attitudes expressed by these states towards the need for fundamental change within the international system, alarm and objection have also been articulated over the chosen methods of their implementation. More importantly, the perception of their capacity to directly influence the domestic political process in Malaysia has necessitated the employment of less conventional strategies in foreign policy by the Administration.

The Iranian Revolution clearly helped intensify debate in Malaysia over the revival of Islam and the viability of an Islamic state in Malaysia. A more worrying domestic repercussion for the Government was the Revolution's indirect promotion of Islam's legitimacy in political contestation and the boost that its success provided to parties and organizations claiming Islam as their base. The Government's initial non-commitment on the subject, however, contrasted dramatically with the clear and early articulation of support for the Revolution by ABIM and PAS.

Nevertheless, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the emergent Islamic Republic of Iran in 1981, came within the new Administration's general strategy of publicizing its foreign Islamic friendships. Iranian officials had in fact made some attempt to "explain the Islamic Revolution" and to express its non-opposition to "moderate intellectuals" in Muslim countries. The Mahathir Administration was therefore at pains to stress the pragmatic aspects of relations with the new Iranian government, even while locating them within the spirit of a shared religion. Indeed the Government received some acknowledgement for its pro-Islam efforts from the Iranians.²

Official relations were also important towards neutralizing what was perceived as real or potential revolutionary Iranian influence over Islamic movements. Intra and inter-party dynamics were to underline the continuing threat that UMNO and the Administration perceived from the Revolution's impact on Malay politics and on the role of Islam in Malaysian society. This was articulated by UMNO's then (1980) Vice-President, Tengku Razaleigh who identified "extremism" and its pressures on UMNO as an intense challenge for the coming decade.³ Its rivals had proclaimed the Party's unsupportive (even disdainful) attitude towards the Islamic revolution as a clear contradiction of its self-proclaimed identity as an Islamic party.⁴

The perception of parallels between political developments in Iran and the crucial changes to PAS leadership by 1982—now younger, more radical and intent on projecting a more universalist Islamic identity for the Party—sustained persistent official attention on the party's contacts with Iran. Following the Revolution, PAS had enjoyed the attention of visiting Iranian dignitaries.⁵ The party's growing foreign profile had clearly enhanced its legitimacy, the correspondence of which was crucial towards the Mahathir Administration's review of its own foreign policy priorities. The assumption of power by new leadership within PAS had identified a niche in the foreign arena as a crucial new direction in party policy, vital to its identity as an Islamic organization capable of governing the country, while offering the potential for greater legitimacy and recognition.

In an interview in 1983, then PAS President, Haji Yusuf Rawa, described his party's relations with Iran as being within the framework of its overall policy of good relations with all countries, of their co-membership of the OIC as well as being based on respect for a country that had "chosen *Allah* as its symbol". In fact, contacts with Iran were described as a logical extension of the Party's programme of meeting with foreign policy planners of respective countries in order to intensify its global activities as an Islamic entity.⁶ Since 1983, the Party has consistently referred to itself as a representative Islamic organization and its agenda as inseparable from global Islamic developments. Indeed, its relations with other countries, including Iran, have been depicted as providing moral support and inspiration for its own struggle within Malaysia.⁷

By 1982 however, Government surveillance of the Party was deemed necessary in the wake of evidence of Malaysians visiting Iran "to study its revolutionary style government" and claims that PAS was now "bent on an Iranian type revolution in Malaysia".⁸ The announcement of such threat was balanced by UMNO's surprisingly effective co-option of the ex-President of ABIM earlier in 1982, bringing significant reward in the form of one less (but highly influential) combatant in policy towards Iran. Following Anwar Ibrahim's entry into the Party, ABIM's support for the revolution in Iran was perceptibly muted if not consistently qualified.⁹ What is more, Anwar's bureaucratic co-option elicited increasing official reaction, centring around the thesis that Iran's Islamic Revolution was "unsuitable" for Malaysia.

Despite pledges to sustain a relationship of economic co-operation, official efforts to "confine" Iranian influence were not entirely successful. By 1983, Dr

Mahathir was sounding a warning against those “who were beginning to talk about revolution”, including among these members of an opposition party, some Malaysian students abroad and “deviationists”. The seriousness of these allegations was underlined some two months later, when the state of Kelantan (where PAS held a traditional base) was allegedly discovered to be the site of an “unofficial” foreign mission that was encouraging Malaysians to visit “that country”.¹⁰

The international impact of the Iranian Revolution was initially perceived in terms of the potential of its repetition elsewhere. The fear of its demonstrated success in the overthrow of monarchy and the establishment of a modern-day Islamic republic run by a (eventually) theocratic leadership, clearly constituted the Mahathir Administration’s thinking on relations with Iran. The relevance of Iran’s revolutionary experience to domestic politics was in fact, made most apparent when it became entangled with Dr Mahathir’s initial attempts in 1983 to radically realign the relationship between the country’s traditional rulers (the Sultans) and the elected government.

IRAN, INTRA-MALAY RIVALRY AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

As the recipient of the primary object of loyalty, the historical importance of the Malay Sultan was assured in Malay social and political life. Although two other ideas of political community—the Malay race/ethnicity (*bangsa*) and the sense of religious community (*umma*), were to gradually challenge the monopoly of the Sultanate in political life, it has never been entirely eclipsed. Through the evolutionary changes in Malaysian government, the nine Sultanates of the Malay states in Peninsular Malaysia have remained a national institution and at least for the Malays, have long served as symbols of their unity and dominance in a multi-racial society. Political development in the modern Malaysian state has in fact been shaped by continued support from all levels of Malay society for *kerajaan*—literally, “the condition of having a *Raja*” (king)—which is also the Malay word for “government”.

In fact, the preservation of Malaysia’s feudal history has had much to do with the nature of UMNO leadership as part of that elite stratum that was linked to the court as well as of their entwined histories in the promotion of Malay ethnic nationalism. UMNO’s identity as protector of the Malays has also been possible through or because of its honour of Malay kingship as the symbolic head of political society in Malaysia and as the embodiment of Malay privilege and rights. UMNO’s Constitution contains clauses that provide for the protection and honour of the Malay monarchy.¹¹ As the Party had come to depend on a delicate working relationship with these monarchs, the political careers of most Malay politicians were often crucial to their relationship with the Sultan of their individual states.

The concessions granted to the Sultans in return for assent to the system of constitutional monarchy allowed them (until recently) substantial prerogative and freedom from federal control and interference (particularly over issues of

land and religion) within their own states. What is more their positions were entrenched by the 1971 Amendments to the Constitution which considered the sovereignty of the Rulers as incontestable and its contravention as amounting to sedition, thus enshrining their institutionalization in Malay political society.¹²

In contemporary times, Malay royalty (even if only symbolically) have continued to be regarded by some parts of the Malay community as protectors of its privileges and special rights, and as the upholders of Islam. Others, claiming a more Malay nationalist spirit or a more “pristine” Islamic one, have associated themselves with a critique of the monarchy, perceiving it as incongruous to the needs of a modern polity and/or as contradictory to Islam’s democratic spirit in promoting the supreme authority of God and individual man as his vice-regent on Earth.

Despite his protestations against such depiction, Dr Mahathir has been associated with such a republicanist spirit. Under the tutelage of his Administration, the position and power of Malay royalty has in fact been deliberately and seriously circumscribed, and by 1993, a constitutional amendment was passed by Parliament with the backing of most Malay and non-Malay MPs, to limit the sovereign immunity of the Sultans from criminal prosecution.¹³ The effective emasculation of the discretionary powers and political potential of a number of individual rulers and of the monarchy as an institution has not been obtained without several stages of political crises and confrontation.

The first constitutional crisis under the Mahathir administration in the period 1983–1984, was demonstrative of the serious tenure that the concept of *kerajaan* maintained in Malay political culture as well as the increasing fragmentation of Malay society over its future. Prior to the passage of the Constitutional Amendment Bill no serious dispute existed over the constitutional powers of the nine hereditary state rulers and of the elected *Yang Di-Pertuan Agung* (the Supreme Ruler). Although clearly identifying their status as constitutional monarchs it was silent on their discretionary power in the appointment of the *Mentri Besar* (Chief Minister of the State) or over withholding assent to Bills passed by the legislature.

However, the administration of Islam has remained a state prerogative, and in religious matters, the Sultans retained significant authority. Despite attempts to centralize and co-ordinate religious administration, the Sultans have resisted the emasculating pressures on their power, with individual Sultans displaying a propensity towards state rights over such matters. The Sultan holds a great deal of influence in the appointment of religious officials, and in the issue of *fatwas* (religious rulings), while disputation over matters such as the determination of fasting dates have frequently emerged. The states of Kedah and Pahang have continued to forgo membership of the National Islamic Religious Council, while Johor and Perak have in the past withdrawn their membership over such disputes.¹⁴

Prior to the Constitutional Amendments, and following such inter-state and state-federal disputes, the former Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman and several youth bodies such as ABIM had urged a review of the Constitution on

such religious grounds, so as to “coordinate all questions involving Islamic unity”.¹⁵ The potential for dispute between the monarchy and the government over matters of religious authority lay in the fact that legislation (even of a *fatwa*) could only be exercised by a Bill passed by the Legislative Assembly and assented to by the Sultan. It was through this mechanism that elected government representatives could influence the administration of Muslim law in their state.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in the past, UMNO political leadership had been wary of taking any action against any of the rulers that might lead to a constitutional crisis or worse, a division within the Malay community, underlined by the laws on sedition.¹⁷ Whatever “republican” orientations they may have held in private, most Islamic movements in Malaysia avoided any overt position on the monarchy, perhaps recognizing its continuing symbolic significance to Malay political domination.

The origins of the constitutional crisis lay in a bill passed (with an overwhelming majority) by Parliament in August 1983 to amend the Constitution so as to remove the power of the head of state (i.e. the King) to delay or to refuse to give assent to any Bill passed by Parliament or any of the thirteen state assemblies. While arousing intense debate in Parliament, press coverage of the issue was restricted by official instruction, due to its sensitive nature. In fact, at about the same time, a revised Official Secrets Act was introduced in Parliament making the possession of official information about government activities or operations more punitive. Public controversy however was unavoidable when the King (following opposition from some of the nine Sultans) delayed his assent to the Bill that sought to clarify royal authority against that of Parliament.¹⁸

Dr Mahathir’s own motivation for seeking passage of the Bill might be viewed as part of his Administration’s modernizing agenda for Malay society. Entering office on a promise to rid that society of its feudal values (the perpetuation of which he believed explained Malay society’s regression), it was envisioned that the social decline of feudalism in Malay society would enable its greater orientation towards achievement, which would ultimately induce, to some extent, a strengthening of Islam. The new Administration was to lead in the political development of a ruling party and civil service that was non-corrupt, efficient and development-oriented. The Sultans’ eventual surrendering of their remaining areas of influence was rationalized as allowing for divisive confrontational politics to be avoided while greater political liberalism would ensue. These ideas were already germane to his thinking from the late 1960s.¹⁹ Yet, the Bill constituted a further display of Dr Mahathir’s propensity for political and administrative centralization and for the streamlining of the policy-making and implementation process often at the expense of more democratic processes. Thus, while the constitutional crisis was frequently depicted as a personal clash between the Prime Minister and the Malay Sultans, it in fact involved fundamental tension and debate within Malay society over one of the pillars of its political culture.

While it may be argued that the episode, and the political alignments that it produced, demonstrated the growing strength of a republican spirit within Malay

society (in part fed by the growing influence of Islamic reformism), it also demonstrated significant and continued popular support for the institution of Malay kingship. Many of the great number of Malay opponents to the Bill viewed the potential removal of certain powers of the monarch as eventually undermining the special position of the Malays, while ironically, anxiety was also articulated by sectors of the non-Malay community who might have perceived the Malaysian monarchy as guaranteeing their own political position against any potential, more radical Malay nationalist government.²⁰ More significantly, as the domestic political crisis unfolded, it also became a focal point of intra-Malay conflict and thus inevitably involved UMNO–PAS competition.

In the event, the timing of the constitutional crisis had as much to do with the ultimate involvement of foreign policy matters as did the issue of Islamic authority itself. Indeed, it was clear that the Administration was equally sensitive to its international image and to any parallels that might be drawn between developments in Malaysia and those that had recently taken place in Iran or other radical Muslim countries. Defence of new governmental policies (such as that of Islamization) was therefore necessary at the international level. For example, in the wake of the constitutional crisis, Anwar Ibrahim, on a private visit to Paris, gave an hour-long speech reassuring his audience of the continued liberal attitude of the Mahathir Administration, insisting that Malaysia had never used Iran as a case study for implementing its programme of Islamization. Nor would developments in Iran be emulated in Malaysia even while they had captured the attention of all Islamic countries. The Islamization programme was said not to be a reaction to demands by “Islamic extremists” or a means for suppressing Malaysia’s non-Muslims.²¹

Crucial to the argument here is the fact that the constitutional crisis, in effect, seriously jeopardized (or at least threatened to) UMNO’s role as protector. Furthermore, the crisis was itself coincidental to important developments in Malaysia’s relations with Iran. The obvious threat that the Iranian model of Islamic republicanism posed to Malaysia’s own institution of constitutional monarchy was implicit in the Government’s measured silence over the success of the Revolution. In 1981, just prior to his assumption of the post of Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir clearly found it necessary to reiterate UMNO’s fidelity to the monarchy and its continued relevance to Malay and Malaysian political society.²² On the other hand, shortly before the Constitutional Amendments Bill was introduced in Parliament, the threat of Islamic republicanism sponsored by foreign entities was publicly raised as an issue by the Administration.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, who was then also the Minister for Home Affairs, called attention to “the recent emergence of ideas on Islamic internationalism subscribed to and promoted by several Malay groups who regarded themselves as Muslims distinct from others”, clearly linking this threat to “foreign influence” over the then “new” PAS leadership. Equally important at this time were widely publicized allegations by the former President of PAS, Datuk Asri Haji Muda (by then an UMNO member), that an *‘alim* from PAS had been appointed Ayatollah Khomeini’s representative in Southeast Asia.

Despite denials from both PAS and the Iranian embassy in Malaysia, the timing of the statement was crucial in the context of the constitutional crisis.²³

Indeed, the linkage of issues is important to note. In the wake of continuing debate over UMNO's relationship to the monarchy, the Home Minister revealed intelligence reports that these Islamic republicans (allegedly consisting of several Opposition party leaders, some government servants, university academic staff, former Armed Forces officers and private sector executives) were influenced by leaders of a "Middle Eastern republic" which advised against Muslim adherence to constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy and advocated their abolition. Indeed, it was important to make clear that the republican intentions of PAS were far more threatening to the institution of the monarchy than any UMNO attempts to qualify the relationship of the people to the rulers. The Home Minister noted that were these "activities" to be realized, the institution of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agung would be destroyed and parliamentary democracy would be threatened.²⁴

Such information, in the thick of the constitutional crisis in October/November 1983, served as a reminder to Malaysians of the dangers of foreign ideological influence and the potential threat of the "export of Islamic revolution". This was further underlined by widely publicized reports of the illegal distribution of fourteen-page pamphlets in *Bahasa Malaysia* carrying speeches by Ayatollah Khomeini, after Friday prayers outside Kuala Lumpur mosques. There were also revelations of the arrest of seven Malaysian Muslims in Saudi Arabia, and documentary evidence that the embassy of a "Middle Eastern republic" in Kuala Lumpur had issued cheques to several Malaysians for travel expenses and pocket money to attend seminars and functions on Islamic revolutionary struggle, organized in Tehran, New Delhi and Dhaka. The Home Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, warned a national gathering of *ulama* that "revolutionary ideas" against Malay unity by "Malaysians who politicized Islam with the intention of overthrowing the Government to set up an Islamic republic by use of force", had become a reality. Indeed, a growing republican threat was cited as being dangerous enough "to supplant Communism as the main threat to social order in the country".²⁵

According to one newspaper report, the Iranian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur had already been privately warned of "consequences" if it did not curtail its links with a group allegedly trying to set up an Islamic republic in Malaysia.²⁶ Although the Iranian government continued to publicly deny any such activity, the Malaysian government was, by November 1983, contemplating a ban on Malaysians travelling to Iran, "if the activities detrimental to our national interests" persisted.²⁷ In the event, the ban was not instituted, perhaps because the ruling party realized the kind of damage that could be inflicted on its credibility as a protector and therefore promoter of Islam, through such action.

It is not entirely clear if Datuk Musa was acting independently, in order to distance himself from the constitutional crisis between UMNO and the monarchy, at the time. Yet, the coincidence of the revelation of these activities and of the growing pressures on UMNO and the Government over the crisis

itself encourages speculation over their connection. Indeed, as Deputy President of UMNO, Datuk Musa, whose political power base was in the state of Johor, might have perceived his own future political career to be at stake. During the crisis, several newspaper reports speculated that one of the reasons for the Government's attempt to amend the constitution and to curb the powers of the monarchy was very much influenced by the personalities of the rulers of Johor and Perak, both of whom were likely contenders for succession to the throne in 1984. It is particularly significant that the Sultan of Perak chose to articulate his opposition to the Constitutional Amendments Bill through reference to his sovereignty in religious matters and through his role as protector of Islam: "the people have given us the power to be their protectors and it is up to the people if they want to take it back".²⁸ (In the event, the Sultan of Johor succeeded to the throne. In the early part of his term as King, there was a widely reported rift between himself and Datuk Musa.)

Indeed, UMNO's vulnerability at the point of the constitutional crisis must also be placed within the overall context of its legitimacy and authority in Malaysian society. The Islamization policy was officially launched in 1983. It was thus incumbent upon the Administration to convince the electorate that only UMNO was capable of being both Islamic and moderate without infringing the rights of the non-Muslim communities. While the constitutional crisis itself and revelations of republican plots by more extremist elements had elicited support for the Mahathir Administration from the Chinese and other ethnic communities, their reservations had also been expressed over the Administration's Islamization policy.²⁹

Dissension from these communities and parties expressed anxiety over the policy's implications for non-Muslims. Shortly after the Constitutional Amendments Bill had been passed, the DAP had proposed that the Islamization process be halted, citing its potential capacity for increasing racial polarization while significantly impacting on the non-Muslim community. The ongoing debate on national culture had also aroused attention at this time. Anwar Ibrahim, then a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and UMNO Youth Leader, underlined the Government's intention to secure Islam as the developmental essence of Malaysia's national culture. He maintained that some of the "extreme" demands (made by Chinese organizations and interests) were arousing "fear and unrest" which would hamper national "unity".³⁰

The Islamization policy had also provoked dissenting response from within the ruling coalition. Prior to the MCA's General Assembly in 1983, several of its state and divisional branch resolutions expressed such misgivings; the presidential address focused on the dangers of religious extremism and growing fears over "recent events and disclosures". Despite Dr Mahathir's attempt, in addressing the Assembly, to allay these fears, assuring non-Muslims that the injection of Islamic values in the Administration would not infringe their freedom of worship or values, Chinese politicians continued to articulate their fear in parliamentary debates over the policy.³¹

The measure of resistance to Islamization from the non-Muslim communities was important in the context of political challenge during the constitutional crisis. Under immense political pressure from other quarters, any dissension from within its own multi-ethnic alliance could hardly, at this point, be afforded. It is perhaps of some significance that revelations of “republican” intent by its political opponents were made at the height of the constitutional crisis when the Mahathir Administration’s Bill was still awaiting signature from the King and while the confrontation between UMNO and the monarchy remained unresolved. On the other hand, the crisis also demonstrated the pressures on the ruling party to act against any potential foreign (i.e. non-Malay) interference in the matter, in the context of its self-identity as protector and as a self-professed Islamic party. In the face of the major controversy that was brewing between the monarchy and UMNO, the party was no doubt at pains to prove its loyalty to and respect for the Rulers. To this end, revelations of other parties with more extremist intentions, such as the outright overthrow of the system of constitutional monarchy, must have helped place UMNO in comparatively more favourable public light.

Indeed, the episode clearly demonstrated the significance of expressions of commitment (at the time) by all Malay political interests, towards the institution of Malay kingship, and towards underlining their own authority and legitimacy as Malay-Muslim entities. PAS disclaimed any involvement in these extremist activities, citing its constitutional endorsement of the existence of a monarchy and of the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agung* at the apex of this system, but UMNO Youth leader Anwar Ibrahim claimed that, other than UMNO, no political party in Malaysia could adequately uphold the position of the Malay Rulers, because only UMNO’s Constitution clearly stipulated their powers and position and the special rights of the Malays.³² As the crisis deepened, and substantive Malay divisions surfaced over the issue, some UMNO politicians found it prudent to remind the public that the Party would “strongly oppose” any attempt to dispense with the monarchy. The media, ever sensitive to government opinion, continued to link the constitutional crisis to alleged PAS attacks on the monarchy, noting its use of the issue as political capital against the Mahathir Administration. This was compounded by newspaper reports that surfaced, revealing on the one hand, anti-government and pro-monarchy demonstrations organized by PAS in Kelantan and Trengganu and on the other, an alleged PAS memorandum to the Prime Minister, which was said to have indicated a clear desire by PAS for a repeal of the existing constitution and its replacement by one “based on Islam”. The Deputy Prime Minister criticized PAS for its “double faced” stand on the constitutional Amendments, seeking “deviously to trap the Malays”, exploiting the issue for its own political interest and for attempting to project itself as the champion of the monarchy when in fact it was known to be an “extremely radical” party.³³

Particularly pertinent were disclosures that religious extremists were even trying to infiltrate the army, an institution also importantly perceived as a symbol of Malay dominance within the country. In fact, the constitutional crisis was to place the Malaysian military in a difficult position, between support for

incumbent Malay political leaders and their Malay rulers. The incident was interpreted by the Malay press as indicating the potential for the politicization of the military, amidst growing intra-Malay rivalry—their potential for being influenced by rival Malay-Muslim parties and ideas therefore represented a specific threat to the ruling party.³⁴

In fact, the future of the relationship between UMNO and Malay royalty has been fundamentally important to Malay politics, demonstrated by the greater factionalism it has spawned within UMNO. Acknowledging this, at the UMNO General Assembly in 1983, Dr Mahathir rebuked those UMNO members who had allowed themselves to be “influenced” by accusations that the Party was trying to create an Islamic republic, participating at fora that had been critical of UMNO. He denied any intentions “either at the top or lower levels of UMNO to abolish Malaysia’s Constitutional monarchy” and underlined instead the Party’s continued commitment to “the present system”.

Eventually a compromise formula was reached that was to be expressed in a new Bill presented to a special session of Parliament and was signed by the deputy of the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agung* and gazetted.³⁵ The temporary resolution of the crisis however brought to the surface clearer expression of intra-Malay rivalry over the issue. Anwar Ibrahim was for instance prompted to call on senior leadership within UMNO to expose “traitors” who allegedly attempted to distort the issue during the Bill’s four-month deadlock. UMNO Youth, under Anwar’s leadership, had strongly supported the Amendments to the Constitution at the 1983 UMNO General Assembly which agreed that all 114 UMNO divisions should hold special meetings to explain the Amendments to their members. In fact, as some delegates pointed out, the crisis would be a test of loyalty of the party towards its leadership.³⁶

The importance of the issue to intra-party politics must be understood within the context of elections for UMNO party posts due to be held at the party’s General Assembly in April 1984, the same month in which the new *Yang Di-Pertuan Agung* was to ascend the throne. The extent to which the Mahathir leadership had to defend its policy, at that Assembly, over the constitutional crisis indicated the amount of support that the Sultans had continued to attract from sections of UMNO.³⁷ Nor had the Islamic revivalist spirit left UMNO untouched, as political competition within the Party continued to revolve around the ability to articulate some sort of Islamic identity and to be seen as supportive of Islamization, while continuing to remain faithful to the other pillars of Malay politics—Malay nationalism and the monarchy.

The subsequent split in UMNO by the late 1980s and the emergence of *Semangat ’46* reflected, at least in part, the divergent strains that have been wrought within Malay politics over the power and position of the monarchy. *Semangat ’46*’s first constitution in fact made specific reference to sustaining the monarchical system highlighted in the address by the President, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (himself a member of the Kelantanese royal family), to the Party’s first Assembly.³⁸ Ensuing strains in 1995 and 1996 within the APU ruling coalition of *Semangat ’46* and PAS in the Kelantan state government (and the

announcement by Tengku Razaleigh that his party would dissolve itself and its members re-unite en masse with UMNO) were also projected as stemming from disputes over the role and limits of power of the Sultan in Kelantan.

The relevance of the constitutional crisis to Malaysia's foreign policy and its religious character was, however, made most apparent when the Administration took action, shortly after its temporary resolution in December 1983, to stem what were perceived as real and immediate threats by Iranian revolutionary influence to the existing form of Malaysian government. Foreign policy thus became entangled in intra-Malay rivalry.

In January 1984, Malaysia's then Foreign Minister, Ghazali Shafie, in a special meeting with Iranian representatives in Bangladesh, was reported to have received assurances that Iran had no intentions of accepting Malaysians for training for subversive activities in Malaysia. In the same month, Datuk Musa Hitam expressed his concern to a visiting Iranian delegation that any misinterpretation of "the Iranian experience and situation" and the potential misapplication of "Iran's brand of revolutionary Islam" within Malaysia's multi-racial and religious context would prove disastrous.³⁹ Indeed, the Administration appeared determined to elicit official pledges from the Iranians against any interference in Malaysian domestic affairs.

Government apprehension over such potential might perhaps be understood within the context of Iran's own foreign policy pronouncements. These were founded on the Islamic government's belief in the viability of "the export of revolution" as central to its foreign policy conceptualization and implementation and by evidence frequently surfacing of Iranian attempts to gain popular local support from Muslims in Southeast Asia for the Revolution. In January 1984, the Malaysian Foreign Minister was accompanied on an official visit to Iran, by a high ranking delegation including an MP and even more importantly, the UMNO Information Chief and an UMNO Supreme Council member. An official communique issued after the visit sought to reiterate common ground between the two countries. It focused on the necessity for their "closer understanding" on foreign policy and other matters (including the condemnation of superpower intervention, the importance of global Islamic unity in effectively confronting "international Zionism and superpower designs and intrigues against Islamic and other Third World countries").⁴⁰

Subsequently, however, official sources depicted the visit's overall aim as being that of convincing the Iranian government of both UMNO's and the Administration's capacity to protect domestic Islamic interests, within the context of the "real situation" in Malaysia. Indeed, the visit was also meant to convince the Iranians of Malaysia's position as the centre for Islamic growth in Southeast Asia and that the religion's development in Malaysia would continue to receive "the utmost attention and promotion by the Government as well as UMNO". More importantly, the delegation had sought to convey the imperative of the conduct of Malaysian-Iranian relations through their respective governments. The Malaysian visit was also aimed at preventing "unwanted, harmful elements" from compromising Iran's standing with Malaysia,

benefiting neither party nor even “the cause of Islam” and served as an opportunity for the mutual comprehension of each country’s “sentiments and sensitivities” even while meeting the challenges to the Islamic *umma*.⁴¹

Despite such “encouragement”, the Government still found it prudent to request Iranian acceptance of a formal agreement, a month later, to control Malaysian travel to the Islamic Republic. In an attempt to “regularize” the flow of visitors between them, the Government essentially proposed the monitoring of all Malaysian visa applications to Iran whether lodged from within Malaysia or received by Iranian diplomatic missions abroad.⁴² In fact, this was not given wide publicity in the local press although Iranian opposition to the proposal did not end the Administration’s attempts to “manage” Malaysian-Iranian relations, thus prolonging the bilateral strain.

As the Home Affairs Ministry continued to monitor the movement of foreign nationals suspected of “extremist” involvement and of all financial assistance to local individuals and political parties, the Foreign Ministry cited certain Iranian activity in Malaysia as constituting clear interference in the country’s internal affairs. By December 1984, the draft proposal for regulating travel between Iran and Malaysia was publicly revealed and described as a necessary means towards reducing “tension” between the two countries.⁴³

Thus Malaysia’s relations with Iran were severely strained by what was perceived as a clear violation of essentially domestic affairs. It is not suggested here that Iranian involvement spawned the constitutional crisis with the monarchy nor that the threat of Iranian interference or influence in Malaysia was a threat concocted by the Mahathir Administration to discredit its political rivals. Yet the perception of external threat was intensified by coinciding with a trying episode in Malaysian domestic politics which appeared to threaten Malay “unity” and therefore Malay dominance.

More particularly, it had affected intra-Malay rivalry and was perceived as fundamentally endangering UMNO’s authority. Undoubtedly, the Administration’s desire to control the avenues of contact between Iranians and Malaysians was an effort at stemming potential effects on internal security but it also worked to shore up UMNO’s standing as a “moderate” actor with its Malay-Muslim electorate. Indeed, by the 1984 UMNO General Assembly Dr Mahathir was identifying “hypocrisy and extremism” as UMNO’s and Malaysia’s “Number 1 enemies”.⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the constitutional crisis and the intensification of UMNO-PAS rivalry, it had also been vital that “extremism” be directly recognized as a national threat to the prevailing communal “balance” both by non-Muslims and their political representatives. It was argued that UMNO could not be expected to bear the burden of fighting extremism alone. Inter-ethnic confirmation of such support and of UMNO’s capacity as the only party capable of ensuring continued Malaysian toleration, peace and harmony, based on Islam, was therefore crucial.⁴⁵ The 1986 UMNO Assembly, for instance, was cautioned about the prevailing competitive spirit of Islam in Malay politics and was reminded that belief in Islam’s moderation rather than its extremism was vital

not only for Malay and Islamic unity but would “enable us to co-operate with other communities and safeguard their interests as well as our own”.⁴⁶

Although relations with Iran remained generally cool for some time thereafter, a considerable degree of emphasis was placed on trade partly in the hopes that secure economic foundations in their relationship might allay more radical intentions. Previous Malaysian economic exchange with Iran had been unfavourable if non-existent when compared to more established relations with Arab countries. This was no doubt partly explained by the adverse domestic and international conditions facing Iran. The high-level Malaysian delegation to Iran in January 1984 had also discussed trade matters while agreement was reached on definite measures to boost trade and economic co-operation during an Iranian visit to Malaysia three months later. In October 1984, the first Malaysian trade delegation since the Revolution was despatched to Iran.

While the constitutional crisis and at the same time the potential Iranian influence on domestic developments exemplified the threat that foreign affairs placed on domestic policy, particularly as concerned Islam, the political challenge that PAS has continued to pose to UMNO involved other foreign policy issues. The Administration’s depiction of PAS as an “extremist” party has been partly based on its more radical foreign policy pronouncements and in particular over its support for Iran’s revolutionary aims in international relations.

The pervasive issue of the institution of the monarchy and of its tenure in Malay political life has continued to be partly reflected in foreign policy. Newer generations of Malay leadership that are imbued with a republican spirit, general to Third World political inclinations and directed towards the expression of Malay nationalism, are currently in a stronger position within the Party. They have demonstrated a desire for the diversification of Malaysian links with Muslim countries in support of those with a more republican character and for the expression of Islam towards the attainment of a more just world order.

Another Muslim state that has gained a reputation for Islamic internationalism of the more radical variety is Libya and for those same reasons its relationship with Malaysia has not always been without strain. The Malaysian government had in the past been willing to tolerate Libyan support for Muslim liberationist activities elsewhere in the region explained, perhaps, by the greater effort of the Libyan government, on the other hand, to cement state-to-state relations with Malaysia and for its generous funding of officially sanctioned Muslim missionary work (through *Perkim*). This had not, however, curtailed Special Branch scrutiny of Libyan religious, missionary and other “unofficial” activity in Malaysia.⁴⁷ Eventually, evidence of continued Libyan support and encouragement for “the opposition”, elicited the response of different strategies in foreign policy.

“EXTREMISM” IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Mahathir Administration’s reading of the potential for religious radicalism in Malaysia has also given precise linkage to its external origins but through a

variety of channels including transnational *dakwah*, religious experimentation and conversion (commonly described in the Malaysian context as “deviationism”), and through the exposure of Malay-Muslim youth in particular to alternative interpretations of Islam. Indeed, the incomplete success of the Administration’s attempts at confining foreign relations of this nature through official outlets has prompted the exploration of alternative avenues for foreign policy. While they have been conducted within less conventional frameworks, their objectives have been fully official. This has inevitably given further expression to intra-Malay differences domestically.

The Hajj

The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*, has increasingly come to preoccupy the foreign policy concerns of Muslim states, explained in part by the vast expansion in the numbers of Muslims now able to perform the pilgrimage with greater facility. Over time, the venue of the *Hajj*, as a gathering of millions of Muslims from around the world, has allowed for the perception of its potential for building the identity of the *umma* at collective and individual levels and for influencing political attitudes in both. Pilgrimage in contemporary terms suggests the increased opportunity for the multi-spatial reference of modern Muslims. As such, religious and social experience can be read at various levels simultaneously—local, national and international—without a necessarily preferred order.⁴⁸ The contemporary performance of the *Hajj* is significant to a discussion of Islam in international relations and foreign policy because it affects something all Muslims everywhere feel strongly about as well as through its capacity to challenge the legitimating formula of the Saudi regime that prides itself on administering the *Hajj* for the rest of the Muslim world.⁴⁹

The history of Islamic civilization has witnessed periods of political interest in the Muslim holy places of the *Hijaz* alternating with periods of neglect. Since the turn of the twentieth century and particularly since 1926, Saudi Arabia, as the guardian of these holy sites, has maintained a position of strict political exclusion, urging that the *Hajj* not be exploited by any state or group for political gain. Nevertheless, the issue of guardianship of the *Hajj* has never been entirely divorced from the political pretensions of Muslim world leaders and in recent times, the annual pilgrimage has served increasingly as a vehicle for the expression of intra-Arab politics and *Sunni-Shi’ia* Muslim differences.⁵⁰

Mary Byrne McDonnell has identified *Hajj* performance in the Malaysian case as holding both communal and individual importance, allowing for “external” considerations of status and membership within a universal community to blend with “internal” considerations of spiritual achievement and state of mind. This has been facilitated by the management of the *Hajj*, through a national body (LUTH) in Malaysia which has been perceived and utilized, since its inception in 1969, as an integral component of the Malaysian Government’s task of nation-building through the standardization and reinforcement of a particular Malay-Muslim identity. In part, this has been

achieved through LUTH's economic success as a Malay financial institution, providing the average pilgrim with a stake in the national economy and by raising individual participation and involvement at the political centre.⁵¹ Overall Malaysian participation in the pilgrimage has been relatively significant in global terms and in 1988, official statistics cited a total of 313,150 Malaysians who had completed the *Hajj* through LUTH.⁵²

Its sole authority in administration of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Jeddah, enshrined in Malaysian law, has been reinforced by the Saudi government's decision to issue visas to Malaysians wishing to perform the Hajj only through LUTH. However, even with the severe penalties imposed on those who contravene such regulations, private pilgrimage (*Hajj swasta*), outside the purview of the national body constitutes a significant minority. In 1984, at least 5 per cent of Malaysian pilgrims performed the *Hajj* privately, while in 1989, government figures cited a cumulative total of 9,302 between 1975 and 1988. Indeed, the frequency (if not popularity) of *Hajj swasta* performed by mainly rural Malay communities and from PAS loyal constituencies, as well as by members of other Islamic movements such as *Darul Arqam*, has been identified as an issue of some concern to the Government.⁵³

While the reasons for such an option may be numerous, there has undoubtedly been persistent criticism over what some view as LUTH's diversion from its role of aiding pilgrims into more purely financial and sometimes "unIslamic" activities for which it has held little or no accountability.⁵⁴ In fact, the performance of *Hajj swasta* does not of itself necessarily denote political choice or dissent, i.e. as constituting action against the Government. None the less the crucial function of *Hajj* administration as a nation-building tool in contemporary times, and the increasing international politicization of the pilgrimage itself have come to identify such private options as a threat to the Malaysian government.

Undoubtedly, dissension from the conservative politics and "moderate" Islam of the Saudi Arabian state and its guardianship of the holiest sites of Islam, articulated by more radical states like Iran, have been echoed by some Muslim interests within Malaysia, including PAS.⁵⁵ In her study of the Hajj in Malaysia, Mary Byrne McDonnell found in more recent years the apparent expression of anxiety at numerous levels of Malaysian society, over radical propaganda emanating from Iran via the *Hajj* as precipitating "fundamentalist" agitation domestically. While some officials within the religious bureaucracy, in particular LUTH's Director, have been candid about this, McDonnell also found that individual pilgrims (after completing the *Hajj*) expressed fears of Iranian agitation in Mecca as posing threats to their personal safety.⁵⁶

The issue of *Hajj* politicization was first brought to public attention in 1983 with the arrest of seven Malaysians in Saudi Arabia contravening Saudi law through possession of material evidence indicating "rebellious" intentions there. The Malaysian government made a clear connection between such evidence and the threat from outside powers wishing to "export revolution" to Malaysia. Embarrassment for the Malaysian government, which prided itself on "close"

relations with Saudi Arabia, was underlined by the Administration's efforts to convince Saudi authorities that such incidents were the result of individual actions and by pledging to tighten *Hajj* invigilation through the reinforcement of co-operation between LUTH, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry and the Saudi authorities.⁵⁷

In as much as the *Hajj* has inferred travel for religious purpose that has allowed for the proliferation and experience of a multiplicity of identities, the degrees of their acuity have very probably also been shaped by the fact that the nature of *Hajj* itself has clearly changed. Whereas previously a religious rite often taken just before death, frequently incurring destitution in its performance and requiring prolonged passage and stay at the Islamic centre, its modern-day equivalent is built around supersonic travel, mass participation, economic venture and brief but frequent performance of the ritual. Undoubtedly, the changed nature of the pilgrimage has held some bearing on any Muslim perception of the rite itself.

The importance of the *Hajj*, however, also lies in its historical and contemporary role as a centre and forum for the Islamic world and as a venue for building the central Islamic concept of *'ijma* (consensus). As Malaysians have participated in the *Hajj* more numerous and more frequently, its potential as a collective experience and as influential towards action at both the collective and individual levels must at least be considered. Certainly, it has served as a special focus of PAS foreign policy due to party perception that through the capacity of the *Hajj* "to unite or divide the global Islamic community", it is central to the foreign policy of all Islamic movements and countries, even those with Muslim minorities. Invariably then, PAS has expressed concern over the Saudi capacity as guardians of the holy places and for the most part has generally shown itself to be supportive of Iranian efforts to discredit the Saudi role.⁵⁸

Incidents such as those which occurred during the *Hajj* in Mecca in 1987 (when large anti-Saudi demonstrations and acts of terrorism, allegedly instigated by the Iranians, caused serious disruption) have been of great concern to the Malaysian government not only for fear of Malaysian\Muslim exposure to radical ideas, but also in terms of ensuring the safety of its pilgrims. As the *Hajj* has come to be administered as a national institution, the Government's responsibility for the welfare of its Muslim citizens in the performance of this holy ritual cannot be overestimated. More importantly, Governmental administration of the *Hajj* has been an important means of building Malay-Muslim society's positive relationship towards "official" (or "right") Islam.

In 1988, Malaysia, as a member of the OIC, was party to a resolution that expressed full support for and solidarity with Saudi measures for providing a suitable climate for pilgrims, and condemning Iranian subversion that had occurred in Mecca in 1987. The Government has, however, also urged the depoliticization of the *Hajj*, underlining that the fulfilment of religious duties must remain its sole purpose since "it is the profound duty of all Muslims to protect the sanctity of Mecca and the Holy Places". Support from Malaysia has also been forthcoming for the Saudi proposal of discouraging repeated

pilgrimage to Mecca, although LUTH itself has calculated that approximately only 5 per cent of Malaysian pilgrims performed the *Hajj* more than once at any season. Indeed, the eventual Saudi decision not to place a quota on the annual number of Malaysians performing the *Hajj* has been rationalized as a symbol of the close relationship between the two countries.⁵⁹

While the act of pilgrimage through *Hajj* and *Umraah* (visit to and lesser rites performed in the holy cities at other times of the year) has served as a means for the elevation of individual social status, it has increasingly also been deployed in politics to symbolic effect. The practice of accompanying major political decisions or policy announcements with a visit to the Holy Land is now frequently a practice of greater numbers of Malay politicians. While their reasons for doing so may be largely personal and purely religious, opinion from within UMNO has also noted that performance of these religious rites has undeniably served as a popular political tool for UMNO leaders at all levels to promote their Islamic credentials. The major intra-UMNO battle in 1987, for instance, occasioned a widely publicized exodus of UMNO personalities from both sides to perform the *Hajj*. Encik Ghafar Baba (former Deputy Prime Minister), Datuk Musa Hitam (former Deputy Prime Minister), Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (former UMNO Vice-President), Datuk Mohamad Rahmat (Information Minister), even Dr Mahathir himself, have undertaken widely publicized (if not frequent) performances of the *Hajj* and the *Umraah*.⁶⁰

PAS concern and dissension over guardianship of the holy sites is also reflected in its representation at international conferences where such issues have been given due consideration. In a sense, this demonstrates the Party's involvement in an alternative international Islamic circuit that challenges the authority of many Muslim governments (Malaysia included), largely condemned as "secular", and neglectful of their role.⁶¹ The tragic death of thousands of pilgrims during the 1990 *Hajj* in Mina, including that of 153 Malaysians, was to raise the issue of Saudi guardianship once again. As pilgrims returned home from the *Hajj* with their own accounts of their experience, debate and dissension at home grew over the implicit responsibility of both the Saudi and Malaysian authorities in the disaster. Eventually, the Prime Minister's Office issued a Special Report on the incident, with the objective of providing "a clear and more accurate picture of the actual events".⁶²

Despite the Administration's attempts at re-ordering Malaysian foreign policy priorities, PAS has perceived little substantial change in policy compared to that of the Tun Razak administration (surprisingly, also a view shared by Anwar Ibrahim⁶³). While Dr Mahathir's policies like that of "Look East" may appear to alter over-dependence on the West while favouring a Third Worldist perspective, PAS leaders also initially questioned what they perceived as his extreme nationalist past.⁶⁴

While PAS has continued to prove articulate in foreign policy and in cooperation with other Islamic movements, this has also served to challenge UMNO's legitimacy and identity. In fact, PAS foreign policy is notable not just for its concerns over relations with other Islamic countries but in its articulation

of an anti-colonial, anti-Western stance and in its suspicion of the involvement of larger powers in the region. This is reflected in the party organ, *Harakah's* extensive coverage of events and developments in the Islamic world, of party representation at various international conferences and of the "positive signs of encouragement" shown by the gains made by Islamic political parties in countries such as Pakistan, Jordan, Algeria and more recently, in Turkey.

In September 1988, for instance, the party organized an extensive international conference (*Ijtimak Antarabangsa Perpaduan Ummah*) in Trengganu graced by the presence of important religious personalities from Islamic movements in Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. Significantly, the Conference was also attended by *Semangat '46* (then recently formed) representatives who articulated the viewpoint that Malaysian politics in the coming century would be increasingly influenced by issues of foreign policy—such as the dangers of superpower involvement in the region through the future stationing of American armed forces in Singapore.

Initiatives taken by PAS and *Semangat '46* (reflected to some extent in the Party's 1990 election manifesto) on matters of foreign policy in fact emphasized the view that the international image of Malaysian Muslims and the development of Islam in Malaysia is made vital through such foreign contact. Within the context of growing intra-Malay rivalry, demonstrated most forcefully in the split between UMNO (Baru) and *Semangat '46*, issues concerning Malaysia's international identity and the external recognition of the Islamic credentials of these parties became further sources for such domestic rivalry, although both parties basically articulated very similar thinking on general issues of foreign policy.⁶⁵

The conceptual goals and directions of PAS's foreign policy were also made explicit in its manifesto for the 1995 General Election as being directed at "defending Islam". In as much as global expansion of the religion continues to provide alarm and anxiety for the West over the rapidly advancing "threat" of Islam, PAS perceives its support of all international Islamic struggles as imperative. As such, its attention has been focused on the efforts of movements such as the Islamic Liberation Front (FIS) in Algeria, on others in Iraq, Libya, the Sudan and in the newly independent republics within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), all perceived as being implicitly challenged and threatened by the West.

Like its domestic opponents, PAS has increasingly articulated an Islamic foreign policy that has incorporated the language and concerns of a Malaysian nation state in the first flush of independence. PAS allegiance to an Islamic ideal in international relations (such as that articulated by Iran of an "authentically Islamic" foreign policy, devoid of the pressuring influence of either East or West) has been obvious. The Mahathir Administration has similarly sought to entrench Malaysia's non-aligned status, although not always through an Islamic idiom. The agenda of concerns of the post-colonial Left in Malaysia has clearly been incorporated in thinking on foreign policy issues by all Islamic movements and parties. To that end, it has found a reasonable degree of concurrence and generalized support from the Malaysian public, Muslim and non-Muslim.

'Ijtihad

The issue of religious authority has also been central to foreign policy matters; the relevance of *'ijtihad* is vital in understanding Government and UMNO responses and reactions to PAS's growing identification with global Islamic affairs.

Its relevancy was raised through the Malaysian reaction to the international publication of the book, *The Satanic Verses*, the subsequent Iranian-initiated vilification of its British author, Salman Rushdie, and the ensuing international dispute that was raised between the Muslim world and the West. Although a fictional work, the book aroused global controversy in February 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini declared it an insult to Islam, and Rushdie as deserving of the penalty of death, posting a considerable bounty for any Muslim who could carry out the act. Retraction of the book by the publishers and a prohibition on its further publication was called for by many Muslims around the world.

Clearly, not all Muslims supported the Iranian decree, but the issue was rapidly turned into a political football, tossed between the Islamic world and the West. It caused considerable civil unrest in many Muslim countries (even areas with significant Muslim minorities), as well as considerable damage to relations between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in a number of Western countries, and eventually, the severance of diplomatic relations between Britain and Iran for a considerable amount of time. Quite aside from its implications for concepts of sovereignty and security in international relations, international debate over the *Satanic Verses* affair (as it came to be called), also concerned more fundamental issues about the emerging role of Islam within a rapidly changing global political framework and was in part, for many Muslims, a reflection of further Muslim humiliation "at the hands of the West and the Zionists".

The book was eventually banned in Malaysia in March 1989, following the outbreak of the international furore, while the Administration projected an attitude of "caution" over the issue. While there were similar expressions of indignation and outrage by some Muslims in Malaysia, the government attempted to depict the issue as bearing on the attitude of Muslims themselves and on the question of their deeper knowledge and understanding of their religion. Official advice reflected the view that Muslims in Malaysia should not simply imitate the actions of others when Islam was insulted but should instead be preoccupied with locating organized means by which Muslims could "respond intelligently" to such attacks as well as explain their "view and stand on Islam and its values".⁶⁶

While there remained spirited exchange over the issue through official channels, PAS endorsement of Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* did not gain support from other quarters. Although the Party attempted to link the issue to Malaysia's hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and Britain's participation within it, later that year, the Government rejected such connection. It argued instead for non-interference and independent interpretation of the issue: "It is dangerous for any Muslim to assume that his viewpoint represents that of all

Muslims around the world. In holding its own view of the matter, the Malaysian government respects the right of the British government to do likewise". Encouragement for independent interpretation did not however invite open debate. Discussion of the issue was rejected in Parliament, explained by its non-urgency and the Government's "appropriate" action based on the recommendations of the 1989 OIC Conference in Riyadh, including "combating propaganda ridiculing Islam, strongly condemning the author and banning the book".⁶⁷

In the light of well-attended public demonstrations on the issue outside the US and British embassies, orchestrated by PAS, it is likely that the tight-lipped official Malaysian reaction was for fear of arousing further militant response, precisely at a time when, recovering from a severe recession, the Government was trying to attract increased foreign investment, as well as rebuild its image of stability in the wake of intense intra-Malay rivalry and the demise of the old UMNO.⁶⁸ Indeed, Anwar Ibrahim, then Education Minister, argued that while Muslim intellectuals should be brave in explaining their opinions on Islam, "they should not merely toss up ideas that could affect the harmony of Malaysia's multi-racial society".⁶⁹

The anticipation of more moderate leadership, following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, together with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, enabled greater efforts by both Iran and Malaysia to increase trade relations and promote more substantive ties but even this was not entirely devoid of intra-Malay rivalry. A *Semangat '46* MP who led a party delegation to Iran in 1989 in search of trade opportunities suggested that despite "political differences", relations with Iran might be more positive if the Government took the responsibility of correcting misinformation on Iran (promoted largely by the international media) within the domestic context. While Malaysia established a Joint Economic Commission with Iran, its official approach continued to be cautious, as evidenced by the Malaysian Foreign Minister's view that the "image and information" disseminated about any country was its own responsibility.⁷⁰

The potential and process of Iran's programme for the "export of revolution" in its own foreign policy has clearly shaped the Administration's attitude towards official relations with that country. The influence of religious radicalism in Malaysia has also been identified as obtaining through less formal instruments. In particular, religious induction and education through modern variants of *dakwah* have served as means for the spread of alternative interpretations of Islam which have been increasingly subjected to Government regulation, partly through foreign policy.

"EXTREMISM" AND DAKWAH

Religious "deviancy" as depicted by state religious authorities is hardly a new phenomenon. While the religious landscape has been richly syncretic with the fusion of pre-Islamic and Islamic beliefs, religious dissent itself has been historically evident, particularly with the colonial legacy of centralizing religious administration. The relationship of Islam to custom (*adat*), Sufism and

mysticism (*tassawuf*) have over time been subjected to the process of religious rationalization begun at the turn of the twentieth century. The institution of an Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy by the state has been a function of its political insecurity on matters of authority and leadership.

Whereas the issue of orthodoxy was formulated differently under pre-colonial and colonial periods, the agenda of the post-colonial state and its intent to locate a universal Malay identity acted as pressure towards greater orthodoxy and centrality of association through a particular interpretation of Islam. The considerable expansion of a network of bureaucratic religious offices and administration by the modern state was underlined by the imperatives of instituting uniformity of religious belief, doctrine and ritual in the face of the historical inability of the *ulama* to practically embody any formal orthodoxy as such. As state religious councils were established throughout Malaysia and the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Office entrenched, these have gradually also been assigned duties of invigilating individual religiosity, commitment to the faith, attitudes, views and ritual performance. The pursuit of religion by other means and the provision of alternative interpretations—designated as being “incongruent with Islamic teachings” (*tahyul*)—have thus increasingly been perceived as a threat to the general Muslim public and more directly to state religious authorities.⁷¹

Despite these obstacles, religious experimentation continued to be an important constituent of Islamic development in Malaysia. The Islamic revivalist process begun in the 1970s gradually helped provide another challenge to those concerned with maintaining “orthodoxy”. In particular, the continued influence of Islamic missionary activity (*dakwah*) in Malaysia has represented, a highly visible aspect of growing religious tension within the Malay community. Throughout the 1980s, the Federal Government continued to face problems in controlling the variety of religious interpretation through this “unofficial” *dakwah*.

While movements like ABIM and, for a time, *Darul Arqam* proved politically acceptable, others outside “the mainstream” whose influence had been identified as pervasive, were by 1981 either publicly condemned or banned outright for their spread of “false Islam”. A government survey concluded the presence of approximately 40 such active *dakwah* movements in Malaysia with an estimated membership of 30,000. One of the more popular movements, the *Ahmadiyah*, centred in Pakistan, was proscribed by the Malaysian authorities and since 1982, its members stripped of their status as Malays. Others within the category of *dakwah songsang* were several Sufi *tarekats* (brotherhoods) and groups such as the *Qadianis* and the *Muhammadiyah Tariqah* which due to their *modus operandi* have been more difficult to trace but have also been proscribed.⁷²

The more violent characterization of religious conflict and tension reached a climax with the *Memali* incident in 1985, when a battle ensued between government security forces and villagers in Kedah who were part of a “deviant” religious sect, ending with eighteen fatalities. The villagers' slain leader was in fact a former ABIM and PAS member, a religious teacher educated in Egypt and

Libya and had served for a time in the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Office. The incident itself was to prove highly symbolic of protestations that intra-Muslim rivalry, occasioned by growing divisions and dispute in Islamic interpretations, had seriously deteriorated.

Shortly afterwards, the Government tabled a White Paper in Parliament on the threat of religious extremism in Malaysia, exposing "the attempts by extremist organizations to set up a Muslim state by force", with particular reference to the protagonists in Memali, who were alleged to be "abusing religion, instigating Muslim Malays to hate the government" and attempting "to topple the multiracial government to set up a theocratic state". While identifying deviationism as a source of extremism, the White Paper sounded a call for missionary activities that were instead, "organized, systematic and free from emotionalism" to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.⁷³

The problem of combating extremism and its threat to the security of the nation were given particular attention in the King's address to Parliament in 1986 and increasingly, Malaysian Muslims have been warned that the propagation of the Islamic faith should not serve as "an obstacle for Government administration". Subsequently, the perception of "deviationism" as a national threat has been underscored by the formation of the Malaysian *Dakwah* Committee, organized specifically to prevent friction and competition between missionary bodies (even those involved in so called "unhealthy" activities). In addition to the existing network of bureaucracies at the federal level over religious affairs, the Committee has also sought co-operation with the National Security Council to conduct a continuing study on deviations from Islamic teachings.⁷⁴

Politically however, the Government has also attempted to link this threat of "extremism" to the identity and activities of its major rival, PAS. In the mid-1980s, religious and political tension mounted as UMNO and PAS exchanged accusation and counter-accusation over their status and legitimacy as Islamic entities, while public addresses by members of the Mahathir Administration increasingly reflected its problem of maintaining authority over PAS. The Prime Minister's National Day address in 1984, for instance, underscored the danger of PAS's new identity to national stability, depicting the *mullah* (Islamic religious leader) form of administration as ancient and undemocratic, based on fanaticism and as not only "un-Islamic" but even directed against Islam.⁷⁵ More recently, the Government has moved more forcefully to ban *dakwah* movements like the *Darul Arqam* which it fully locates within the realm of deviationism.

To some extent, the threat of religious radicalism has also been connected to the "problem" of religious diversity and in part, intra-religious pluralism. A kind of orthodoxy of belief has, over time, been instituted through the relationship between political and religious authority. The traditionally Sunni character of Malay Muslims was historically shaped by the translation of the religion to the region through trade and missionary activity. Yet *Sufi* and *Shi'ite* influence (the former in particular) have also been historically relevant to the development of Islamic culture in the Peninsula.⁷⁶

Quietism and mysticism although initially tolerated in the contemporary Malaysian context because their expressions did not directly threaten the State's political legitimacy, have gradually come to find disfavour among federal and state religious authorities. As the institution of "right" Islam has been made imperative to the achievement of the State's developmentalist agenda, divergent religious attitudes have appeared more threatening. Mystical sects whose teachings appear to counter, even indirectly, the State's desire for greater Muslim "this-worldly" orientation have remained targets of investigation by Pusat Islam.

Since the late 1980s, Government attention has been focused on the incidence of religious conversion among *Sunni* Malaysian Muslims to *Shi'ism*, which has been depicted as being substantial and expanding. Evidence of the growing interest in *Shi'ite* religious practices and beliefs have increasingly preoccupied in particular federal religious authorities who, in 1987, identified the situation as problematic, although "widely exaggerated". Against the background of continuing political and social dissent from the State, frequently expressed through Islam and negotiations for a re-merger between *Semangat '46* and UMNO in 1996 however, focus was once again given to outstanding threats to Malay unity, articulated through extremism and the inappropriate practice of *Shi'ism* among Muslims in Malaysia.

What distinguishes the current Administration from its political predecessors in its attempts at instituting orthodox belief and ortho-practic forms, is its location of the growing problem of religious "extremism" through *foreign* influence. Although identified as a problem of domestic Malaysian society, the Administration has continued to draw a connection between the growth of religious extremism and contact with outside forces. The Government White Paper on the subject, for instance, identifies the phenomenon (and its impact on Malay-Muslim society) as emanating, for the most part, from sources external to the country.⁷⁷

Similarly, the "problem" of diversity in religious culture and practice has been perceived as a direct result of foreign influence; obtained primarily through the circulation of religious literature, including video cassettes and tapes, pamphlets and magazines but also through formal (and less formal) channels of education. The Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Office (also known as *Pusat Islam*) has been active in the vetting of such material. In 1985, the then Head of the Division, Datuk Dr Yusof Noor announced plans for its expansion, in particular, of the *Unit Akidah dan Ajaran Sesat* (Unit for Faith and "Deviated" Teachings) under the *Pusat Penyelidikan Islam* (Islamic Investigation Centre) in order to deal more effectively with the increasing volume of such material, including that of *Shi'ite* teachings, filtering into Malaysia.⁷⁸ In 1996, the same authority identified the existence of forty-seven deviationist groups, fifteen of which were described as active and involving some 1,000 followers.

The adherence by allegedly increasing numbers of Malaysians to "new" interpretations in Islam has also been identified as problematic to Malaysia's conduct of diplomatic relations with certain countries.⁷⁹ Although the Malaysian

Government has maintained its acceptance of *Shi'ite* teachings as fully Islamic, it has defended its actions against the spread of such beliefs as “unsuitable” within the Malaysian context. Thus the main threat to Malaysian Muslims, as perceived by the Administration, lies in their lack of “true” knowledge and that this might be avoided if Muslims followed Government guidelines. Nevertheless, the need to move against the development of such religious diversity in Malaysia is frequently explained by the Government with reference to the experience of civil unrest caused by radical *Shi'ite* communities in other countries, alluding particularly to their “historical” potential for dissent.⁸⁰ The proscription of Darul Arqam in 1994 was also defended on the basis that its teachings increasingly encouraged belief in the prophetic qualities of its leaders and in its sanction of the search for the Mahdi—historically, a more exclusively *Shi'ite* belief.⁸¹

Diversity in religious practice has been additionally obtained by the incidence of foreign contact through less formal channels. The growth of *Shi'ite* religious belief and practice in the country in particular, has also been linked to the large scale presence of illegal immigrants and migrant workers. The rapidly expanding Malaysian economy in the 1990s has relied heavily on the availability of a transient workforce from around the region. However, the presence, for example, of Indonesian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers (sometimes belonging to different Muslim sects) as distinct communities in states such as Perak, Johor, Perlis and Selangor, has also had important implications for patterns of socio-cultural development among Malay-Muslims. Both federal and state governments have been concerned about the influence that such communities have or can allegedly exercise. Some state governments have moved to legislate against the “growing” practice of *nikah mutaah* (a form of contract marriage accepted in *Shi'ite* belief) between foreign workers and local women. Others have moved against illegal immigrants who are alleged to have styled themselves as religious leaders within local communities.⁸²

The phenomenon of increasing religious diversity has also been linked to the influence of foreign missionary movements. The Mahathir Administration has contrasted the “counter-productive” work of such groups against that of “traditional” religious practices in Malaysia promoting the strength and spirit of Islam “in an amicable manner”. Nevertheless the facilitation of these groups through the traditional and historical ties of Malaysians with Muslim countries and religious institutions abroad has rendered them somewhat difficult to regulate. Although the Government is able to monitor foreign assistance to *dakwah* bodies, through *Pusat Islam*, their activities within Malaysia have not always been within its jurisdiction.

There has also been some attempt, through foreign policy, to control this “wrong” Islam. Despite official rhetoric on international Islamic unity, the Administration has made some effort at drawing foreign public attention to the differences between Malaysia’s *Sunni* tradition against that of the *Shi'ia*.⁸³ The alarming multiplication of so-called deviationist Islamic groups has prompted the Government’s urging of Muslim nations to curb the “spillover” of their own spiritual movements and export of their ideas to other Islamic countries.⁸⁴ The

International Seminar on Muslim Unity, hosted by the Government in 1987, was also significant in obtaining consensus on this threat of “extremism” at both the local and international levels, and in acknowledging that Muslims could not exist in isolation but should interact and administer their societies in co-operation with other non-Muslim communities. At the Conference, a government minister noted that in Malaysia’s case, the danger came from the exploitation of certain extremist groups, by others, which in turn caused internal divisions that would ultimately work to the detriment of Islam and the Muslim community.⁸⁵

Its continued inability to effectively police religious behaviour has, however, convinced the Administration of the need to invoke more punitive measures against such religious diversity. By 1996, in the wake of reports of the tenacity of the *Darul Arqam* movement and its members (despite its proscription), the Director of *Pusat Islam* announced the Government’s intention of tabling a motion in Parliament to amend Article (3)1 of the federal constitution towards official recognition of the *ahl al-sunna w’al jama’a/Ahli Sunnah Waljammah* (Sunni sect of Islam) in Malaysia, effectively making the practice of any other branches of Islam by the Malays prosecutable. This was followed by the issue of a *fatwa* by the National *Fatwa* Council towards the gazetting of this ruling under state religious enactments, prior to any proposed enforcement. Although such legislation would accept the profession of *Shi’ism* as a birthright, the Government has indicated that religious conversion will not be tolerated.

The issues of religious diversity and *Sunni-Shi’ia* schism are linked more generally to the question of political authority and legitimacy raised earlier. Significantly, any experimentation with or support for *Shi’ite* religious belief is linked inevitably to their political implications. The long-term impact of the Iranian Revolution might be better assessed from the ideological issues it has raised about the role of the state and, in particular, the relationship between government and Islam itself. The strength of *Shi’ite* dissent from normative rules and practice in the area of government and foreign relations has been supported by the practical triumph of a clerical dictatorship in Iran. It has also been importantly shaped by a 1988 decree by Ayatollah Khomeini for the predominance of the concept of *velayat-i mutlaq* (absolute vice-regency) of the *ulama*, enshrining their direct and supreme political authority. As an important new formulation in Islamist politics, it has suggested the singular command of the Islamic jurisconsult (*velayat-i faqih*). While the likely applications of this idea are not without their contradictions, it promotes the fusion of political and religious authority (invested in one person), making a clearer assertion of the close relation between public influence, performance and professional authority⁸⁶

The threat to established authority remains a pervasive theme in Islamic debate within Malaysia. Ultimately, any religious thought (or practice) which has the semblance of questioning and/or challenging such institutional structures is perceived as being potentially harmful. In announcing its intent to proscribe *Shi’ia* practices, *Pusat Islam* has underlined the State’s rejection of *Shi’ia* ideology, but not that of its Islamic status.⁸⁷ Defining “extremism” is thus also related to the idea of authority conceived through *ijtihad* (discussed in

Chapter 3). UMNO and the Mahathir Administration continue to be threatened by the monopoly of the *ulama* in religious knowledge and authority, in both traditional and moral terms. An identity which PAS leadership and Government religious authority share.⁸⁸

To counter this, the ruling party has attempted to reinforce its legitimacy and its own authority to offer opinions on these religious matters. The shift towards obtaining consultation and opinion from Muslim intellectuals on such matters has thus also been relevant here. An international “consensus of speech” from Muslim thinkers and authorities has increasingly served to sanction the Administration’s identity, image and its views. In particular, international opinion has been useful in identifying the extremism of UMNO and the Federal Government’s political rivals against its own moderation: essentially “right” versus “wrong” Islam. PAS has, for instance, objected to the Government’s sponsorship of international conferences which it perceives as instruments holding the ulterior motive of categorizing and discrediting serious opposition to essentially “secular” governments. The 1987 conference on extremism, for instance, was described by the Party as representative of Government strategies to check the advance of Islamic movements in Malaysia and other Muslim countries, through consultation and concurrence with other secular and “un-Islamic” governments.⁸⁹ The *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia* (PUM) also registered concern that government action to curb *Shi’ite* practices in Malaysia would have the undesired effect of sowing further discord within the domestic Muslim community. The President of the Association, Haji Ahmad Awang, has argued that Malaysian government authorities need to acknowledge the non-monolithic nature of Islam—indeed, the Association has itself sponsored international conferences towards a “rapprochement” between *Sunni* and *Shi’ia* within the context of Islamic revivalism.⁹⁰

Although the arguments offered above suggest that foreign policy on “extremism” has been directed towards the fulfilment of a domestic agenda, it has also reflected a sensitivity to general discourse on Islam and its meaning to the West and to the means by which it is perceived in international relations. In differentiating the morality and caution of its own Islamization efforts from that of most of its Islamic competitors, the Administration has also identified a distinction between fundamentalism (which it appropriates as its own values) and extremism (that of its competitors), particularly for the benefit of its non-Muslim audience, both domestic and international.⁹¹ Such discourse represents attempts to portray the religion as a positive force in global relations, emphasizing its synonymy with “fundamental and universal human needs and values”. A distinction between “harmless fundamentalists” as those who adhere to the teachings of the *Quran* and “deviationists” as extremists who are removed from the “actual” teachings of Islam, was echoed by both Dr Mahathir and Datuk Musa Hitam, the former Deputy Prime Minister, insisting that “according to our interpretation of the fundamentals, Islam is adaptable, reasonable, logical”. Indeed, unlike UMNO’s fundamentalism, the extremism of its competitors neither recognizes nor respects the communal balance which UMNO has so carefully cultivated.⁹²

The articulation of such distinctions at international fora, however, also belies a sensitivity to the language and labels that have become a kind of shorthand for identity within the process of Islamic revivalism and to Western stereotypes of Islam, frequently perpetuated in the international media as inherent linkages between Islam and violence. In Anwar Ibrahim's perspective, the negative image of Islam portrayed by "Orientalists", the West and their media, depicted Islam and Muslims as a threat to the old order, as fundamentalists easily equated with fanatics, unlike Muslim intellectuals who perceived Islam in a rational and open manner. In 1992, the Administration banned two issues of the international news magazine *Newsweek*, for "tarnishing the image of Islam and for portraying Muslims as religious fanatics". During the 1995 General Election, both *Newsweek* and another international publication, *Time*, were heavily criticized by Dr Mahathir for continually attempting to portray "Malaysia as a country run by Muslims" in a bad light, referring to Western attempts to classify Malaysia together with Libya and Iran as "ridiculous".⁹³

Publications which are based locally but which have attempted international commentary on Islam and politics in other countries (as well as in Malaysia) in less favourable light, have also been targeted by such stringent measures. In 1995, the Malaysian government banned an international Islamic news magazine based in Kuala Lumpur, *Media Muslim*, for publishing articles which "slandered the Malaysian government and other countries" and for "retarding the growth of Islam in Malaysia". As a counter-strategy, the Administration has more recently committed itself to sponsoring satellite television and radio (Islamic Vision, the Voice of Islam) networks, often in co-operation with other Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, towards "correcting the negative image of Islam frequently portrayed by the West" while alerting Malaysians to "the dangers of fanaticism to religion, race and culture".⁹⁴

The Administration has also solicited multilateral support for curbing extremism, and has been an active party to co-ordination efforts by Muslim governments to combat "extremism" as a generalized threat, evidenced by its active support at the 1995 OIC Summit in Casablanca for formal agreement between its member states on this issue. The Special Resolution reached at the Conference was significant in the consensus that it represented among more conservative Muslim governments against radical states, providing the OIC with the means to act against those states identified as sponsoring extremist or terrorist activities.

However, Malaysia has also continued to demonstrate its insistence on distinguishing between "right" and "wrong" Islam itself. In the wake of a US Bill in 1996 on controlling international terrorism by economically isolating countries like Iran and Libya which are cited as sponsoring acts, Malaysia has been adamant that its foreign policy (in this case, its decision to advance its economic relationship with Iran) should be decided by its own measure and not by that of the fears of the non-Muslim world, in particular the US. This was explained by Dr Mahathir as being in accordance with Malaysia's general opposition to unilateral pressures within the international community and in particular over economic sanctions against so-called "rogue" states.⁹⁵

“EXTREMISM” AND MALAYSIAN STUDENTS

Another medium of foreign influence which has been identified as a source of concern and challenge to the Malaysian government is that of its student population abroad, in particular Malay-Muslim students. Much of the opposition that the Government and UMNO had faced in the 1970s emanated from student organizations working through the idiom of Islam. The New Education Policy instituted after 1969 had enabled vast numbers of Malay students to receive their tertiary education abroad, sponsored directly by the Government. Indeed, by 1984, it was officially explained that the very fact of their numbers (cited as standing at 18,000 in that year), required governmental attention to their activities.⁹⁶

Policy on these student communities appears to have been designed from a sense of their potential for offering a similar challenge and opposition to the Administration’s vision of “right” Islam, unless their capacity to be influenced by alternative interpretations of Islam are acted upon. The issue of alternative influence is directly related to the fact that religious education, both formal and informal, has served as significant avenues for the transmission of *dakwah*. Their exposure to and reciprocal contact with international Islamic intellectual sources and writings have influenced, to some extent at least, their perception of the domestic milieu, their identity as Muslims and their connection to a universal Islam. Evidence of their increasing criticism of and dissension from Government policies, including foreign policy, was perceived by the Government to hold a direct link to such international contact.

Indeed, there was enough concern for the office of “*Dakwah Attaché*” to be instituted in a number of Malaysian embassies in such large student centres as Jakarta, London and Cairo, shortly after the Mahathir Administration assumed office. The functions of these attaches were described very generally in 1981, as “correcting” the views and information that Malaysian students received abroad about the country. By 1982, their numbers were being increased and their functions made officially more specific with responsibilities, among other things, to establish contact with local Islamic organizations, foster closer relations between them and the Malaysian government and supervise the welfare of Malaysian Muslims in their respective territories. By 1984, Malaysian embassies also held specific committees to review issues and problems connected with Malaysian students abroad, in part, to avoid claims that the Embassy itself was monitoring students.

Overseas student affairs are also handled by the Prime Minister’s Office and by officials of the Malaysian Student Department who are mandated to monitor student activities for signs of trouble. Concern over the variety of Islamic influence that these students come under is demonstrated by the orientation sessions that they have been required to undergo on their departure and upon their return to Malaysia, every two years. At one orientation session for instance, students were reminded that in order to understand “the true teachings of Islam”, one would have to be guided by “the interpretations of experts” towards the

practice of a “more wholesome Islam”, rather than to “merely read the Quran and records of the *Sunnah* (life-style and practices of the Prophet)”.⁹⁷

Students found to be involved in “extremist” activities have been threatened with the withdrawal of their scholarships and other punitive measures. The Ministry of Education has however consistently maintained that the number of students involved in such “extremist” activities remains small and that the Government’s objections are not against the activity of *dakwah* itself but that of its increasing politicization.⁹⁸

In fact, the standards of student activities overseas have also been the concern of other Muslim groups but for different causes. In 1983, ABIM and the Muslim Students’ Association of the US and Canada (MSA) called for the greater inculcation of Islamic values among young Malaysian Muslim students sent abroad for further studies to ensure their adherence to Islamic tenets. The suggestion was put forth that a clause might be included in the scholarship contracts that the students are bound to, threatening the withdrawal of such sponsorship if they flouted Islamic laws. Both the groups have been critical of what they perceive to be “anti-dakwah” advice given by certain orientation officials to Muslim students sent overseas because it “misrepresented” *dakwah* itself.⁹⁹

Government alarm has also been expressed over evidence of the involvement of Malaysian students in subversive activity abroad. Reports of alleged student involvement in foreign Islamic liberation movements such as with the Afghan *Mujahideen* have surfaced periodically. The former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman and Head of *Perkim* and RISEAP, claimed evidence of the covert training of Malaysian students in guerilla activities and combat drill in certain countries, suggesting that the Government act forcefully against their despatch to such areas. In October 1985, the UMNO Washington Club President reported similar evidence of “subversive” activities, purportedly financed by a foreign source, “for foreign purposes”.¹⁰⁰

In fact, UMNO has had a direct role in intensifying this politicization as students have become inadvertently involved in intra-Malay political rivalry transplanted abroad. UMNO has undoubtedly been challenged by continued PAS influence over students attending Middle Eastern universities, even while these connections have probably as much to do with alma mater networks as they might with political affiliation. But intra-Malay rivalry has increasingly been extended to whatever foreign arenas Malaysian students might be found in. Student organizations and conferences are frequently addressed by government ministers, and by both UMNO and PAS representatives, where inter-party debate and challenge also occur. Indeed, for PAS, it has served as an important means to explain changes in party leadership (instituted after 1982) to Malaysian students abroad as well as its agenda for Malaysian society.¹⁰¹

According to the Government, the pattern of foreign connection between revolutionaries abroad and “extremists” at home has also been replicated in Malaysian student activity overseas. In November 1983, following revelations of Iranian attempts to export revolution to Malaysia via PAS, high-level sources also revealed some active Iranian involvement in “subverting the minds of

Malaysian students abroad”, particularly those in the US, Britain and Australia. Similar serious allegations were made by the Chairman of the Kedah State Education Committee that a “local Opposition party” leader had encouraged Kedah student members of an Islamic revolutionary group towards instigating anti-Government activities in Cairo, and was being investigated by the Malaysian Education Attaché there. Dr Mahathir also directly accused PAS of “fomenting trouble” among students studying abroad in 1985.¹⁰²

While Malay-Muslim student dissension overseas is officially handled by government bureaucracies created specifically for those purposes, it has also prompted the application of other strategies by the ruling party such as the establishment of political clubs in the largest overseas Malaysian student population centres (four by 1983). Although the clubs have been officially explained as serving recreational and welfare purposes, the popular student perception was that they were instituted with the express purpose of neutralizing other student organizations, particularly those that professed Islam and *dakwah* as a cause. Holding such social functions and status has exempted their proscription by the 1982 Societies Act, which at any rate is applicable only within Malaysia. The clubs have served additionally as venues for the articulation, explanation and defence of the ruling party’s policies against the charges of its competitors; representatives annually attend the UMNO General Assembly as observers. Such strategies appear, however, to have helped reinvigorate the student political scene rather than control it, as competition intensified in the mid-1980s between UMNO clubs and their political opponents in a bid to attract Malay-Muslim students abroad.¹⁰³

Although the Administration has maintained its appreciation of “constructive criticism”, it is obvious that national stability is perceived to be synonymous with the political fortunes of the ruling party, even abroad. Dr Mahathir himself has expressed the feeling that dissenting students “who are not an asset to the country” should not be sponsored by the Government. At a point when the most serious intra-Malay rivalry was taking place within UMNO, the Foreign Minister underlined the important role of Malaysian students as “young ambassadors of the nation” who should counter “negative” images of Malaysia presented abroad, particularly through the mass media.¹⁰⁴

UMNO AND UNOFFICIAL FOREIGN POLICY

Part of the Administration’s problem in dealing with the issue of extremism has been its difficulty in acting like an Islamic movement; a freedom which its social and political opposition enjoys. Indeed this concept of divergence between the roles of Islamic political parties and Islamic movements is increasingly given definition and articulation by *dakwah* organizations, student movements and by PAS itself.

Attempts to control foreign relations through official outlets have thus not been restricted to relations with Iran. Vital towards understanding the role of Islam in Malaysian foreign policy is the conduct of “unofficial” contact with Muslim countries like Iran and Libya which are increasingly used as a

supplementary means towards affecting both external and domestic contexts. Reliance on such strategy is in part a function of the Administration's need to exercise and demonstrate its "protector" role towards Malay-Muslim interests both domestically and internationally.

But it is also a function of a changing external context—of the problematic recognition and sponsorship of non-governmental parties and interests (who are not always attuned to Government thinking) by outside Muslim interests. Due to its incapacity to condemn or curtail such a liaison which claims to be dedicated to the international promotion of Islam, the Administration has had to enter into direct competition with such parties for international recognition, but at the less official level.

This form of direct competition and "unofficial" foreign policy for "official" purposes was crystallized in the work of the UMNO Youth International Bureau, established in 1982. Despite the party wing's original orientation as a basically local political body, Anwar's co-option into UMNO and his subsequent leadership of the youth wing meant that his international contacts were valuable and that the Bureau worked largely as an extension of his ideas.¹⁰⁵

While functioning as an "independent" organization, the Bureau has also worked in concurrence with or through the implicit consent of all foreign policy arms of the government such as the UMNO Supreme Council, the Prime Minister's Office and the Malaysian Foreign Affairs Ministry (which the bureau chief alleges is consistently non-committal over issues on which the bureau seeks to act). The Bureau's official aims are discernible from the fact that it actively pursues contacts with only those organizations abroad that possess direct and/or influential links with the government of their home countries. Within the context of official concern over perceived Libyan (and Iranian) support and sponsorship for UMNO's political rivals, the International Bureau has sought to counter activities by representatives of these countries, through its role as a Malaysian "*duta kecil*" (little/junior embassy or representative). Apparently, however, its activities are limited by a lack of "permanent" resources.¹⁰⁶

In March 1984, Anwar Ibrahim visited Libya (significantly, as President of UMNO Youth and not in his ministerial capacity), obtaining an agreement for religious co-operation with the Libyan Islamic *Dakwah* Association, an agreement to increase trade and cultural relations with Malaysia, a promise of assistance towards the establishment of official *dakwah* centres in Sabah and a programme to upgrade exchange between students and youth leaders of Libya and Malaysia. This was followed by a visit by Dr Mahathir himself (accompanied by Encik Anwar and Datuk Dr Yusof Noor, then Head of the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Office) in December 1984, shortly after which the Malaysian Overseas Investment Corporation and the Libyan Foreign Investment Company agreed to set up a joint holding company in Kuala Lumpur for trade, investment and commerce.¹⁰⁷

When the US-Libyan conflict first surfaced in April 1986, Malaysia issued its traditional plea for "a peaceful solution", but the actual US bombing itself drew particularly harsh criticism from the Government and from other Malaysian

sources. Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, raised the issue of the US bombing of Libya at an International Islamic Convention held in Singapore (Libya had helped finance, *Perkim's* headquarters through loans totalling some M\$28 million). More importantly, UMNO Youth staged demonstrations at the US embassy, and support was also forthcoming from other multi-ethnic organizations such as the National Union of Malaysian Muslim students. In fact, widespread Malaysian support for the Libyans against the US has existed for some time and the Mahathir Administration was perhaps hopeful of turning such support to Malaysian advantage in its official relations with Libya: in May 1986 a special representative of Colonel Gaddafi visited Malaysia to personally thank the Government for condemning the US attack on Libya.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, this sort of "unofficial" strategy came to fruition in 1986 when, after consistently lobbying the Gaddafi administration in Libya, UMNO Youth gained assurance, "in writing", from Libya, that only UMNO (through UMNO Youth) would be extended recognition as the legitimate guardians of Islam in Malaysia. The confirmation of this recognition was characterized in 1987 when, following a further visit by UMNO Youth, the Libyan Islamic Call Society agreed to help build a Muslim Youth Training Centre (under the aegis of UMNO Youth), which was officially touted as "Libyan appreciation for UMNO's support in fighting the Zionist threat and as an endorsement of its position as the defender of Islam".¹⁰⁹ Such confirmation was particularly rewarding within the domestic context of intense intra-Malay rivalry at the time, and with the increasingly open split within UMNO, between the Razaleigh and Mahathir factions.

While the Bureau perceives itself as working as the major engine in constructing a (relatively) new, warm relationship between Malaysian and Libyan international Islam, it has similarly attempted to affect Malaysian-Iranian relations, although this has proved more difficult. Despite attempts to draw Iranian support away from PAS, UMNO Youth has apparently been somewhat hampered by the Iranian perception that the organization is not "serious" in its Islamic intentions.¹¹⁰

The ascendancy and tenure of a PAS-dominated coalition government in Kelantan from 1990, resurfaced UMNO suspicions of Iranian support for PAS activities, even at the foreign level. Alleged evidence of material support provided for the party by Iran in 1994 (cited in an American newspaper quoting US intelligence reports) raised suspicions that these were co-incident to renewed attempts by the Administration to regulate PAS activities and monitor the organization for signs of deviance.

Although the real potential for the duplication of the Iranian Revolution has effectively diminished over time, its longer-term implications remain a serious threat to governments like that of Malaysia. The impact of the Revolution has been linked primarily to the rise of Islamic political consciousness in a variety of countries and to the spread of religious extremism internationally. Any identification with the Revolution in Malaysia has, over time, been feared less in any organized form than for its implications for the relative position of religious and secular authority in a modernizing state. While the context of religious

revivalism itself has helped raise these issues, the impact of the Iranian Revolution has over the long term remained potent in legitimizing and mobilizing debate over the political implications of contemporary Islam both within the state and outside it.

The problem of defining “wrong” Islam

The management of extremism or “wrong” Islam has remained central to both domestic and foreign policy in Malaysia. Its control has however been made problematic by the fact that it is linked to the proliferation of religious diversity in Malaysia which, to some extent, has been obtained by degrees of contact and religious exchange across state boundaries. The perception of threat lies in the potential that Islam as it is understood, experienced and practised in Malaysia, is increasingly also shaped by the intangible movement of ideas and consciousness across borders as it is by state power and inter-state relations.

The imperatives of “right” Islamic belief and expression in Malaysia are in fact underwritten by the continued perception of fragility of the Malay-Muslim community against potential dominance by others, to some extent promoted by the contours of Malay political culture and the sub-text of Malaysia’s multi-religious, multi-ethnic society. In such a context, the expression of any dissension, division or pluralism within the Islamic community has increasingly come to be equated with the threat of “extremism”, unaffordable in either the domestic or international context. Less conventional strategies in foreign policy have afforded a measure of success in containing the impingement of external religious influence on domestic society. The Mahathir Administration’s recent intensified efforts to counter such influence in fact reflect its incapacity to entirely police religious experimentation and development or institute any Islamic orthopraxy.

Divisions within the house of Islam remain a fact of history despite the fervent belief of Muslims in the truth of Islamic unity. In reality, even the basics of faith have always been contested. The fact that even while affirming its “authenticity”, Muslims are as likely to believe in the dynamism of dogma and as such are likely to continuously act and re-act upon religious doctrine is evident in the development of Muslim societies. *Qu’ranic* injunctions have in fact been subject to different social and political interpretation.

The degree of diversity between Muslims, both in terms of thought and practice, is important to recognize. It is historically grounded in theological difference and remains a feature of Islamic revivalism. This has included reaction on the part of Muslims who believe that the only possible response and resistance to secular modernity is renewed and deepened religious commitment—this is often categorized as the traditionalist or conservative model.

The frequent depiction of “wrong” Islam in the Malaysian context, as unsuited to modernity and processes of modernization, appears to suggest the incapacity of these movements to adapt to their circumstances and as “closed off” from normative discourse. Yet its organic vitalism notwithstanding, “wrong” Islam also remains a distinctively modern phenomenon. To a great

extent it also constitutes a more recent example of Muslim reaction to the perceived challenge of the contemporary West and its culture.¹¹¹ Certainly there exists a dynamism in the development of ideas and practices within these movements of “wrong” Islam which suggest precisely their modernity, albeit of a more exclusionary nature than that of the State’s vision.

Efforts at distinguishing classical from modern doctrines, such as that offered by the contemporary Malaysian State and which have the effect of depicting the State’s interpretation as more correct because it is more “modern”, in fact obscure the real social and political forces that have rendered certain doctrines more acceptable than others at any given time. What exists in all Muslim societies with reference to Islam is a kind of simultaneity and continuity of ideas which are fundamentally dependent upon the groups, social institutions and status of those who use and select them.¹¹²

The Mahathir Administration has attempted to counter the impression of the religion as a closed system by itself presenting Islam, to some extent, as a “living” faith. However, in attempting to control what it considers “wrong” Islam and by instituting either directly or indirectly, its version of orthodoxy, it is also somewhat guilty of contradicting the basis of its own arguments towards *‘ijtihad*. Inevitably then, the success of its promotion of such thinking will also invite further debate about what Islam is and what it sanctions even as it underlines the propriety of different interpretations.

NOTES

1. Presidential address to the 1986 UMNO General Assembly in *Penyata UMNO 1986/87*, Kuala Lumpur, 1987, pp. 557–567.
2. *Malaysian Digest*, 15 October 1981, p. 3. The first official (post-revolutionary) high-level Iranian visit to Malaysia in October 1981, acknowledged the Government’s impressive and “serious efforts” at promoting Islam while the Malaysians offered assistance to the Iranians from “one Islamic country to another”.
3. *New Straits Times (NST)*, 30 October 1980.
4. “UMNO Menentang Kebangkitan Islam” (UMNO Opposes the Resurgence of Islam) in *Suara Islam*, No. 2, September 1979.
5. See *Suara Islam*, April 1981 reports on the visit of representatives of the Iranian Prime Minister to the party’s office, who were themselves trying to garner support for their stand in the Iran-Iraq war.
6. Yusuf Harun, *Dialog Dengan Pimpinan* (Dialogue with Leaders), Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pena, 1986, pp. 290–304.
7. Ustaz Haji Yusof Al-Rawa, “Teguhkan Jama’ah Teruskan Jihad” (Strengthen the Party, Continue the Holy War), *Ucapan Dasar Muktamar Tahunan PAS Ke-32*, 26 September 1986, Marang, Trengganu (Kuala Lumpur, 1986).
8. *NST*, 22 November 1982.
9. See Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, Encik Anwar Ibrahim’s remarks in *NST*, 22 August 1982; interview with Anwar Ibrahim in *Panji Masyarakat*, March 1983, pp. 51–52. The gradual marginalization (if not elimination) of many secular leaders of the Revolution and the growing dominance of the *ulama*, prompted many ABIM leaders to qualify their support for the Revolution in principle, while distancing themselves from the actions of the Iranian *ulama*.
10. *NST*, 22 November and 25 November 1982, 12 June 1983; *ST*, 7 August 1983.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, then Trade and Industry Minister and the chief of UMNO Kelantan operations made this announcement. Dr Mahathir had noted that “there existed a group of people who were going around showing pictures of a certain country which had overthrown its king”.

11. See Para 3, Clause 3.2, *Perlembagaan UMNO, Di-Persetujukan Dalam Persidangan Perhimpunan Agung Khas UMNO Pada 8 hb. Julai 1979* (Constitution of UMNO passed at the Special General Assembly, on 8 July 1979).
12. Chandra Muzaffar, *Protector?*, Penang: Aliran, 1979, p. 66. This refers to Article 181 of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia.
13. See Dr Mahathir Mohammed’s address to Parliament on introducing the Amendment reproduced in *Dewan Masyarakat*, February 1993, pp. 17–24.
14. The Constitution states clearly that religion is a state right with the rulers at the head of the respective state religious councils. In June 1983, Johor and Perak withdrew their membership from the National Islamic Religious Council following a dispute over the fixing of the date for the commencement of the annual Muslim month of fasting, the Ramadan.
15. *NST*, 18 and 19 June 1983.
16. Murugesu Pathmanathan, “Malaysia in 1984”, *Southeast Asian Affairs 1985*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985, pp. 211–234.
17. The exception was Tunku Abdul Rahman (himself a member of the Kedah royal household) who, during his premiership of the country often urged the Sultans against interfering in the political process. See N.J.Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of the United Malay National Organization and the Parti Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980, pp. 182–183.
18. See debates in Parliament in *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen, Dewan Rakyat (PRPDR)* in the period July–August 1983. The Bill’s stated aim was to resolve the ambiguity between the constitutional provisions for the consent of the Conference of Rulers and the King’s capacity to act only on the advice of the Cabinet.
19. John Funston, “Challenge and Response in Malaysia: The UMNO Crisis and the Mahathir Style”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1988 pp. 363–373. *The Malay Dilemma* and *The Challenge* take the decline of monarchical political power as their starting point.
20. See A.C.Milner, “Rethinking Islamic Fundamentalism in Malaysia” in *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 1986, pp. 48–75; on a republican spirit in contemporary Malaysia see “Kedudukan Raja-raja Melayu: Suatu Segi dari Sejarah” (Position of the Malay Rulers: A Historical Perspective”, *Utusan Malaysia (UM)*, 11 November 1983.
21. *NST*, 15 September 1983.
22. Presidential address to the UMNO General Assembly, 19 June 1981 in *Penyata UMNO 1981/82*, Kuala Lumpur, 1982, pp. 411–414.
23. *UM*, 3 September 1983; *Straits Times (ST)*, 6 October 1983. The new PAS President, Haji Yusuf Rawa, claimed that Haji Asri’s remarks were “a political gimmick to destroy the party”.
24. *NST*, 3 and 24 October 1983. It was revealed that a radical group in Malaysia had sent eight delegations to “a Middle Eastern Islamic republic” which had financed the trips.
25. *NST*, 24 October 1983; *PRPDR*, 3 November 1983, pp. 1386–1390, detailed the reasons and arrest of these Malaysians in Saudi Arabia; *UM*, 7 November 1983; *UM* and *Berita Harian (BH)* 11 November 1983. While official announcements consistently declined naming the country, the constant reference to an Islamic republic in West Asia is an obvious reference to Iran.
26. *The Star*, 7 October 1983. This message was apparently conveyed to high-level members of the embassy by senior Wisma Putra officers approximately two weeks prior to this date.

27. NST, 13 November 1983. The embassy claimed awareness that an Iranian-style Islamic revolution could never be achieved in Malaysia.
28. Murugesu Pathmanathan, "Malaysia in 1984", op. cit.
29. *BH*, 11 November 1983. Organizations such as the Malaysian Youth Council (comprising the youth sections of many of the coalition partners' parties) pledged loyalty to Mahathir against "any threat from whatever party that tries to establish an Islamic Republic in the country".
30. *UM*, 19 and 27 September 1983. Anwar had to meet in dialogue with the representatives of 16 Chinese organizations who presented their grievances over the marginalization of non-Muslim interests in policy on Malaysia's national culture.
31. *The Star*, 17 October 1983; *PRPDR*, No. 89, 15 November, pp. 12569–12570; 16 November, pp. 12687–12709; 18 November 1983, pp. 12966–12977.
32. *NST*, 4 October 1983; *BH*, 12 November 1983.
33. *UM*, 23 and 28 November, 2 December 1983; *NST*, 19 November, 5 December 1983. PAS was reported to have organized a mass gathering of some 5,000 people at the Sultan's palace in Trengganu, pledging their loyalty to the Sultan over the crisis.
34. See reports in *UM*, 13 and 17 November 1983 where a Malaysian Brigadier-General warned against "members of the Malaysian army involved in the activities of a group working together with government enemies in planning the creation of an Islamic republic in Malaysia".
35. Michael Ong, "Malaysia in 1983: On the Road to Greater Malaysia" in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1984*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1984, pp. 197–230. The compromise formula involved restoring Article 150, repealing the Amendment to the Eighth Schedule and amending Article 66(5) which included an extension of the fifteen-day period to thirty days and contained a new provision allowing for the King to express his disagreement with a Bill, after which it would be sent back to Parliament for further debate.
36. *UM*, 28 November 1983.
37. *BH*, 26 May 1984. The presidential address maintained that the Government's objective was only to resolve the uncertainties between the powers of the people and those of the rulers. Some differences of opinion were expressed over the issue while Dr Mahathir himself acknowledged it as one of the greatest challenges to the party.
38. See text of the President's address to the first *Semangat '46* General Assembly in *Watan*, 14 and 17 October 1989.
39. Report in *Lianhe Zabao*, 12 January 1984 cited in *Mirror of Opinion (MOP)*, January-March 1984; *BH*, 14 January 1984.
40. *FAM*, March 1984, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 11. The visit was carried out at Iranian invitation and hosted by those in high office including the Iranian President, the Deputy Speaker, Foreign Minister and Minister of Trade. The press release noted the historical, cultural and religious bonds that closely linked the two nations and expressed satisfaction with the existing happy state of relations between Iran and Malaysia.
41. See Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister's statement in Parliament in *PRPDR*, 27 March 1984, pp. 1535–1538, explaining the objective of better understanding by the Iranians of Malaysia's socio-economic development and politics, including especially the Government's efforts to inject Islamic values into Malaysian society.
42. *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, 9 August 1984. The request was made to the Iranian Foreign Minister when visiting Kuala Lumpur in April 1984. The Iranian embassy maintained that not more than 20 visas had been issued and that the total number of Malaysians visiting Iran had not exceeded 100 in the period August 1983 to August 1984.
43. *ST*, 22 September 1984; *NST*, 12 December 1984. According to the Deputy Foreign Minister, the Malaysian government had to regulate this exchange of visits so that "a situation will not be created that could harm our bilateral relations".

44. Presidential address in *Penyata UMNO 1984/85*, Kuala Lumpur, 1985, p. 416.
45. *UM*, 30 September 1984; *NST*, 30 December 1985. Datuk Musa Hitam's address to the annual assemblies of two BN partners—Gerakan and the MIC—emphasized that “the political war to get rid of religious extremists or people who fan communal chauvinism in Malaysia had to be the main struggle of all the component parties of the National Front”.
46. Presidential address in *Penyata UMNO 1986/87*, Kuala Lumpur, 1987, pp. 557–567.
47. *FEER*, 19 February 1982. The increasing concern was in part prompted by their acquisition of premises “far in excess of the needs of a handful of Libyan diplomats in the country”.
48. See Dale F.Eickleman and James Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
49. James Piscatori, “Asian Islam: International Linkages and their Impact on International Relations” in John L.Esposito (ed.), *Islam in Asia*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 230–261.
50. See David Edwin Long, *The Hajj Today: A Survey of the Contemporary Mekkah Pilgrimage*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1979, pp. 91–113; Dale Eickleman and James Piscatori (eds), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, op. cit.
51. Mary Byrne McDonnell, *The Conduct of Hajj from Malaysia and its Socio-Economic Impact on Malay Society: A Descriptive and Analytical Study, 1860–1981*, PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1986, pp. 401; 597.
52. Statement of the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in *PRPDR*, 21 June 1989. Figures represent total numbers since 1964.
53. *PRPDR*, 29 November 1983, pp. 13962–13966; No. 43, 31 October 1984, p. 4912; Vol. 1, No. 15–19, 7 November 1986; 21 June 1989; Mary McDonnell, op. cit., pp. 349–356. Under Para A/168 of the *Lembaga Urusan dan Tabung Haji (Amendment) 1973*, persons found violating this law can be fined M\$ 10,000 or serve a prison sentence of between 1 and 2 years or both.
54. The national press has itself suggested that the mainly rural population that chose this form of “private” *Hajj* were dissatisfied over the body's transformation into a profit-making venture instead of one designed to help pilgrims. See Editorial in *NST*, 21 May 1985. See also Ozay Mehmet, *Islamic Identity and Development*, London: Routledge, pp. 159–160, who criticizes LUTH's profile as a capitalist holding company, participating in highly profitable but inherently risky and speculative stock-market transactions, despite its Islamic character.
55. See the statement by a PAS MP in Parliament in *PRPDR*, Vol. 1, No. 15–19, 28 October 1986.
56. Mary Byrne McDonnell, op. cit., p. 546, fn. 39.
57. Home Affairs Minister in Parliament in *PRPDR*, 3 November 1983, pp. 1386–1390. The pilgrims were found to be carrying large posters and photographs of Khomeini, literature containing speeches by Iranian leaders condemnatory of the Saudi Arabian government.
58. Statement of PAS MP, *PRPDR*, Vol. 1, No. 15–19, 28 October 1986; *Harakah*, 18 December 1987 and 14 July 1989; *Watan*, 11–14 August 1987.
59. *Journal of the World Muslim League*, March–April 1988, p. 30; Foreign Minister's address to the Seventeenth Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference, Amman, Jordan, 1988 in *FAM*, March 1988, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 41–48; *Harakah*, 18 December 1987; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1987, p. 42; *PRPDR*, 21 June 1989.
60. See Ismail Kassim, “Islamic Credentials an Advantage in UMNO Politics” in *ST*, 29 January 1988.
61. *Watan* and *Harakah* have frequently reported on PAS representation at these conferences. See for instance *Harakah*, 24 June 1988 on PAS participation at an

- international conference of *ulama* concerning Saudi protection of the holy places organized by the Organization of Islamic Unity in California.
62. See Jabatan Perdana Menteri, *Kertas Khas Nahas Terowong Muassim* (Special Report on the Muassim Tunnel Accident), Jabatan Perdana Menteri (Prime Minister's Office), Kuala Lumpur, 1990, p. 1.
 63. Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, 20 December 1990, Kuala Lumpur.
 64. Yusuf Harun, op. cit., p. 300. He cautioned that Mahathir's Look East and South-South co-operation policies while laudable, were not entirely effective since big powers such as the US, the Soviet Union and China were still dominant in the region. This view has been echoed by others within PAS leadership. Interview with Haji Fadzil Noor, President and Haji Mustaffa Ali, Youth and International Bureau Chief, PAS, Kuala Lumpur, 28 December 1990.
 65. *Harakah*, 22 September 1988; *Watan*, 24 September 1988 and 15 October 1990.
 66. Education Minister, Anwar Ibrahim in *ST*, 20 April 1989. Cautioning against imitating world reaction, he also recommended that intellectuals should not be so fearful as to be closed to any form of discussion.
 67. See debate between PAS MP and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Parliament, *PRPDR*, 6 March 1989; *The Star*, 25 March 1989. Criticizing the Government for not taking either "the hypocrisy and insult of European countries and the US towards the Islamic *ummah*" or support for Khomeini's directive to "kill the enemies of Islam" more seriously, the PAS MP warned of general Malaysian rejection of British participation at the CHOGM meeting, if the Government did not resolve the issue. "We are not anti-British but we do not want Britain to shelter acts that insult Allah and his Prophet".
 68. See Deputy Foreign Minister's statement in Parliament, referring to the importance of hosting CHOGM as "an opportunity for Malaysia to make itself known in the First World as a convention centre, and in our efforts to attract foreign investors and tourists to Malaysia", in *PRPDR*, 6 March 1989.
 69. *ST*, 20 April 1989.
 70. *Watan*, 23 September 1989; debate between Semangat '46 MP and Minister of Foreign Affairs in Parliament in *PRPDR*, 4 December 1989.
 71. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan, "Versions of Eternal Truth: *Ulama* and Religious Dissenters in Kedah Malay Society" in *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, No. 8, 1989, pp. 43–69.
 72. *Ajaran-ajaran Salah Di-Malaysia Menuju Kepada Islam* (False Teachings On Islam In Malaysia), National Council for Islamic Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, 1978, (P/PM(UG)2); *NST*, 10 May 1985; Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 64. In addressing the National *Dakwah* Organizations dialogue, Datuk Dr Yusof Noor, urged Muslims to be selective in the movements that they supported and reject those basing their struggles on such "negative sentiments as anger, resentment and jealousy", supporting instead those promoting "responsibility, trustworthiness, love, brotherliness and unity."
 73. Preface, *White Paper on Religious Extremism in Malaysia*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Malaysia, 12 March 1986, Kuala Lumpur. The Paper also attempted to expose "the Communist Party of Malaya's intrigue to exploit Islam for their own political ends".
 74. *NST*, 24 November 1985; *FAM*, March 1986, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 2–6; Minister in the Prime Minister's Office on religious extremism in *PRPDR*, Vol. 1, No. 1–14, 13 October 1986.
 75. *UM*, 31 August 1984.
 76. Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised Among the Malays*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963, pp. 21–50.
 77. *White Paper*, op. cit., p. 1.

78. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1987, p. 44; *PRPDR*, 28 October 1987.
79. See for instance, the comments of the Deputy Home Minister, Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayob, quoted in *BH*, 29 March 1996.
80. See comments made by the Prime Minister, the Home Affairs Minister and officials from Pusat Islam in *UM* and *BH*, 4 March, 29 March, 26 May 1996.
81. See for instance Dr Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah, *Gerakan Islam Tradisional DiMalaysia: Sejarah dan Pemikiran Jemaat Tabligh & Darul Arqam*, (Traditional Islamic Movements in Malaysia: History and Philosophy), Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Kintan, 1992, pp. 102–112.
82. See comments of the Perlis Chief Minister in *NST*, 13 April 1996.
83. Datuk Musa Hitam's address to diplomats and academics gathered at a conference on Malaysia in the US in Institute of Strategic and International Studies, *Malaysia—Past, Present and Future*, Kuala Lumpur, ISIS, 1987, pp. 6–7. This statement, however, appears to have been deleted from a reproduction of the speech in *FAM*, December 1984, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 373–380, which serves as the official record of Malaysian foreign policy statements, programmes, agreements and activities.
84. *ST*, 1 December 1987; *UM*, 30 March 1996.
85. Datuk Dr Yusuf Noor's comments on the Conference in *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 1987, p. 17.
86. See Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London and New Delhi: Sage, 1994, pp. 160–184; Fred Halliday, "The Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism: Iran, Tunisia and the Challenge of the Secular State" in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 91–113.
87. See comments of the Director of Pusat Islam in *UM*, 14 May 1996.
88. For instance, after the Memali incident, PAS *ulama* passed a *fatwa*, identifying Ibrahim Libya as a martyr (*al-syahid*), which the Kedah state authorities sought to annul by identifying the Sultan and the state government's *fatwa* committee as the highest authorities over religious interpretation and ruling, the opposition of which was punishable under *Sharia* law. The PAS President retorted by under-scoring the equal educational and religious qualifications of PAS *ulama* against that of the Government *ulama* ("because they too had degrees from Middle Eastern universities").
89. Interview with Haji Fadzil Nor, President of PAS, 28 December 1990, Kuala Lumpur; see also *Harakah*, 28–30 September and 9 October 1987. PAS has expressed the belief that the Malaysian government is interested in learning from the experience of other Muslim countries in facing what the hosts of the Seminar described as "Islamic extremists", and ways by which to attack if not control them.
90. See reports on the "*Seminar Antarabangsa Pendekatan Sunni-Syi'ah Dalam Konteks Kebangkitan Islam*" (International Seminar on *Sunni-Shi'a* Rapprochement/Reconciliation in the Context of the Islamic Revival), hosted by the PUM in 1993 in *UM*, 3 and 4 July 1993.
91. The Foreign Minister has stressed that "Malaysia does not condone any form of extremism, be it Islamic or otherwise". Address to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, 1987 in *FAM*, December 1987, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 40–45.
92. Interview with Datuk Musa Hitam, 21 June 1989, Kuala Lumpur; *Malaysian Business*, July 1983, p. 28; *ST*, 6 June 1983. Interestingly, he maintains that the importance of this distinction between fundamentalism and extremism was a concept *he* proposed to the Prime Minister. This distinction is perceived as necessary because "when they (the West) talk about the fundamentalists, what they mean is the extremists. We believe that we are the fundamentalists because the fundamentals of Islam are positive".
93. *NST*, 8 September 1987; interview with Encik Anwar Ibrahim, Kuala Lumpur, 21 December 1990, *ST*, 21 April 1995.

94. *UM*, 4 March 1992; 10 and 21 April 1995; *ST*, 13 May 1995.
95. See comments made by Dr Mahathir on the possibility of US sanctions against Malaysia, following the state oil company, PETRONAS' agreement to buy into an Iranian oil field in *ST*, 23 August 1996.
96. *PRPDR*, Vol. II, No. 3, 15 March 1984, p. 397.
97. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1986, p. 41.
98. See Parliamentary debate on Malaysian students abroad opposing government policies in *PRPDR*, 5 January 1981, pp. 2450–2452, 1 November 1982, pp. 1719–1724; Vol. II, No. 3, 15 March 1984, p. 397; Vol. I, No. 20–24, 6 November 1986; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 9 and 10, 1982, p.14 and Vol. 10, No. 4, 1986, p.41; *ST*, 6 October 1985; *ERA*, 25 May 1985, pp. 20–21 and 1 November 1986, p. 24. Other duties of Religious Attachés include the supervision of funerals, marriage, *dakwah* and advisory services for Malaysian Muslim citizens abroad and the collation of Islamic publications for the Islamic Research and Study Centre of the Department. Students are provided with passage home bi-annually and are obliged to attend these seminars which invariably serve as warnings about the dangers of extremism. Initial warnings are usually issued to “militant” students and persistence in such activities prompts the issuance of “show cause” letters for continued government sponsorship. Punitive actions were for instance taken against eight students in the United States and Canada (some allegedly involved with “*dakwah* extremists” from foreign countries) who were found to have violated the terms of their scholarships.
99. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 7, Nos 5 and 6, 1983, p. 40. Muslim students had apparently been told to be “anti-drug, anti-disco and *anti-dakwah*” during their study period, while ABIM officials argued that *dakwah* could fill the vacuum experienced by some Malaysian Muslims overseas. For an alternative view on Malay-Muslim student life and activities abroad, see *Panji Masyarakat*, July 1982, pp. 9–11, November/December 1982, pp. 26–27, September 1983, pp. 28–29; May 1984, pp. 20–21.
100. *NST*, 8 September and 24 November 1985. He accepted however that these activities were probably covert and not necessarily condoned by the foreign governments concerned. The participants were reportedly female Malaysian students who had attended a shooting course at an Albany (US) summer camp, through such sponsorship.
101. Interview with Haji Subky Latif, PAS Information Chief, Kuala Lumpur, 19 July 1989; *ST*, 11 December 1985. Such is the nature of political competition that each time an UMNO politician visits students in Cairo, for instance, a PAS politician shows up not long afterwards. See also a report in *The Star*, 18 January 1987, on a forum organized by the Malaysian Islamic Students Group in Arizona, USA, which featured the oratory skills of both PAS Vice-President Haji Hadi Awang and Encik Anwar Ibrahim.
102. *UM*, 11 November 1983; *NST*, 13 February 1984 and 16 January 1985. This was substantiated by evidence that the leader had visited the students at the Kedah House in Cairo for discussions, that the students had apparently also been influenced by certain revolutionary elements in several Arab countries and that 10 members of the UMNO Club in Egypt were forced to quit the facilities provided for them by the Kedah state and Malaysian government authorities in Cairo.
103. *PRPDR*, 11 January 1982, pp. 1247–1249 and 27 October 1982, p. 1395, 11 October 1984, pp. 4586–4587; interviews with a former UMNO Club President, Kuala Trengganu, 28 August 1989; Malaysian students, London, 1988 and Kuala Lumpur, 1990 (including former student members of Darul Arqam in New Zealand). See also “*Kumpulan Islam bertelagah dengan UMNO diunited Kingdom*” (Islamic Groups in Dispute with UMNO in the United Kingdom) in *Sarina*, 15 February 1983, pp. 25–26; “*Studen seru di sertai Club UMNO U.K.*”

- (Students urged to join UMNO Club, United Kingdom) in *Merdeka*, 1 April 1985, p. 27.
104. See Datuk Rais Yatim's comments in *NST*, 27 December 1986, referring to foreign news coverage of Malaysia "fed by groups that tried to spoil the nation's image abroad".
 105. Interview with Haji Mustaffa Yaakob, Vice-President, UMNO Youth International Bureau (OIC and Islamic Countries Section), Kuala Lumpur, 27 December 1990. Anwar Ibrahim was its first President and the Bureau's initial overtures were made possible by his influence and good relations with countries like Saudi Arabia and Libya.
 106. *Ibid.* The Bureau has a policy of giving prior notice of all its actions to the UMNO Supreme Council and the Foreign Ministry. According to Haji Mustaffa the Government was aware of Libya's support for "the Opposition" as strategy practised for Libya's own purposes.
 107. *Malaysian Digest*, 30 April 1984, p. 4. Anwar was by this point already Minister of Sports, Youth and Culture; *FAM*, Vol. 18, No. 1, March 1985, p. 37–38.
 108. *NST*, 28 March, 17 April, 14 and 19 May 1986; *FAM*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 1986, p. 42; *Malaysian Digest*, May 1986, p. 2. One UMNO Supreme Council member also labelled the United States as a "bully". Gerakan (a component party of the Barisan Nasional) Youth in Penang described the US "act of terrorism" as superpower aggression over the sovereignty of a small nation.
 109. Interview with Haji Mustaffa Yaakob, *op. cit.*
 110. Interview with Haji Mustaffa Yaakob, *op. cit.*; *BH*, 3 January 1988. He maintained that the 1986 UMNO Youth delegation meeting with Gaddafi was a success because "we had managed to make ourselves clear" and attributed difficulties with the Iranians, as explained in part by the strong relationship they held with "the Opposition" in Malaysia, and also by the apparently bad image the Bureau created in having to refuse the Iranian invitations on three separate occasions due to extenuating circumstances.
 111. Aziz al-Azmeh makes this argument with reference to radical Islamist politics and those typically described as "fundamentalist" in *Islams and Modernities*, London and New York: Verso, 1993, pp. 96–97.
 112. *Ibid.*

5 Building the *umma*

Malaysia and Muslim minorities

The welfare of the spiritual community of the *umma* has constituted an important area of thinking for Muslims and clearly holds significant implications for the conduct of inter-state relations within the normative rules and principles of international society. In tandem with a global Islamic revival, care and concern for the plight of Muslim minorities around the world has increasingly drawn the attention of Muslim governments and movements. For all Malaysian Administrations, these issues have constituted significant foreign policy concerns. Unlike its predecessors, however, the Mahathir Administration has, within the context of an expanding modern day Muslim diaspora, had to address this issue more tangibly. The growing strength of Islamic voluntarism in this matter, coupled with the increasing stature of its political rivals in the Muslim world, has meant that the ruling party's commitment to the welfare of all Muslims has also been under challenge.

This has been reflected in the Administration's determination to at least co-opt the language of its rivals. In his address to the first UMNO General Assembly under his Presidency, in 1981, Dr Mahathir maintained that as an "Islamic nation" itself, Malaysia could not be divorced from the Islamic world and that it would continue its commitment to the solidarity of and responsibility for fellow Muslims.¹

Such commitment has however been qualified as being within the context of "the brotherhood of all nations" and suggests his Administration's desire to signal parallel respect for the rules of modern international society, encompassing the concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This was exemplified in his first address to the Third Islamic Summit in 1981, when, as Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir sought to emphasize the need for continual vigilance by the OIC and its agencies for "mutual respect" and "non-interference in the affairs of others" (including those of neighbouring states) unless this was requested by the governments of the countries concerned and then only through those governments.²

The principle of territorial sovereignty has remained particularly valid as concerns the issue of Muslim minorities in neighbouring countries, most especially where it has concerned fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Administration's attempts at somehow meeting the demands of domestic pressure while adhering to this principle have, in fact, led to some difficulties with its neighbours. Nor has the continued "pragmatism" of Malaysian governments always been shared by other Muslim countries or entities in the international arena. This has meant that a combination of external and internal factors have increasingly led the Mahathir Administration, in particular, to walk a tightrope between the articulation of concern for Muslim minorities bordering Malaysian territory and the maintenance of cordial relations with the non-Muslim governments of those minorities, who are coincidentally ASEAN partners.

That said, the existence of fellow Muslims with irredentist leanings has failed to divert Malaysian foreign policy from the promotion of regionalism through ASEAN, the framework of which offers the potential for the realization of other foreign policy goals such as neutralization of the region. Some scholars have arrived at the conclusion that geographical proximity has, paradoxically, restrained Malaysia from providing meaningful support to separatist efforts and that ethno-religious ties however strong are likely to be subordinated to other considerations.³ Nevertheless, as increasing intra-Malay rivalry has called attention to such issues, the Mahathir Administration has found the display of more substantial concern for these minorities as imperative.

The OIC has frequently shown concern for Muslim minorities, identifying the fraternal basis on which aid to refugees of Muslim origin should be extended.⁴ Through membership of the Organization, Malaysia has been similarly bound (despite its efforts at convincing its neighbours of "non-interference") towards improving the welfare of these minorities. The Government, however, prefers to reiterate its motives and policy on all Muslim refugees as being purely humanitarian, in consideration, no doubt, of the problems it might encounter from its own non-Malay-Muslim population if it conceded a shared ethnicity or religion as deciding factors.

It is worth bearing in mind that Malaysia's membership of and commitment to ASEAN remains its stated primary foreign policy priority. In fact, such co-operation became more important with the onset of domestic difficulties in 1969 when regime maintenance took priority over any co-religionist aspect in foreign policy. There is little reason to doubt that official Malaysian perception has altered over the view that the neutralization of the region would only be possible in a context of domestic viability and strength, regional peace and co-operation and that these goals might best be achieved through a commitment to ASEAN which has, after all, been the institutional product of regional conflict resolution.⁵

Nevertheless, the Mahathir Administration has made some attempt at squaring domestic public opinion with regional regime requirements and international Islamic opinion. On the other hand, its ASEAN neighbours have

displayed an aversion to the involvement of foreign Islamic interest in issues which are felt to be purely regional or domestic and have expressed, either directly or indirectly, the fear that international Islam could rebound on their domestic societies with grave consequences for the ruling regimes.

Malaysia's relationship with two of her ASEAN neighbours, Thailand and the Philippines—which have significant Muslim minorities that have also posed irredentist problems to their respective central governments—best exemplifies the dilemma and pressures of registering a religious identity in foreign policy. This is made more complex by tensions within the Malaysian federal system and state politics, involving the northern states of the Peninsula and the state of Sabah in East Malaysia in particular. The maintenance of territorial integrity in contexts of cross-border ethno-religious influence and ties are added dimensions for foreign policy formulation and implementation within the Southeast Asian region, underlined in the Malaysian case as the only nation which shares borders with each of its ASEAN partners.

MALAYSIA AND THAILAND

The relationship between Malaysia and Thailand's Muslim populations centres around a shared identity defined by an inextricable link between religion and ethnicity. While Muslims constitute only 3 per cent of the Thai population, the vast majority are concentrated in the four southern provinces of Satun, Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani. Historically the basis of identity for these populations has revolved around their sense of belonging to the former kingdom of Pattani, the Malay "race" and Islam (Pattani's history has been marked by its status as an important centre of Islamic scholarship in the Malay world). Although the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 witnessed the formal ceding of the four northern Malay states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis to the British, they were relinquished to Thai rule by Japanese occupying forces in Malaya during the Second World War.

The Muslim population's ties to the central Thai administration drawn from the majority Buddhist population have remained uneasy, reflecting a tendency towards ethnic cleavage, coincident to socio-economic and political distinctions. While autonomy and secession have been advocated by some parts of the community, the Thai government has resisted this, and in some parts of Southern Thailand, protracted secessionist struggles, including armed rebellion by a variety of "liberation" organizations have been conducted.

While the idiom of Islam and Islamic revivalism have been significant channels for the expression of the grievances of this community, this should not discount the potential of religious revivalism as an end in itself. The secessionist alternative is, in part, strengthened by the proximity of the Thai Muslims to Malaysia, the inherent ties between the two communities, and the increasingly supportive policies of the federal Malaysian government towards its own Malay-Muslim society that have had a demonstratable effect on Thai Muslims. This has been further complicated by the official Thai perception of the existence of

implicit Malaysian aid to the separatists, whether governmental or otherwise. These dimensions of the issue have therefore continued to affect relations between the Thai and Malaysian governments and indeed have grown as UMNO has consolidated its position against PAS as the protector of Malay interests in Malaysia. UMNO's consolidation of power in the northern states in 1978 thus, ironically, brought the Federal Government (as the supposedly more moderate Malay faction) closer to the issue and what was previously only an opposition party's (PAS) political platform and policy of support for kinsfolk across the border, was increasingly perceived by some as also constituting the general policy of the federal government.⁶

Despite these differences, the relationship between Thai and Malaysian governments have traditionally been sustained by diplomacy. What was problematic for settlement by means of institutional frameworks, was generally dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis and through close contacts between high-level leadership, largely sustainable through the common perception of problems of internal and external security. Affinity of perception and attitude has not however been filtered to the ground level where tensions continued and increasingly came to play a wider lobbying role in policy matters, particularly on the Malaysian side. Considering that the regional states where PAS has had important strongholds were the traditional areas of refuge for these Thai Muslims, the problem for the Federal Government and for UMNO is better understood. Indeed, the pressure that this placed on political parties and politicians also meant that foreign policy was occasionally dictated by and/or subordinated to domestic considerations.

In the absence of a long-term solution, the facility for Thai Muslims crossing to Malaysian territory allowed for their discreet incorporation into Malay villages, a practice of which the Thais were well aware. Although not explicit, such practices were condoned since 1961 by all succeeding administrations, leading to large patterns of migration and in some instances, the presence of entire villages of Thai Muslims in Malaysian territory.⁷ Indeed, the combination of the Muslim separatist and Communist problems, through the presence of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) along the Thai Malaysian border had caused considerable anxiety to both countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, they were prevented from turning into international crises partly due to personal assurances between the leaders of both states which helped avoid misunderstanding.

Since 1977, Malaysia and Thailand have been also party to the General Border Agreement, which from its inception qualified the CPM as a common threat while perceiving the Muslim separatist problem as Thailand's domestic affair. The General Border Committee (GBC) itself functioned as a forum to discuss security and other related problems in the border area, and served to promote contact and communication between Thai and Malaysian officials. The Agreement, however, existed within the context of fluctuating relations between the two neighbours. Indeed, the potential for the Agreement to cover separatist guerillas fleeing into Malaysian territory, through the "right of hot pursuit" for Thai or Malaysian forces, led to some strain in relations between the two

governments. From the Malaysian perspective, however, Thai entry into Malaysian territory to counter the irredentist threat was unacceptable and “against all international practices”.⁸

Thus, despite the cementing of bilateral relations and the importance of ASEAN for both parties, mutual suspicions over the level of effort to eradicate their separate problems led to a climate of fluctuating tension in their relations, occasionally causing serious eruptions. Indeed, it had been suggested that for as long as the Communist problem remained for Malaysia, it served as a useful countervailing force or bargaining chip to balance the presence of the Muslim separatist fronts south of the Thai border. Thus “intergovernmental solidarity” reflected a kind of simple trade-off for either side. While the Malaysian government had no choice in avoiding involvement in separatist efforts, it also had considerable incentive to keep the conflict from being settled.⁹

Drastic changes taking place in both Malaysian domestic politics and the Muslim world in general, have helped transform official Thai perception of the “external dimensions” of the Muslim separatist movement. Although the Administration in Kuala Lumpur had previously been pressured and embarrassed by PAS’s independent policy towards the Thai Muslims, federal authorities had usually explained this as locally inspired action. In the flush of independence, opposition party leaders, many from the northeastern states, had pressed the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur to back the Pattani cause. Indeed, from the Thai perspective, support for the separatist cause traditionally came from two primary sources—Malaysia and the Middle East—and they were convinced of a PAS link in support for the Pattani rebels from these extra-regional sources.

Overall, however, the problem appeared to focus around one issue—that of perception: not whether aid existed as fact but whether either party (Malaysia or Thailand) believed this to be so. Indeed, Thai suspicion of the Malaysian Federal Government offering more than moral support or official sanctions from the northern Malay states, more likely referred to the inability or unwillingness of Malaysian administrations to either act against such support or to turn a blind eye to it. The Federal Government’s hesitancy in acting is in part also explained by the relationship between state and centre. Indeed, the complex interrelationship that the external dimensions of the issue shared with its domestic ones was perhaps symbolized by the close involvement of the Malaysian and Thai Home Ministries, together with that of their respective foreign ministries.¹⁰

Some months before he was to assume the post of Prime Minister and President of UMNO, however, Dr Mahathir’s fortitude on this issue was severely tested. In January 1981, the largest exodus of Thais onto Malaysian territory occurred when more than 1,000 refugees fled into the Sik, Baling and Kroh districts of Dr Mahathir’s home state of Kedah and to Perak, whereupon, as Deputy Prime Minister, he publicly pledged to study the reasons for their flight. While the refugees variously claimed that they had been harassed by CPM terrorists, Thai soldiers and elements of the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO—a separatist organization comprising largely foreign-

trained Malay Muslims) in southern Thailand, the Malaysian border authorities were in a dilemma as to how the runaways should be treated. Once again, the primary problem was that of perception: while the Malaysians viewed the matter as a bona fide refugee problem, the Thais perceived the refugees as agents of PULO who were now receiving official encouragement from the Malaysians.¹¹

In fact, Dr Mahathir, in his address to the Third Islamic Summit some three months earlier had pointed out that attempts to encourage dissidents had soured relations between governments and strongly advocated that Islamic nations and the OIC itself show respect for the internal affairs of other countries.¹² Thus, while the new Administration had signalled its intention to continue the policies of its predecessors in the matter of secessionists, the issue of Muslim refugees was rather different.

The magnitude of the problem was highlighted by the Malaysian government's refusal to meet Thai requests for the repatriation of the refugees, at least until the reasons for the mass exodus had been scrutinized by the Malaysians themselves. While the matter was being negotiated with Thai authorities, a special task force under the Home Affairs Ministry had also been assigned immediate and direct responsibility for the refugees. Indeed, Dr Mahathir went so far as to admit that although the Government held an official policy of non-acceptance of refugees, there was "no definite policy on the Thai-Muslim refugee problem". Precedent had in fact been established in 1978 when Malaysia accepted 100,000 Kampuchean Muslim refugees for resettlement, repeated subsequently in the Malaysian acceptance of some Muslim Indochinese during the Vietnamese refugee crisis at the close of the 1970s.¹³

This "policy" of having no policy must in fact be analysed against the domestic context. The racial fragility of Malaysian society has to an extent placed serious limitations on the actions of the Government and for the most part dictates the perception of politicians. Opposition parliamentarians (from parties such as the multi-ethnic Democratic Action Party) had, on previous occasions, indicted the Government's seemingly double standards in refugee policy (between Muslim and other refugees). On the other hand, the large-scale presence of Vietnamese refugees in the largely Malay states of Kelantan and Trengganu had brought serious division and protest from within the Malay community just a year earlier. In 1979, the UMNO General Assembly had focused on the refugee problem in general, and more particularly on the then approximately 75,000 Vietnamese refugees in Malaysia. At issue were their Chinese ethnic origins, over which the Government faced intense pressure from various Malay lobbies. As such policy towards fellow Muslim refugees would have had to, at least, display some parity.¹⁴

Dr Mahathir's personal involvement in the issue must also be understood within the context of intense campaigning leading up to UMNO elections a few months later. While his candidacy for Party President was unchallenged, the contest for Deputy President, which had raised the issues of the Chinese connections of its candidates and the "essence" of their Malay identities, had left the party in deep cleavage.¹⁵ In campaigning for party and therefore national

leadership, Dr Mahathir was, on the other hand, also engaged in losing his old Malay extremist image—a label affixed since the publication of his book, *The Malay Dilemma*.

Strain was clearly developing in relations with Thailand, however, over the course of action taken by Malaysia concerning the exodus of Thai-Muslims. As their numbers grew, Kedah state intelligence sources admitted the Home Ministry's increasingly complex task of distinguishing bona fide refugees from those entering the country for political motives. While Malaysian officials claimed that some refugees refused repatriation for fear of Thai reprisals, Malaysian pledges of co-operation were more forthcoming once Thai assurances of further investigations into the matter were given.¹⁶

The problem was that the Thais were convinced of the presence of many PULO rebels among these refugees, whom the Malaysian government was knowingly sheltering. In fact, the alleged link between Malaysian armed forces and the PULO rebels was made explicit by media articles citing the convictions of Thai border officials that since the late 1980s, Muslim separatists had been wearing jungle fatigues and using tinned rations and equipment similar to those used by Malaysian forces.¹⁷ The former Malaysian Foreign Minister and Chairman of the GBC however described this as an issue of misunderstanding. While admitting that this had created serious repercussions for the Malaysian authorities, he defended the provision of army fatigues and rations as "humanitarian" gestures exercised in isolated instances rather than as a considered policy of aiding separatism *per se*. Indeed, the Malaysians had often gained assistance from these separatists in information about tracking Communist rebels.¹⁸ Such incidents, however, demonstrated that the determination to consolidate local affairs on either side of the common border was increasingly bringing the national governments into potential conflict.

Although the Malaysian government may well have been concerned about convincing the Thais of the absence of any ambitions of support for irredentism, it was perhaps also persuaded that the provision of shelter for the refugees was the minimum necessary under the circumstances. Indeed, Malay public opinion, expressed via the vernacular press, certainly demanded as much. For instance, *Utusan Malaysia*, the Malay daily that generally promotes the UMNO party line, provided a lengthy editorial during the crisis suggesting that the issue was only temporary, minimizing its impact on bilateral relations "because Malaysia views the matter as more humanitarian than political" and arguing that the issue might be resolved with more haste if initiatives were "positive" and "without prejudice". Although adamant about Malaysia's non-interference in Thai internal affairs, the Malay press nevertheless acknowledged the "Siamese twin" relationship between the two countries and advised a wider perspective on the issue. It placed much weight on acknowledgement of the complex dimensions of a shared ethnicity and religion noting, for example, that "the problem of Muslim refugees crossing over into a Muslim state from their homeland in which the majority of people are Buddhists should be viewed in wider perspective by understanding the existing reality, including the problems of

autonomy and welfare of Muslims in the country concerned".¹⁹ Indeed, co-religionist considerations on Malaysia's part were represented as holding only humanitarian motives. On the other hand, the Administration also had to address disquiet from its own non-Muslim population, whose resentment over any obvious practice of double standards or symbolic display of their potential disinheritance, even demotion as citizens in the face of further Muslim migration into the country, was notable.²⁰

On the Malaysian side, prolongation of the issue was also attributed partly to Federal-state politics. The central government has not always been able to act decisively over state matters, particularly in terms of religion and in such a sensitive matter the respective Chief Ministers played strategic roles. Although Thai-Malaysian relations at the central government level remained good, suspicion over activities at the border level continued, leading to the proposal that the Thai ambassador to Malaysia hold direct talks with the Menteri Besar (MB) of Kedah and Perak to overcome the problem. Suspicion over some form of Malaysian contact with PULO forces continued, not just from the Thais but from political opposition within Malaysia. Although the Federal Government denied granting permission to the MB of Kedah to meet with PULO representation, it also claimed that it had no jurisdiction over the MB's "discretion and prudence".²¹

A former Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry has maintained that Malaysia's foreign policy involving Muslims must be understood within its specific context: the situation, circumstances and subsequent policies relating to the "outer fringes" of Malaysian territory being somewhat different from procedures at the centre. Indeed certain constraints were unavoidable precisely due to the decentralized nature of political administration.²²

Despite reassurance and personal guarantees from the Thai ambassador on the safety of returning refugees, there was little end in sight to the problem, compounded by the additional influx of hundreds of Burmese Muslim refugees, allegedly linked to a PAS scheme to employ refugee labour in padi (rice) fields at the Muda Irrigation Area in Perlis.²³ As the matter dragged on, the issue of quid pro quo co-operation reemerged. Shortly before the reconvening of the GBC, the Malaysian Home Minister publicly rejected the possibility of joint Thai-Malaysian security operations against Muslim irredentist forces, such as PULO, reiterating that the General Border Agreement provided for joint operations against the "common enemy" which "clearly" referred only to Communist terrorists.

Although both had consistently expressed the preference for quiet diplomacy within ASEAN structures in resolving such issues, the Malaysians had sometimes found it prudent to transfer the burden to other international forums. This held the obvious advantage of alleviating pressure on any overt Malaysian response which might be "misconstrued" by the Thais, thus leaving its image within the Muslim world intact (perhaps even blameless).

However, Malaysia's prior request for the involvement of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in the matter, upset the Thais who

desired that the issue remain bilateral to avoid internationalizing pressure. Yet it was precisely such potential for bilateral “strain” that the Federal Government hoped to avoid, in the light of its inability to act otherwise on the issue of Muslim refugees.²⁴ Compromise was however finally reached when the Malaysians guaranteed that international involvement would be handled in a manner beneficial to Thailand. Disavowing any form of irredentism and distancing itself from any secessionist empathies the Malaysian Government announced its plans to co-operate with Thailand in dealing with the problem by “helping to present a correct picture of the issue to Muslim countries”. As the Malaysian authorities pointed out, however, this would depend on the maintenance of Malaysian credibility in the Muslim world (to speak on Thailand’s behalf) and on implicit Thai confidence in Malaysian sincerity *vis-à-vis* the issue.²⁵

Indeed, some Malaysian Islamic groups officially patronized by the Government, such as the Muslim welfare body, Perkim and the regional *dakwah* organization, RISEAP, similarly discouraged radical dissension by Thai Muslims, advocating co-operation instead with the central government as a means towards solving refugee problems, even while greater Malaysian efforts at border security were being reported.²⁶ The Administration did however continue to be politically challenged by PAS. The Federal Government’s indecisive action was harshly criticized at the Party’s General Assembly, where the issue of Thai “mistreatment” of its Muslims was dealt with extensively. Many party members connected the problem to the Thai government’s “oppression” and “harassment” of its Muslim minority and evidence of ASEAN co-operation as false and ineffective, emphasizing that Malaysia would be continually faced with such refugee problems.

A motion to debate the issue at the UMNO Assembly was based on the grounds that Malaysia’s official stand on the oppression of Kampuchean, Vietnamese and South Africans required that such consistency be equally displayed towards Thai Muslims particularly in consideration of their ethnic and blood links with “half the Malaysian people”. On the other hand, in keeping with the party’s stature as an international Islamic organization, official party communiqués also advocated the use of diplomatic channels towards solving the problem, citing PAS’s equivalent priority of maintaining good relations with the Thais.²⁷

In effect, the Malaysian perspective underlined a temporary incapacity to act bilaterally even while underlining a commitment to inter-governmental goodwill by alleviating external Muslim pressure on Thailand. In its hopes for a measure of success, Malaysia would thus have to continue in the pattern of previous policy. This was an important compromise, particularly for the Malaysians, and is reflective of their reliance on diplomacy as the ultimate tool in dealing with the delicate issue of Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries. The status of the 1,250 Thai Muslims in Malaysia remained that of refugees and by June 1981, they were officially claimed to be receiving humanitarian aid until their voluntary repatriation was possible. Such a temporary solution was arrived at after extensive consultation between the Thai and Malaysian governments.²⁸

What is evident is that despite continued Thai pleas to assume joint control of the problem, the Malaysians, partly swayed by Malay public opinion, particularly in the lead up to a somewhat divisive UMNO General Assembly vote, felt unable to act decisively, or at least in any way which might be construed as detrimental to the Government's image both to their domestic Muslim audience and to the larger Muslim world. The fact that the Malaysian authorities delayed deciding on the issue until after the Assembly in June and were publicly discussing repatriation of the refugees only at that time, suggests as much. What is more, the Minister for Home Affairs underlined the importance of Thai-Malaysian consultation on the matter.

Indeed, the Malaysians were vindicated the following year through a PULO memorandum to the UN which found its way into an international Islamic magazine of a Saudi-based organization. The Secretary General of PULO, while gratefully acknowledging humanitarian aid by the Malaysian Government and the states of Kedah and Perak towards "the so-called Thai Muslim" refugees in accordance with the UN charter, disavowed the involvement of "unnamed groups" masquerading as Pattani refugees and refuting allegations of material support to PULO by the Malaysian government as "baseless".²⁹

What is indicative from the incident is the variety of forces, both domestic and international, that came into play in the Malaysian perception of the problem and how this affected the formulation and implementation of policy. It also underlines the precisely *ad hoc* nature of foreign policy on this issue explained by its complex dimensions. Yet such strategies also meant that the problem was restricted to one of management, rather than any real attempts at resolution. Such choice on the part of the Malaysians has been related to continued perception that the issue should remain primarily a Thai domestic concern.

It is as well to point out that successive Malaysian Administrations have been sensitive to the official Thai viewpoint that national security demands the full integration of its population, no matter their religious or ethnic origins. Malaysia's own multi-racial and multi-religious character has undoubtedly underlined the Administration's attitudes when challenged by similar situations. Indeed, in line with the action of its predecessors, emphasis has been given to the notion that stability within Thailand is crucial to Malaysia's own well-being.³⁰

While the number of Thai Muslims continuing to enter Malaysian territory has not been repeated in earlier proportions, the Administration itself was unable to reduce significantly continuing tensions at the border, partially explained by differences in personality and outlook on both sides. In the characteristically blunt manner of its leader, dissatisfaction was expressed with Thai border cooperation over the (then) problem of the Communists while Thai opinion, as represented by General Harn of the GBC, was critical of Malaysian "blindness" to the supportive efforts of their own Malay elements for the Muslim separatists. In fact, during Harn's tenure at the GBC, relations between the two countries were severely strained because of his individual attempts to push Malaysia into

admitting that Thai Muslim guerillas were the common enemy of both countries. Yet, for its own part, Malaysia continued to “unofficially” help Thailand via its “secret” diplomatic campaigns among certain Middle Eastern countries who were generous in their material support to the Pattani Muslims, for their “fuller” understanding of the Thai situation.³¹

The international principles which Malaysia has sought to preserve have been increasingly buttressed by diplomatic pressure for socio-economic development in the region and for a wider margin of cultural freedom by Thai officials in implementing some basic Islamic religious needs for their Muslim subjects.³² An initial decision taken at a National Security Council meeting in Malaysia in 1981 for the proposed construction of a wall along the Malaysia-Thai border was in part an expression of Malaysian frustration at the lack of curtailment of the infiltration of Communist terrorists and of other illegal activities. While effective dissolution of the Communist threat through the signature of the Communist Party of Malaya to an amnesty agreement with the Malaysian Government, obtained in 1989, the problem of separatism on the Thai side has remained and has continued to be problematic for the Mahathir Administration. This has been particularly so with the ascendancy of the PAS-dominated government in Kelantan which itself raised Thai anxiety over any renewed support for Muslim guerillas whether potential or real. Although the GBC has continued to operate to police illegal trafficking and other matters, its terms of reference have had to be seriously reassessed. In 1993, however, efforts made by the Thais for the redefinition of “terrorists” within the Agreement met with continued resistance from the Malaysians.³³ To some extent, the facility of any “temporary” stay of Thai Muslims on Malaysian territory has also continued to be an issue of debate in domestic Malaysian politics—during the 1995 General Elections campaign, for instance, UMNO’s rivals in Kelantan (*Semangat ’46* and PAS) accused the Mahathir Administration of transporting and dispatching over 70,000 Thai Muslims to key constituencies in the state to ensure UMNO’s victory in the then impending elections.³⁴

The generalized approach of improving socio-economic standards as a means of preventing potential dissension has in the meantime been accelerated. Such effort has been partially attempted through the Thai launch of its *Harapan Baru* (New Hope) programme in Southern Thailand and the joint contribution of both Malaysia and Thailand towards development of their common border region in the 1990s.³⁵ The protracted negotiations over the Northern Triangle project involving the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia, the southern states of Thailand and northern Sumatra in Indonesia and its gradual entrenchment as a co-operative framework for potentially greater economic benefit for all sides, have gone some way towards underlining this attitude. Indeed, the PAS- *Semangat ’46* government in Kelantan similarly launched economic initiatives for obtaining co-operative benefits with Thailand through a joint committee on industrial development, although such plans have been subject to federal approval.

In the long term the role of the federal ruling party as protector of Muslim interests, even while it is played out in intra-Malay rivalry, has had to be

balanced against the fear of antagonizing other ethnic interests within the country and considerations for the maintenance of viable relations with a neighbour that has proved vital to the primary security organization on which Malaysia bases its foreign policy. As such Malaysian attitudes towards the Muslim minorities in Thailand have been measured. The Malaysians, even under the Administration of Dr Mahathir, have been reluctant to allow any international Islamic recognition of the matter as a just cause, due to sensitivity towards the principle of territorial integrity. Such caution has been less obvious in Malaysia's policy towards the Muslim minority in the Philippines.

MALAYSIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

Although Malaysian-Filipino relations have been similarly affected by the issue of co-religionist minority rights, they are additionally complicated by territorial claims. Relations between the two countries in Malaysia's earliest stages of independence were marked by such disputes, particularly that over Sabah. In fact, the recognition by both Malaysian and Filipino leaders of their mutual vulnerability in domestic politics, in this period, was probably as influential in marking significant change in policy: in both states domestic instability was accompanied by more pragmatic foreign policies.³⁶

For both, external conflict in the 1960s appeared to have the potential for exacerbating domestic problems involving ethnic groups and threatened in the 1970s to jeopardize deliberately cultivated international co-operation. While official movement towards institutional regional co-operation through ASEAN temporarily shifted focus away from these disputes, the continued problem of Muslim separatism in the Philippines has been linked, particularly from the Malaysian perspective, to these claims.

For the Mahathir Administration, the politicization of ethnic discontent and the cause for separatism continued to supply the adjunct problem of Filipino Muslim refugees fleeing into Sabah. Indeed, the former Sabah Chief Minister's (Tun Mustapha Harun) flamboyant pro-Muslim policies, the provision of sanctuary for refugees in Sabah since 1972 and support for Filipino Muslim insurgents were to leave considerable problems for his successors even while they attempted to reverse such practices.

The Sabah state government's prerogative in exercising jurisdiction over immigration matters (over and above the Federal Government), a right secured under the Malaysia agreement (the legal accord establishing the incorporation of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore in the entity to be known as Malaysia), has remained a fact of considerable significance. While many of them were naturalized, large numbers of these refugees continued to maintain such status in Sabah. In 1978, official government statistics noted the presence of over 70,000 refugees from the Southern Philippines in Sabah and in recognizing the severe strain that this had placed on the state, announced the intention to establish a Special Committee to investigate the matter.³⁷ Sabah has been additionally pressured by the complicating increase in the already large-scale presence of

illegal Indonesian (and therefore considered as ethnically Malay) immigrants to the East Malaysian state.

The problems that the combined presence of these Muslim refugees and illegal immigrants pose in Sabah are better understood within the context of the state's complex ethnic make-up (referred to in Chapter 1). While non-Malay natives share the status of *Bumiputera*, the increasing political dominance of Malays at the centre and the pro-Malay policies instituted, particularly after 1969, have also had an effect in East Malaysia.

Although the indigenous peoples of the states of Sabah and Sarawak have been included within the post-1969 qualification of *Bumiputera*, their resistance to a concept of Malay-Muslim identity and dominance has been apparent. Initial attempts at assimilationist policies on the part of the Federal Government were predicated to some extent on Peninsular belief that these peoples shared greater commonalities with the Malays (than did the "immigrant" races) and by their relative underdevelopment. In fact, the non-Muslim *Bumiputera* majority's vision of national identity has differed significantly from that of the federal centre and has led to growing tensions and resentment between state and federal government.

The "integrationist" policies of the Tun Mustapha state government in Sabah, up to 1975, in effect involved massive conversions to Islam. An estimated total of more than 80,000 conversions was said to have taken place in Sabah, between 1960 and 1980, indicating an increase of the Muslim constituency from 40 per cent in 1970 to 51 per cent of the total population by 1980.³⁸ The succeeding administration of Datuk Harris Salleh in 1975 (from the *Berjaya* party, supported by the central government) continued federalist policies which further integrated the state with the Peninsula and helped to ensure Malay-Muslim dominance.³⁹ Indeed, Datuk Harris's position at the head of *Berjaya* was to a large extent determined by pressures for a Muslim Chief Minister both from within the state and from the Peninsula.

What is believed to be the liberal granting of permanent resident status, if not citizenship, to the vast numbers of Muslim refugees from the Philippines and to other illegal immigrants has served as a source of considerable anxiety to the non-Malay community, contributing to the fragile nature of ethnic relations and politics in the state. The issue of resettlement of Filipino Muslims is fraught with difficulties precisely because of the complex ethnic "balance" in Sabah. Indeed, the eventual ascendancy of a ruling party, devoid of any Muslim character and more commonly perceived as a Christian party (because of its strong Christian Kadazan base of support), has fused the interaction between domestic and foreign policy even further.⁴⁰

The eventual defeat of Harris Salleh's administration in 1985 in state elections, by the then newly formed *Parti Bersatu Sabah* (PBS), headed by Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, a Christian, was clearly a setback for the Federal Government. Although both *Berjaya* and the United Sabah National Organization (USNO—its predecessor), were unwilling to accept the PBS's mandate to rule, the Federal Government applied pressure towards their

observation of Kitingan's constitutional right to the office of Chief Minister. Unconditional federal support for the PBS was not, however, forthcoming. Despite majority state support, PBS's quest for acceptance within the ruling coalition, the *Barisan Nasional*, was stalled for some time. At the same time, ethno-religious considerations continued to taint straight party rivalry between the PBS, *Berjaya* and USNO leading eventually to the Sabah crisis in 1986.

While a series of legal suits and by-elections had severely disencumbered (although failing to remove) the PBS, civil unrest ensued in Sabah (with minor bombings and demonstrations), reflective perhaps of the determination of its political opponents to disenfranchise the party's supporters of victory. In March 1986, a serious crisis developed when Muslims demonstrated in the streets followed by mob violence and riots. Many were believed to be Filipino Muslim immigrants (the majority of whose status as citizens was questionable) whose support was allegedly paid for by Sabah opposition parties.⁴¹ The deteriorating situation led to the eventual intervention of the Federal Government and the declaration of a state of emergency.

From the perspective of PBS however, UMNO had registered its own political interests in seeking the re-establishment of Malay power and dominance in the state through the Federal Government's toleration of these events. The Mahathir Administration's attempts to cobble together a "Sabah formula" through the coalition of all three parties was therefore rejected by the PBS, considerably worsening state-Federal relations.

These political developments must be placed within the context of the ethno-religious tensions that persisted within Sabah. The PBS victory in 1985 was in fact widely interpreted as an expression of largely Christian Kadazan as well as general non-Muslim dissatisfaction and insecurity over the influx of Muslim refugees and immigrants, perceived as threatening to the political and cultural status of these communities. Illegal immigration had become a potent issue for Sabah's native population, reaching crisis proportions in the early 1980s. One estimate in 1983 placed the number of Muslim evacuees in Sabah (as a result of the separatist troubles in the Southern Philippines) as standing somewhere between 160,000 and 200,000.⁴²

This remained a part of pointed political debate between the state government and central authorities, due primarily to local perception that immigration was encouraged (if not permitted) by the Federal Government as part of its communal restructuring policies aimed at boosting Malay political dominance. Although Malaysia had, already in 1983, received the concurrence of the UNHCR in resettling and assimilating Filipino Muslim refugees through educational and employment opportunities in Sabah, there was resistance from the new state government towards this. In the absence of verifiable statistics, the Sabah Chief Minister accused his predecessors of artificially inflating the Muslim population in the state between 1963 and 1975, through its liberal policies on refuge and immigration towards Filipino and Indonesian Muslims as a means of securing its own political base.⁴³

On assuming office in 1985, the new Chief Minister, Kitingan, raised the issue of controlling the influx of refugees into Sabah regardless of their race or religion, which in turn led to accusations by the head of *Berjaya* that the Minister was against Islamic *dakwah* and more specifically opposed to Muslim refugees. Indeed, the state government's subsequent softening of its position on illegal immigration, including that of Filipino Muslim refugees, must be partially viewed as being, at the time, a conciliatory gesture towards the UMNO-dominated Federal Government, in the hope of proving more acceptable as a Barisan Nasional partner.⁴⁴

Yet the new Sabah government continued to face pressure and harassment from its opposition, particularly on the grounds of allegations that as a basically Christian party, it was acting in a manner hostile to Islamic interests, dismissing Muslims in government and replacing them with co-religionist Kadazans. Coincident to the PBS's rise to power, large-scale Muslim alarm was being reported in the media over evidence of a threatening tide of Christian missionary activity engulfing or challenging the dominance of Islam and Muslims in Malaysia and the Southeast Asian region. Projections of a Christian conspiracy in the region must also be understood within the context of the long-term effects of the Marcos Administration's policy from the 1970s of encouraging Christian migration from the northern Philippine islands to the more traditionally Muslim southern islands, in particular that of Mindanao.

In 1985, for instance, the *Mufti* (Chief Priest) of the Federal Territory announced the existence of a plot to create disunity among Muslims in the region through a certain group which had been provided M\$2,000 million for the task. On the other hand, the influx of *dakwah* groups from outside Sabah had by the state government's reckoning led to serious intra-Muslim division over religious matters in the state. Under the Sabah Administration of Muslim Law Act of 1977 potential offenders are prosecutable by the state religious council and two major missionary movements from the Peninsula, the *Jemaat Tabligh* and the *Darul Arqam* were subsequently banned in Sabah.⁴⁵

The economic dimension of the issue is equally relevant here. The arrival of large numbers of Moro Muslims in Sabah in the 1960s had helped alleviate the severe manpower and labour shortages that the state was suffering from at the time. Indeed, subsequent reports imply that the Mahathir Administration had, by similar force of economic circumstance, turned a blind eye, in the past, on large-scale illegal immigration to East and Peninsular Malaysia. Such labour has been vital in accelerated plans for country-wide industrialization and for the strategic expansion of a diversifying economy. A resource-wealthy state like Sabah has, therefore, been economically crucial to the federal development agenda.⁴⁶

In fact, the issues of illegal immigrants and Muslim refugees were raised at a time when the UMNO-dominated government was under a great deal of domestic political pressure over its capacity to defend Malay-Muslim interests nationally. Since the BN had publicly thrown its weight behind *Berjaya*, the victory of PBS represented a major blow to the Federal Government. UMNO's prevarication (no doubt influenced by *Berjaya*) on PBS entry into the ruling coalition was clearly demonstrative of this.

However, UMNO leaders were also probably aware that the admission of a non-Muslim, more importantly Christian, party to the BN at the time would have raised criticism from its Malay-Muslim rivals. On the other hand, it had already condemned PAS strategies for widening electoral support from other ethnic communities (in particular the Chinese, through a National Unity Conference in 1985) as a betrayal of the Malay-Muslim cause. Thus in the run-up to the General Election in 1986, questions of image and symbolism in demonstration of ethnic affinity were crucial. Indeed, the Federal Government's concerns in Sabah during this period were depicted, by the then UMNO Youth President and Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim, as being based on "inadequate Muslim representation in the PBS at the time".⁴⁷

The importance of the ethno-religious dimension in political survival in Malaysia was further evidenced by the state government's subsequent attempts at improving its multi-racial image through its appointment of Muslims within the PBS. The whole episode, in fact, served to underline the limited extent to which the Muslim community in Sabah, and by extension throughout Malaysia, were prepared to accommodate practically the legitimate aspirations of those of a different religion, particularly in terms of political dominance and power.

While the PBS easily won a two-thirds majority in subsequent state elections and was eventually accepted into the BN, the Sabah crisis demonstrated that UMNO's policy of moderation in political terms, ranged against the "extremism" of rival parties like PAS, was somewhat limited by circumstances and seemingly inconsistent. In the face of symbolic threat from a non-Muslim state government, and of challenge to its mantle of "protector" of Malay-Muslim interests, UMNO (despite its leadership of a ruling multi-ethnic coalition) was "forced" to prevaricate on its commitment to a multi-racial legally elected government.

As religion and ethnicity continue to colour all political developments in Sabah, persistently threatening to upset the fragile ethnic "balance", UMNO and the Federal Government have had to suffer the as yet unresolved issue of whether Peninsular notions of Malay-Muslim dominance were to apply equally to the East Malaysian states. Indeed, these political developments eventually led to UMNO's decision to initiate and eventually establish a direct political presence in the state to "protect" Muslim interests.⁴⁸ The success, if not importance, of this move towards the long-term shaping of the ethno-religious character of Sabah was demonstrated at the 1995 UMNO General Assembly, where UMNO Sabah was touted as the largest regional branch with record membership numbers.

At issue has been the perception on the part of minority Sabahans that the 20-point agreement, which was the basis of Sabah concessions to enter the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, has been steadily eroded if not altogether jeopardized. Among other important points, the Agreement stipulated that Federal Constitutional provisions for Islam would not apply to Sabah and Sarawak. In reality, the consolidation of a pan-Malaysian Islamic identity for the Malays of Peninsular Malaysia, incorporating Sabah (and Sarawak) Muslims has not led to the dilution of that religio-ethnic identity but to its fortification

and has added to their political pre-eminence as Malays. More important to the issue here, however, is that such religious and ethnic considerations have prevented the Federal Government from decisively acting on the issues of refugees and illegal immigrants in Sabah.

These circumstances have, to some extent, helped shape the Mahathir Administration's foreign policy towards its regional neighbour. They have certainly tempered Malaysian actions on the Philippines' claim to Sabah and have, more often than not, been employed towards affecting the Sabah political "balance" and UMNO's authority there, either directly or indirectly. The continued large-scale presence of Muslim refugees believed by the Philippine authorities to house among them many guerrillas from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a secessionist movement in the Southern Philippines that held a significant Islamic identity, led to considerable strain in the relationship between the two countries, even while the Malaysian Government consistently stated its intentions of abiding by principles of non-interference.⁴⁹

Officially, the Administration has maintained the observance of a standard policy on refugees seeking sanctuary within its borders and has rejected local integration as a solution.⁵⁰ Certainly this was most uniformly applied towards Vietnamese refugees in Malaysia and aimed at third country resettlement. As in the case of Thailand, however, official attitudes towards refugees from the Philippines have been distinctly different. This has raised some disquiet from non-Muslim-Malay constituents and speculation that the facts of a shared ethnicity and religion have acted as decisive levers on Malaysian foreign policy in this matter. By 1979, the opposition DAP party was pleading with the Government to halt such discriminatory practices for the sake of Malaysia's international image.⁵¹

Subsequently, without entirely conceding that co-religionism plays a role, the Malaysian Government has attempted to draw a distinction between Muslim and other refugees by reference to their origins. In 1988, the Government admitted treating the issue of Filipino refugees as separate from that of Vietnamese boat people, "because the Philippines is a close neighbour and in view of the close relationship between the two countries". Significantly, Malaysian willingness for self-implication in such practices is at least partly linked to any potential progress on the resolution of the Philippines' continuing territorial claim to Sabah. Indeed, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry made its linkage of the issues explicit.⁵²

The formation of the MNLF in 1969 and the intensifying Moro struggle with the central Philippines government, was to some extent aided by the independent initiatives of the Tun Mustapha administration in Sabah. Reports of the provision of training facilities and logistical support (even if indirectly) to the Moro fighters on Sabah soil, seriously embarrassed the Malaysian Federal Government. However, its inability (or perceived unwillingness) to rein in the actions of the Sabah state government was received as an attempt to pressure the Philippines government to drop its territorial claim. Yet the establishment of ASEAN had also meant that Malaysian support had to remain primarily

diplomatic and channelled particularly within the structures of the OIC. Inasmuch as Malaysia helped expose the Moro issue to the international community, its assistance was invaluable.

OIC support for the Moros has been forthcoming within the framework of its 1972 Charter, aimed at strengthening “the struggle of all Muslim peoples with a view to safeguarding their dignity, independence and national rights”.⁵³ In fact, Filipino Muslims have received more attention from the OIC than any other Muslim minority in a non-member state. As such, the individual and collective efforts of Muslim states, through the Organization, helped to strengthen the separatist movement’s military and political capabilities to the extent that it was able to pressure the Philippines central government into making significant concessions and restraining its policies.

Malaysia’s concern for the welfare of Muslims in the Philippines had inevitably been linked to its membership within international Islamic organizations. The assignation of Moro separatism to the status of a “just cause” has meant that international Islam, through the medium of links between external Muslim political communities (be they within the framework of states or organizations), has helped sponsor and subsidize the religious awareness and irredentist intentions of the Moros and of the Muslim population of the Southern Philippines in general.

As a member of the OIC, Malaysia has played some part towards exerting this pressure. At its Summit in 1973 the Conference in fact requested that Indonesia and Malaysia use their good offices within ASEAN to halt the “campaign of violence” against the Muslim community in the Philippines. However, as in the case of Thailand, and due to continuing perceptions of what constitutes Malaysia’s own national interests, it also helped to stave off such international pressure on its fellow ASEAN members when such a course of action was found more prudent.

In 1985, for instance, delegations from Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei to the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference opposed a resolution condemning the Marcos government for its alleged “repression inflicted on the Bangsamoro people and its denial of basic human rights”. Shortly after the Conference, President Marcos issued a public statement of thanks to these governments for supporting and explaining the Philippines’ position.⁵⁴ Such incidents demonstrated the Malaysian government’s desire to maintain good relations with an ASEAN partner through representation and diplomacy at the international level, despite domestic pressure to prioritize the welfare of Muslim minorities. It was also, to some degree, a measure of the Mahathir Administration’s sensitivity (like many of its ASEAN partners) to external involvement in the region over issues perceived as being essentially bilateral. More so when those issues concerned something as emotive as a common religious identity.

Bilateral relations however continued to fluctuate. Perhaps in anticipation of its already apparent activist Muslim identity, the Philippines challenged the then recently inaugurated Mahathir Administration over continued support for the separatists. Indeed, the Administration’s denials of such support appeared less

credible when in a highly embarrassing episode the Philippines coastguard was alleged to have seized a boat ferrying Moro guerillas to Sabah.⁵⁵

In 1986, the fall of the Marcos Administration rekindled hopes for a solution to the problem but while his successor, President Aquino, herself appeared committed to a resolution of the Sabah issue, declaring her government's actions to be based on the principles of "self determination and justice", talks held in 1986 produced no results. Dr Mahathir appeared disturbed by the lack of focus on the issue by the Philippines as well as the suggestion from some quarters that Sabah might be exchanged for commercial concessions. The Aquino initiatives however were to meet with much domestic Filipino opposition and were eventually stalled in the Philippines Senate. In fact, the 26-year claim has, until recently, remained a bone of contention even with successive administrations and somewhat of a hindrance to substantive co-operation between the two countries. The Malaysian Government has refused to accept any conditions (as requested by the Philippines Senate) to the surrender of its claim.⁵⁶

The fact is that the Mahathir Administration has also displayed a willingness, to some extent, to be more "receptive" towards external pressure on Islamic issues, when bilateral relations have not advanced towards the resolution of the Sabah issue. The linkage between Malaysian support for the MNLF cause and Sabah was made most apparent by 1987 when in the context of "dialogue" between the MNLF and the Philippines government, member countries at the OIC Summit that year, declared their "continuous" solidarity with the Bangsamoro people and the Organization's intention "both collectively and individually" to extend full co-operation to the MNLF for Bangsamoro autonomy.⁵⁷

The OIC Summit emphasized that resolutions on Muslim minorities should not be understood as intervention in the internal affairs of other nations and that there was no desire to jeopardize negotiations between the Philippines government and the Moro people for their autonomy. Even so, and perhaps as an attempt to distance its individual contribution to OIC support, the Mahathir Administration has publicly placed much store by its collective actions in "aiding" the success of the struggle of the Moro people.⁵⁸ It is hard to imagine that Malaysia would have given its full support to such a resolution, had negotiations over Sabah proceeded more fruitfully.

Following the breakdown of autonomy talks between the MNLF and the central Philippines government, a few months later, Malaysia entertained a meeting in Kuala Lumpur with the Front's chief negotiator, Nur Misuari, who had earlier announced his organization's intention to request military aid from Malaysia, although this was denied by the Malaysian Foreign Minister. Meanwhile, the Ministry itself declared Malaysian neutrality on the issue of Moro autonomy, since it was "an internal political affair" of the Philippines, with the proviso that it was monitoring developments both as a member of the OIC and as a fellow partner in ASEAN.⁵⁹

Further tension in Malaysian-Philippines relations at this time was brought about by the murder of two Malaysian Muslim missionaries in the Philippines. Although initially claiming confidence in Philippine investigations, the

Malaysian government was pressured by its domestic Malay-Muslim lobby into registering its concern over the incident. PAS, for instance, declared it as an insult to Islam and accused the Administration of practising a foreign policy based on material gain evidenced by its continued diplomatic relations with the Philippines government despite the incident.⁶⁰

In effect, the timing of the government's reception of the MNLF delegation is important as was its articulation of commitment on the issue of Muslim autonomy in the Philippines. Deeply disappointed at the continuing intransigence of the Philippines Senate over Sabah, the Administration's display of a positive co-religionist attitude was also useful at a period when it was itself under challenge from within UMNO, following the party split at the General Assembly in April 1987.

Building on the Administration's nationalist (concerning the issue of the territory of Sabah) and Islamic (concerning the demonstration of concern for the welfare of Muslim minorities) credentials was thus valuable at a point of serious intra-Malay and intra-UMNO rivalry. Indeed, the widely publicized meeting of the Foreign Minister with the MNLF leader differed sharply from previous lowkey reporting of any official Malaysian connection with separatist movements. The changed attitude was perhaps also reflective of the increasingly powerful lobby of UMNO Youth in foreign affairs, under the Presidency of Anwar Ibrahim. As a committed supporter of the Mahathir faction in 1987, the Youth wing was also beginning to effect more clearly influence over the very agenda of Malaysian foreign policy.⁶¹

Any apparent Malaysian willingness to act more openly in the political and diplomatic interests of the Muslim minority in the Southern Philippines, continued then to be somewhat directly linked to unsettled questions of territorial integrity between Malaysia and the Philippines. Indeed, despite the Malaysian Parliament's decision to extend diplomatic recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1981, it was consistently pointed out by officials both governmental and non-governmental (including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative present at the debate), that this should not and would not set a precedent for the recognition of other "liberationist" organizations such as those in the southern parts of Thailand and the Philippines.⁶²

While support continues for what are perceived as "just" Muslim struggles such as that of the Pattanis and the Moros at the Malay-Muslim grassroots, the spectre of regional conflict and territorial insecurity appears to have sensitized national leadership to the implications of irredentist support for inter-state stability within the region. Confronted itself by problems of national and territorial integration, any encouragement for the pursuit of an active policy of support for irredentists within a neighbouring country by the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur appears less plausible. Particularly when the government of that country is similarly committed to concepts of regional and international order through securing domestic stability.

The threat of secession by Sabah has frequently been raised as an issue of concern by the Federal Government since the formation of Malaysia in 1963,

underlined by the fact that their incorporation into the new political and international entity known as Malaysia received only about a third of the unreserved support of the inhabitants of Sabah and Sarawak, at the time.⁶³ Subsequent Federal-state tensions described above and the continuing problem of national integration in Malaysia, have given greater weight to this fear. The absence of a clear Malay-Muslim majority and the strong ethnic presence of Christian Bumiputeras normally of Kadazan extraction, as well as the bridging capacity of the Chinese in Sabah between these communities, in political terms at least, provides a picture not entirely in keeping with the Peninsular Malay notion of the Malaysian nation.

At a national seminar held in 1985 concerning the issues of territorial and national integration, the Sabah Chief Minister expressed grave concern over the “immense psychological gap” that existed between Malaysians in terms of identity while the President of the Gerakan party (a BN coalition partner) articulated the indignation of Malaysian non-Muslims over the alacrity with which Muslim immigrants appeared to have been granted not only citizenship but also Bumiputera status. Indeed, one of the recommendations made at this Seminar was that the policy of Islamization be underplayed in Sabah and Sarawak.⁶⁴

PBS’s last minute self-extraction from the BN coalition before the 1990 General Elections magnified Dr Mahathir’s personal sense of treachery on the part of Sabah’s Kadazan leaders, which in turn influenced UMNO’s decision to accelerate its expansion into the state. All of these developments promoted further deterioration between state and centre and continued inter-religious ill-feeling. At a pointed address at the official opening in 1994 of one of the Administration’s more recent institutional attempts to control Islamic interpretation, the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), Dr Mahathir alluded to the depths of the problem in Sabah, endorsing a system of rotating leaders of different religious backgrounds within the state’s administration.⁶⁵

The ascension of the Fidel Ramos Administration in the Philippines allowed for significantly improved relations between the two countries, in part explained by the good personal rapport between the leaders. Nevertheless the Sabah issue remained unsettled, and in 1995 the Malaysian Foreign Minister was still alluding to the continuing problems of illegal immigrants and workers from the Philippines for Sabah’s domestic situation even while there were efforts to resolve the issues of resettlement and repatriation more conclusively over the long term.⁶⁶

As in the case of Thailand, the Mahathir Administration’s policy agenda towards the Muslim community in the Philippines has focused increasingly on longer-term goals, primarily through economic aid and co-operation as means for obtaining their security. The concept of the East Asean Growth Area which includes the Southern Philippines, the states of East Malaysia, Kalimantan and Sulawesi in Indonesia and Brunei has sought to build towards long-term economic development, and is perceived as a means by which Malaysia can make active contributions—such as through its expertise and experience in fields such as Islamic banking. The initiation of the Joint Committee for the

Socio-Economic Advancement of Muslim Filipinos between Malaysia and the Philippines in 1996 has been specifically directed towards such purposes. In launching this initiative the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, made specific linkage between the agenda and work of the Committee and the resolution of the problems of illegal immigration in Malaysia, specifically in Sabah.⁶⁷

Furthermore, in 1996 Malaysia and Indonesia served as important members of an OIC committee that helped broker a peace agreement between the Fidel Ramos Administration and the MNLF led by Nur Misuari with eventual projections towards securing a degree of autonomy for Muslim areas in the south. While the agreement has caused widespread protest from Christians in the Philippines as well as dissidence from breakaway factions of the MNLF and the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and Abu Sayaff groups, Malaysia expressed satisfaction at the pace and substance of the negotiations (and the eventual conclusion of a peace agreement in August 1996), directly linking the imperatives of and prospects for peace in the area to economic interests—both for itself and for the East Asean Growth Area as a whole.⁶⁸

The imperatives of a co-religionist affinity for Muslim minorities in the region notwithstanding, the Administration has consistently demonstrated its acceptance of the nation state system as an (international) fact of life. The former Foreign Minister, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, for instance denotes the necessity for a perceptual distinction between Malaysia's articulated support for the "autonomy" of Muslims in neighbouring countries and any encouragement of their separation from the nation states to which they belong, which Malaysia does not support.⁶⁹

The former Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, later a valued member of Mahathir's foreign policy establishment (as Special Representative to the UN) has conceded that while ethics has demanded the "oneness" of the Islamic *umma*, it is not apparent that the building of this *umma* might serve as the answer to all global problems. Although Islam would be relevant in international society, insofar as it coincided with notions of social justice, this had to be worked out within a *national* context.⁷⁰

Even Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who in his previous career as a member of the Islamic opposition, had been a fervent supporter of the rights of Muslim minorities, particularly in Thailand has, upon attaining national office, been more wary of appearing to encourage irredentist tendencies and has increasingly sought to qualify Malaysian co-religionist sympathy for them, even at the political level. Declaring his vision for its international policies, in the run-up to presidential elections for UMNO Youth in 1984, Anwar maintained that although support for the *Mujahideen* struggle in Afghanistan could be justified on the basis of empathy for a struggle of national liberation, the issue of Muslim "brothers" in Pattani and in the southern Philippines, was "different", more complex and as an issue called, above all, for a fair distribution of justice.⁷¹

His own attitude towards Muslim minorities in neighbouring countries was given further expression in 1989 on a visit to Singapore, where he was queried

on the significance of Islam in Malaysia and how this had affected its relationship with its ASEAN neighbours. In a typical display of his considerable skills as a Malay and Malaysian politician, Anwar's reply was in fact also demonstrative of the Mahathir Administration's objectives in its vision of "right" Islam. While emphasizing that each country had to act out of the "peculiarities" of its own situation and arguing that Malaysia had never done anything to upset the sensitivities of its neighbours, he also insisted that "the Muslim cause" could not be compromised.⁷²

In attempting to underline the possibilities for the social consolidation of the community in ways which do not directly threaten the normative political framework of territorial pluralism, some Malaysian political elites appear to subscribe to more nuanced arguments about the role of Islam in modern international relations, extended by thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman. Indeed, even as he has maintained a deliberately vague allegiance to assisting the cause of Muslim minorities, Anwar, like many of his governmental and upper-echelon UMNO colleagues, has espoused social justice and development for Muslims in the region, rather than outright support for separatism. He concedes however that the very promotion of a "Muslim cause" itself has been perceived as a threat by "some neighbours".⁷³

MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE AND OTHER REGIONAL MUSLIMS

The issue of Muslim minorities in the region also involves Malaysia's relations with the city state of Singapore, significant due not only to their physical proximity but because of their peoples' intertwining history. Despite periodic amicable good neighbourliness between the two countries, structural tensions haunt the relationship, made manifest in Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965. Singapore's ejection from the Federation of Malaysia was necessary, in part, due to its identity as an overwhelmingly "Chinese" state within the context of a Communist threat linked to an ethnic-Chinese constituency and a struggle for Malay-Muslim political dominance within the concept and framework of Malaysia.

Separation did not, however, insulate the politics of one state from the other. Singapore and Malaysia have remained economically interdependent but also joined by family ties and even more importantly, communal linkages. The Malay-Muslim minority in Singapore account for some 15 per cent of the population, perceived on the Malaysian side as a "disadvantaged diaspora entitled to protection".⁷⁴ Such sentiment has been further complicated by degrees of lingering resentment felt by some Malay politicians over the secession of sovereignty of what is perceived as originally and essentially "Malay" land, which has been periodically exploited as an issue in the name of Malay nationalism.

The Singapore government on the other hand is consistently wary of the alleged propensity of any Malay Singaporean identification with prevailing Malaysian political opinion and in the decade of the 1980s became even more concerned over the potential for radical Muslim activism (linked to the prospect

of racial tension) spilling over the causeway. The uneasy relationship was further represented in personal differences between political leaders of the two countries, although the ascension of Dr Mahathir helped put the bilateral relationship on a sounder footing, in part because leadership on either side has recognized the other's representation of a locus of power and in part by the first Singaporean Prime Minister's (subsequently Senior Minister) own admission of his greater ease at the personal level, with Dr Mahathir's non-royal origins.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the increasing strength of Malay and Muslim organizations in lobbying for the protection of what are perceived as Muslim interests (linked to a sense of Malay nationalism) has also enabled stresses and strains in the relationship to persist. The issue of Singaporean investment in and ownership of Malaysian land, property and business has increasingly become the subject of such expression. The sale of land and property to Singapore companies and individuals in the state of Johor which borders Singapore has, in particular, been the subject of consternation on the part of Malay politicians and constituted a serious issue of contention between Malay parties, in the late 1980s in particular between UMNO Baru and *Semangat '46* in 1987. These issues are also linked to fundamental concerns about the distribution of benefits and the perception of inequalities in both bilateral economic ventures and through the projected sub-regional economic co-operative scheme known as the Growth Triangle, involving Singapore, Johor and Riau in Indonesia.⁷⁶

The acceleration of arms procurement, generally within the region, has helped maintain a sense of bilateral threat. Conflicting perceptions over the maintenance of regional security—Singapore's rationalization of the imperatives for continued US involvement in the region against Malaysian concern for its neutralization—have occasionally raised diplomatic strain, such as was produced by Singapore's agreement to host services to US military and naval forces on a rotational basis since 1989. Malaysia has maintained a generalized opposition to permanent US bases in the region, but a subsequent Malaysian agreement to host temporary US naval facilities on a commercial basis at Lumut in the state of Perak, helped partially to alleviate the bilateral stress.

One incident in particular—the official visit of the Israeli President to Singapore in 1986—was highly demonstrative of inherent tensions in the Singapore-Malaysia relationship with particular reference to religion, but because it has also involved the issue of Malaysian support for the Palestinian cause, it will be discussed separately.

In the first half of the 1990s Malaysia's encounters with the problems of refugees from other regional partners demonstrated the continuing dilemmas for the Mahathir Administration in attempting to square its agenda of socio-economic development and security through engagement of regional partners with its concern for the welfare and security of co-religionists.

Burmese persecution of its Rohingya Muslim community was such a pertinent case. At a point when Malaysia, in tandem with its ASEAN partners were advancing a policy of "constructive engagement" with the military regime there, the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Muslims from Myanmar into

Bangladesh in 1992, recounting stories of slavery, rape and torture at the hands of the Burmese, challenged the wisdom of the Mahathir Administration's policy. Diplomatically, the Malaysian government demanded immediate resolution of the problem citing its disruption to regional stability. Domestically, however, it came under increasing pressure from its Malay-Muslim lobby, even within UMNO, to exercise tougher measures and in particular to impose sanctions against Myanmar, a move the Mahathir Administration could not singularly decide upon without consultation with its partners in ASEAN. At great expense to its standing with domestic Muslim opinion, and to some extent the image of some senior UMNO leaders, Malaysia stood its ground against sanctions on Myanmar aimed at improving that regime's human rights record from the perspective that this would in the long term be counter-productive.

The issue of Acehnese refugees in Malaysia has a longer history but is relevant to any religious identity Malaysia might wish to hold regionally, due to separatist struggles to establish an Islamic republic in Aceh, Sumatra. Although in 1993 hundreds of Acehnese sought refuge on Malaysian territory, Malaysia's insistence on maintaining gradually improving relations with Indonesia, already troubled by the numbers of illegal Indonesian workers in various Malaysian states but most particularly in Sabah, and its hopes for entrenching the Northern Growth Triangle project (which would include Northern Sumatra) between Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, led the government to refuse them political asylum and to seek, instead, their repatriation, although not forcibly. Inevitably, Malaysia has looked to the UNHCR to temporarily resolve the plight of such refugees.

Indeed, the desire for reciprocal acknowledgement of certain inviolable sovereign rights from its neighbours is clearly at least as important to Malaysian foreign policy goals. Despite active Malaysian membership of the OIC, an organization increasingly strident in its efforts to better the welfare of Muslim minorities, the Mahathir Administration has repeatedly emphasized Malaysia's firm commitment to the over-arching principles of international society. At the 1987 Summit, for instance, while speaking in support of Islamic universalism, Dr Mahathir reiterated the imperative for recognition that while they belonged to a universal religion, Muslims also belonged to separate countries and races "by means which did not threaten the Islamic *umma* as a whole".⁷⁷

It is clear however that older strategies of personal assurances between national leaders, confined as they have been to central structures of power rather than regional or localized relationships, are unlikely to be viable indefinitely. As these regional neighbours move further and faster along their respective roads of national and political development, it is unlikely that the partially arbitrary structures and frameworks which have thus far given shape and form to the relationships can or will be continued. As their societies modernize, public sentiment has and will become a more important factor in the policies exercised by a number of countries in the region. The active growth of non-governmental organizations and their capacity for effectively raising such issues for discussion and debate in the national Malaysian press, indicates that long-term resolution is necessary.

Added to this is the context of renewed vigour in the international identity of Muslims and of international Islamic opinion whose weight and credibility in the 1990s is by now considerable. It is at least worth asking if the adequate attention of national governments to socio-economic aspirations of their minority populations can ever also fully address their inherent need for ethnic or religious expression. In as much as this expression challenges national loyalties and allegiance it is problematic, not just for states like Thailand and the Philippines who administer these minorities but even more so perhaps for states like Malaysia which must balance their own emergent religious identity (shaped to some extent by domestic pressures) against the fears of their regional neighbours similarly engaged in forging and consolidating the individual integration of their nation states.

A recognition of the priority of the common concern of its regional neighbours in guarding their mutual sovereignty has characterized Malaysia's official actions as concerns Muslim minorities. Unlike its predecessors, the Mahathir Administration, in its espousal of the "Muslim cause", has also articulated a clear distinction between concern over issues affecting the political as opposed to the religious domain for these Muslim minorities. Thus while the Malaysian government might consider diplomatic intervention where the latter domain is concerned, more delicate matters (including insurgency and rebellion) are considered to be strictly "internal" affairs of the country concerned. Nevertheless, on occasion, Malaysian foreign policy has clearly seen the benefit of linking these issues as well.⁷⁸

Religious issues have thus, for the most part, comprised a no-go area in political exchange except at the highest official levels. In terms of socio-cultural development, however, increasing exchange between religious authorities on all manner of issues in Islam, the frequent appearance by religious personnel at conferences, seminars and other public fora by these neighbouring countries has helped maintain a dynamic area of co-operation. Through organizations like RISEAP (see below) and the ASEAN Forum of Muslim Social Scientists, for instance, more official Malaysian religious and intellectual opinion has gradually exercised a significant degree of influence on the regional Muslim community and appears to have encouraged a greater sense of shared experience in a regional Islamic revitalization that nevertheless remains within the bounds of their status as separate nation states.

Efforts have also been made at regional inter-governmental co-operation in the supervision and institution of religious authority and interpretation. The institutionalization of meetings of the Ministers of Religious Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (MABIMS) in 1989 reflected, to some extent, intensified efforts at managing religious development and problems in religious affairs common to these countries. In 1996 common note was made by these same countries of the need for controlling "foreign influence and religious extremism" in the region.⁷⁹ However, certain member states had also earlier articulated the desire for autonomy in handling matters of religious "deviance", due to the domestic political implications such issues hold for each

state. At the MABIMS meeting in 1994, for instance, a number of official representatives insisted on their right of independent policy in handling the issue of the *Darul Arqam* movement in their respective countries.⁸⁰

AIDING SOUTHEAST ASIAN MUSLIMS

In religious terms, the parallels between the modern day plight of Muslim minorities and the original status of the Islamic community as a persecuted minority within the Arab world are important in placing the concept of *hijra* (emigration)—the Prophet Muhammad’s response to the initial rejection and persecution of Islam through his flight from Mecca to Medina—in the contemporary context of “building” the Muslim diaspora. The principles of retreat (*hijra*) and resistance (*jihad*) have traditionally been perceived as means by which to ensure the survival of “Islamic” communities whatever their location and their sense of belonging, more by means of a shared religion than by other ties. These concepts are therefore also about sustaining identity. Both concepts are however manifestly dynamic and how they are read through the modern experience of Muslims is important in understanding Muslim ways of conceiving the contemporary status of Muslim minorities. In as much as these principles of retreat and resistance are directed towards an inward looking form and defensive character, the modern Muslim diaspora has been largely concerned with Islam as a means of expressing confessional interest. For the Malaysian state, the task of building the *umma* is perceived as realizable primarily through the promotion of a socio-economic agenda aimed at obtaining social justice. Increasingly this has been manifested through “right” *dakwah*, supported by the state.

The Administration’s record of religious voluntarism in Southeast Asia is demonstrated primarily through its support for *dakwah* activities. The convention of the Regional Islamic Dakwah Conference by the Malaysian Government in 1980 was the first of its kind in the area and helped to establish the Regional Islamic Dakwah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific—RISEAP—which has been a vital symbol of the Administration’s commitment to Islam as a force in the region.

The importance accorded to *dakwah* of the transnational variety is partly explained by the Administration’s concern over the spread of “correct” interpretations of Islam, and through its appraisal of the increasingly expansive influence of this genre of international Islamic activism. On the other hand, support for *dakwah* is also perceived as a more positive means for “religious” aid towards Muslim minorities and as a probable extension of the Federal Government’s trojan-horse strategy of bureaucratizing and centralizing *dakwah* organization under the Prime Minister’s Office within the national Malaysian context.

In his address to RISEAP’s first General Assembly in 1983, Dr Mahathir pledged Malaysia’s active role in the Islamic *dakwah* movement, both locally and internationally explained by its policy of close association with Islamic nations and through its support of Islamic causes: “In this regard, we believe that our

participation should not only be active but also effective in the true sense of the word. We in Malaysia will continue to do everything within our means to assist in the struggle of the Muslim *umma* for the right to live the lives of true Muslims.”⁸¹

Rhetoric aside, such aid has always been envisioned within limits. At the 1980 Conference, for instance, the point was made that *dakwah* work involving Muslim minorities should be directed towards encouraging those communities to remain as part of their adopted countries without losing their Islamic identity. Similarly, at the first meeting of RISEAP in 1982, its first Secretary-General, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia’s first Prime Minister, argued that Islam should be viewed as a help rather than hindrance towards building loyalty to a government and country “because Islam teaches Muslims to obey the views of the country in which they are and to observe law and order and work for harmony among the races in that country”.⁸²

That Conference was also important for the resolutions that it passed, establishing Malaysia as the headquarters of RISEAP, committed to coordinating the various *dakwah* organizations active in participating countries and as a regional institute for the training of *dakwah* workers.⁸³ Although a voluntary organization, its links with the Saudi-based *Rabitah al Alam al Islami* and OIC component organizations have also provided it with a symbol of official approval.

More importantly, the Malaysian government has acted as the main patron of the organization which has helped provide the Mahathir Administration with an important tool for image building as well as a platform for promoting its ideas on Islam. Indeed, in some ways, it might be argued that what the Malaysian Government finds potentially embarrassing or problematic through any direct promotion, including issues concerning the welfare of Muslim minorities in neighbouring countries, its high profile patronage of organizations like RISEAP, makes possible. Thus it is beneficially associated with such exercises while avoiding any complications of these being mistaken as direct policies of the government itself.

The Malaysian government has made contributions in terms of religious education through the distribution of religious texts and special arrangements for the education of religious youth and personnel from neighbouring countries. In 1984, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia announced proposals for their joint production of a radio programme, “Voice of Islam” to be broadcast throughout Southeast Asia, towards dissemination of the Islamic faith. By 1995, this had been elevated conceptually to the idea of a regional radio network based in Malaysia, in cooperation with Indonesia and Brunei, with the objectives of projecting a new image of Islam and correcting non-Muslim misconceptions of the religion. Malaysia has also been accorded the task of compiling the first ASEAN Shariah law journal to provide legal references in the administration of Islamic personal law for countries in the ASEAN region.⁸⁴

Despite an avowed apoliticism, organizations like RISEAP and indeed the Malaysian Government’s patronage of them are however important in a symbolic if more long-term sense. It is the first and so far only organization of its nature and

has the capacity to influence Muslim minorities if not directly and politically, at least in terms of their images and perceptions of the *umma* and its real or symbolic solidarity. Indeed the importance of *dakwah* lies, in part, in its capacity to influence political developments while remaining within the socio-religious realm and therefore “untainted” in Muslim eyes. As such it appears to offer the potential of the most effective means of influencing “Islamic consciousness”.⁸⁵

In spite of its efforts at distinguishing between forms of aid to neighbouring Muslim minorities, the Mahathir Administration has nevertheless run into difficulties. The problem is that even such indirect attempts at helping to improve their welfare continue inevitably to be perceived as assisting these minorities towards a sense of Islamic separateness and independence. Indeed, the development of Islam as a factor in Malaysia’s domestic politics has increasingly strained its neighbours’ perceptions of its capacity to stem the spillover of such “change” to their respective peoples. Malaysia’s self-proclaimed role as an Islamic nation and its prioritization of relations with co-religionists has thus placed the Administration in a more delicate position in relation to its Southeast Asian neighbours.⁸⁶

AIDING EXTRA-REGIONAL MUSLIM MINORITIES

While action on behalf of Muslim minorities in neighbouring countries has been limited, as far as possible, within the scope of social development, the Mahathir Administration has found it prudent to demonstrate its concern for Muslims, particularly for minorities further afield, in more indirect ways and sometimes more actively.

The Malaysian Government has been both materially generous towards and has worked in co-operation with other voluntary organizations such as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), the OIC and with individual Muslim countries like Libya in efforts to aid Muslim minorities. The Administration has frequently extended aid to Somalian refugees (including extensive involvement in a UN peacekeeping mission there), and has been vocal in its concern for the plight of Muslims in areas such as Assam and Beirut. Significant among the achievements of RISEAP, has been its co-operation with the Malaysian pilgrimage management board, LUTH and the national carrier (Malaysian Airline System) in facilitating the *Hajj* by pilgrims from countries such as Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and New Caledonia.⁸⁷

Indeed, it has been the first Malaysian administration to be widely linked with the care of Muslim minorities outside the Southeast Asian region. In the foot-steps of its predecessors it has actively contributed towards the construction of mosques and other religious facilities and has gone further afield to countries such as the US, Italy and Japan. This image was given a further boost by the appointment of Anwar Ibrahim (shortly after joining UMNO) to the World Council of Mosques in 1982, who was later made a Supreme Council member of this organization which co-ordinates the activities and construction of mosques in the Islamic world as well as outside it.⁸⁸

On an official visit in 1987 to the Soviet Union, Dr Mahathir pledged Malaysian support for and interest in the welfare of “brother” Soviet Muslims whose continued faith he urged while diplomatically emphasizing that “Islam wanted its followers to live in peace with their neighbours and those who protected them”. While such high profile co-religionist exercises may have been symbolically important at a time when the Administration was under challenge from within UMNO, such links have also been put to practical use: by 1987 for instance, the Soviet republic of Uzbekistan was expressing keen interest in establishing joint ventures with Malaysia, a useful foil to Islamic critics who maintained, at the time, that Malaysia should not, at any rate, be holding links with a Communist power.⁸⁹

Since the collapse of Communism and the emergence of several independent states from the former Soviet Union that have traditionally held a distinctly Islamic character, Malaysia has been actively involved in forging new links with these states and has offered material and moral support to Muslim minorities in these regions. While the Government has been pressured to act on Russian aggression against states like Chechnya and their Muslim minorities, official Malaysian plans for economic and social co-operation have more actively sought to include the Central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Khazakstan, Uzbekistan, Chechnya and others on a co-religionist basis. To some extent, however, this has been propelled by domestic pressure from other quarters as the competitive arena for the promotion of “right” Islam between Malaysian Muslims has been extended abroad. *Dakwah* movements such as *Darul Arqam* have, for instance, established their own connections in Uzbekistan towards a revitalization of Islam—*Darul Arqam* members have been particularly active in mosque restoration and the education of Muslim youth there.⁹⁰

Malaysian foreign policy towards Muslim minorities in the region and in particular towards their presence in Thailand and the Philippines has clearly been conducted within the consciousness of regional volatility over unresolved borders. It has also indicated a sensitivity to the role of Islamic politics in the expression of confessional interest within the domestic societies of its neighbours. Inasmuch as religious concerns directed at the welfare of the *umma* have not detracted a state like Malaysia from its fundamental subscription to the Westphalian ideals of territorial sovereignty and integrity, it is plausible, however, that transnational religious exchange might be giving new shape and form to state and society interaction across such boundaries.

In fact, the limitations on its immediate regional actions have meant that the Administration’s support for Muslim minorities and movements of liberation appears also to be in inverse proportion to their distance from Malaysia. As such, the extension of aid to Muslims further afield has frequently proven more salutary. Thus issues such as that of Palestine and Afghanistan and the welfare of Muslim populations in other regions, most recently in Bosnia, have been able to elicit much wider and intensive official support from the Malaysian government.

NOTES

1. *Penyata UMNO 1982*, Pejabat Agung UMNO, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, pp. 379–390.
2. *Foreign Affairs Malaysia (FAM)*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1981, pp. 1–11.
3. A.Suhrke and L.G.Noble (eds), *Ethnic Conflicts in International Relations*, New York: Praeger, 1978, p. 15; W.K.Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 202.
4. See *Report and Resolutions of the Fourteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Dhaka, People's Republic of Bangladesh, 6–11 December 1983*. Resolution No. 27/14-P on Refugees notes that the solidarity of OIC member states with host countries of refugees “is dictated by principles of fraternity and defence of human rights and the dignity of man which emanate from the Islamic heritage and traditions.”
5. Michael Leifer, *AS BAN and the Security of Southeast Asia*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 17.
6. Surin Pitsuwan, “The Ethnic Background of Issues Affecting Bilateral Relations Between Malaysia and Thailand” in Franco Pellizzi *et al.* (eds), *Ethnicities and Nations*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, pp. 318–344.
7. Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, 22 March 1991; Che Man, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
8. Statement by the Defence Minister, *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Negara (PRPDN)*, 25 June 1980, p. 1294; *Asiaweek*, 4 April 1980. In accordance with the Agreement, unilateral operations by security forces within either country were the norm. The right of “hot pursuit”, however, enabled these same forces to effect border crossings if in contact with the enemy: “The Combined Task Force Headquarters of the country concerned shall inform its opposite and Regional Border Committee Office of the crossing and seek permission of the distance and duration allowed for such crossing”.
9. Suhrke and Noble, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
10. See Classified Documents of the Thai Parliament Special Committee 1979:17, cited in Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study*, Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985, p. 261; interview with Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, former Secretary-General, Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1983–1988), Kuala Lumpur, 6 June 1989.
11. *Impact International*, 24 April 1981. The issue was made more potent by earlier revelations in a Thai newspaper, the *Bangkok Post* (sensitive to the Thai government viewpoint), that Thai authorities suspected the then President of PAS of being linked to a clandestine group supportive of Muslim separatism. Cited in *The Star*, 31 December 1980.
12. *FAM*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1981, pp. 1–11. Dr Mahathir maintained that, “if the people of a country wish to change their government, it is for them to do so”.
13. *The Star*, 31 December 1980; *New Straits Times (NST)*, 4 April 1981; Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Viewpoints*, Pelanduk, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, p. 158; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 3, Nos. 10–11, 1978.
14. Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, former minister of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 20 June 1989; *Suara Islam*, No. 1, July 1979, p. 28; UMNO General Assembly debates as reported in *Utusan Malaysia (UM)*, 21–23 April 1979. Citing the issue as the first real test for UMNO’s strength in Kelantan, PAS, whose strongest political base was in these states, drew attention to the Malaysian Home Affairs Minister’s own admission that the influx of Vietnamese refugees might endanger the stability and security of the country. Government statements of tougher measures against Vietnamese refugees underlined UMNO grassroots thinking and was reflected in the submission of a record number of resolutions for discussion of the problem at the Assembly.

15. The defeated candidate, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's Chinese connections in business, eventually worked against him (at least partly).
16. *UM*, 6, 9 and 11 April 1981.
17. Pitsuwan, "The Ethnic Background of Issues Affecting Bilateral Relations Between Malaysia and Thailand", op. cit., p. 324.
18. Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, op. cit.
19. *UM*, 30 April 1981; *Sarina*, May 1981, pp. 18–22. According to such opinion, Malaysia co-religionist sympathies for the refugees held only humanitarian and not ulterior motives as believed by the Thais.
20. Nanyang Siang Pau, 24 April 1981, cited in *Mirror of Opinion (MOP)*, January–April 1981.
21. *UM*, 28 April 1981; Dr Mahathir's reply in Parliament, *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat (PRPDR)*, 8 June 1981, p. 2674, to allegations about links between PULO and the Malaysian Foreign and Home Affairs Ministries and the MB of Kedah.
22. Interview with Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, op. cit.
23. *UM*, 30 April; 4 May and 20 May 1981. Although one report cited some 550 Muslim Burmese refugees in Southern Thailand waiting to enter Malaysia, the MB of Perlis denied any threat of a refugee influx, with official reports citing a total of 95 Burmese Muslim refugees in Malaysia by the end of May.
24. Tamil Murasu, Editorial 25 April 1981, cited in *Mirror of Opinion (MOP)*, May–July 1981.
25. *Berita Minggu*, 24 April 1981; *Berita Harian (BH)*, 22 May 1981; *Straits Times (ST)*, 25 May 1981.
26. *UM*, 15 May, 5 and 11 June 1981. The President of Perkim, Tunku Abdul Rahman, reminded Malaysians of the danger to the Muslim minorities in other countries, "which can affect Malaysia and all Muslims", suggesting that the best possible aid was through co-operation.
27. *Suara Islam*, No. 8, June 1981. PAS complaints were defended as serving to remind the Malaysian Government that it needed to be clear on this matter which it had not thus far been. Some party members maintained that Thai Government actions thus far appeared deliberately aimed at hampering the situation of the Malaysian government.
28. *PRPDR*, 8 June 1981, pp. 2679–2680; 11 June 1981, pp. 3491–3494. Up to 31 May 1981. 624 Thai Muslim refugees had entered Malaysia. UNHCR involvement was considered unnecessary at this point, explained by the sufficiency of bilateral efforts towards resolution of the problem.
29. The memorandum was published in full in *Muslim World League Journal*, February 1982. pp. 26–27.
30. Minister for Defence, Datuk Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi in *Malaysian Digest*, January 1987, p. 1.
31. *Bangkok Post*, 7 September 1982; *Far East Economic Review (FEER)*, 1 October 1982, 11 October 1984.
32. Statement by Deputy Home Affairs Minister in Parliament as reported in *NST*, 29 November 1985; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 7, Nos 1 and 2, 1983, p. 37.
33. *ST*, 30 August; 19 October 1993.
34. *The Sun*, 7 April 1995.
35. In 1987, the Mahathir Administration suggested to Bangkok that it encourage the development of the southern states of Thailand in line with that taking place in the northern states of Malaysia. See *Malaysian Digest*, October 1987, p. 12. The two countries contributed a total of M\$20 million towards raising the standard of living of inhabitants at the border area as a complement to military action in the region, *Berita Harian*, 20 January 1989.
36. Lela Garner Noble, "Ethnicity and Philippine Malaysian Relations", *Asian Survey*,

- Vol. 15/S, May 1975, pp. 453–472.
37. *PRPDR*, 31 March 1978, pp. 974–975.
 38. *Perkim Annual General Report*, 1981, p. 3 cited in Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 91; Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1986, *Demographic Estimates for Sabah and Sarawak 1970–80: Studies on Demographic and Population Statistics*, No. 1, pp. 5–6 cited in Jeffrey Kitingan and James Ongkili, *Sabah: 25 Years Later*, Sandakan, Sabah: Institute of Development Studies, 1990.
 39. Ironically, the Chief Minister's lack of a specific ethnic base within Sabah (because of his own multi-ethnic origins) made him more politically vulnerable and therefore largely reliant on support from the Federal Government.
 40. The primacy of the ethnic configuration in Malaysian politics has in part provided for the failure of the Parti Bersatu Sabah's (PBS) attempts to define itself as a multiracial party.
 41. *FEER*, 17 March 1986.
 42. *ST*, 31 October 1983.
 43. Yahya Ismail, *Politik Islam Sabah* (Islamic Politics in Sabah), Kuala Lumpur, Dinamika Kreatif, 1986, p. 71.
 44. *NST*, 1 June 1985; *Asiaweek*, 1 November 1985.
 45. *Berita Minggu*, 19 May 1985; *ST*, 20 April 1989.
 46. Che Man, op. cit., p. 226; *FEER*, 5 May 1984, *Asiaweek*, 13 March 1985.
 47. See comments of Anwar Ibrahim, then UMNO Youth President and Education Minister, in *Malaysian Business*, 16 June 1986, p. 14. Indeed, it is no small detail that Encik Anwar played a significant role in negotiations with Datuk Pairin and Dr Mahathir over the "Sabah formula".
 48. Chamil Wariya, *UMNO Era Mahathir*, Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1988, p. 73.
 49. *PRPDR*, 13 June 1974, pp. 1035–1036. Then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak stated in Parliament that the Malaysian Government regarded developments in the region essentially as an internal affair of the Philippines and strictly adhered to the policy of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. According to a report, in *The Manila Bulletin*, cited in *Berita Harian*, 20 October 1982, 200,000 Moro people have fled to Sabah since 1972 while a 1981 American Congressional Report maintained that a considerably large number of Moro National Liberation Front rebels permanently resided in Sabah.
 50. Address by Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Datuk Razali Ismail, in *FAM*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 1987, pp. 16–18.
 51. *PRPDR*, 27 November 1979, pp. 10823–10824.
 52. Statement by Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister in Parliament reported in *The Star*, 21 March 1989.
 53. Charter of the Islamic Conference, Article II, Para 6 in Abdullah al-Ahsan, *The Organization of Islamic Conference*, Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1988, p. 128 (Appendix A).
 54. *BH*, 26 January 1985.
 55. *Berita Minggu*, 6 December 1981; *BH*, 10 and 11 December 1981. The Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied any knowledge of the seizure.
 56. *Malaysian Digest*, April 1988, p. 7.
 57. *NST*, 12 February 1987.
 58. *UM*, 31 January 1987.
 59. *ST*, 11 June and 13 June 1987; statement by the Deputy Minister in *PRPDR*, 3 July 1987.
 60. *Harakah*, 17 July 1987.
 61. Interview with Haji Mustafa Yaakob, Vice-President of UMNO Youth International Bureau, Islamic and OIC Section, Kuala Lumpur, 27 December 1990.

62. See Parliamentary debates on the Amendment to the Diplomatic Exclusivity Act 1966 (Vienna Convention) in *PRPDR*, 14–15 October 1981 (second and third readings), pp. 3575–3698.
63. See description of the findings of the Cobold Commission in Nordin Sopiee, *Political Unification in the Malaysian Region 1945–1965: From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya 1974, p. 85–87.
64. Institute of Strategic and International Studies, *The Bonding of a Nation: Federalism and Territorial Integration in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: ISIS, 1985, pp. 51–52; 60.
65. *NST*, 24 March 1994.
66. *NST*, 2 and 3 June 1995.
67. *ST*, 2 June 1996.
68. See comments by Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Malaysian Foreign Minister in *UM*, 26 August 1996.
69. Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, op. cit.
70. See James Piscatori's interview with Datuk Musa in 1981 in Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, Cambridge and London, Cambridge University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986, p. 82.
71. Khalid Jaafar, "Antara Anwar Dengan Suhaimi" (Between Anwar and Suhaimi), *Dewan Masyarakat*, May 1984, pp. 12–15.
72. See his interview with Singaporean television (*Friday Background*), 18 March 1989.
73. Interview with Encik Anwar Ibrahim, Kuala Lumpur, 21 December 1990; Anwar Ibrahim, "Development, Values and Changing Political Ideas", *Sojourn*, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1986, pp. 1–7.
74. Michael Leifer, "Israel's President in Singapore: Political Catalysis and Transnational Politics", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1988, pp. 341–353.
75. For a survey of contemporary Malaysian sentiment on Singapore see "Hubungan Malaysia-Singapura Dekat diMata, Dekat diHati?" (Malaysian-Singapore Relations, Close at Sight, Close to the Heart?), *Dewan Masyarakat*, March 1989, pp. 24–27. For a Malaysian perception of Singapore's fears, see a series of articles, "Hubungan Malaysia-Singapura" (Malaysia-Singapore Ties) in *Watan*, 6–9 August 1988.
76. Evidence of the impunity with which state officials have disbursed land rights to foreigners has become a critical issue of inquiry. See for instance, *BH*, 20 May 1996, which reported that many foreigners were building "*istanas*" (palaces) on Johor state land.
77. Address to the Fifth Islamic Summit in Kuwait, 18 January 1987 in *FAM*, March 1987, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 51.
78. See interview with Dr Mahathir in *Arabia: An Islamic World Review*, August 1985, p. 14.
79. *ST*, 12 May 1996.
80. Johan Hendrik Meuleman, "Reactions and Attitudes Towards the Darul Arqam Movement in Southeast Asia", in Bernard Dahm (ed), *Religious Revivalism in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, forthcoming.
81. *FAM*, Vol. 16, No. 3, September 1983, pp. 8–11.
82. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 4, Nos 5 and 6, 1980, p. 28; Vol. 6, Nos 1 and 2, 1982, p. 37.
83. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 4, Nos 5 and 6, 1980, p. 29.
84. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 1 and 2, 1982, p. 4; Vol. 7, Nos 9 and 10, 1983; "Voice of Islam", *BH*, 7 April 1984.
85. James Piscatori, "Asian Islam: International Linkages and Their Impact on International Relations" in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam in Asia*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 230–261.
86. Interview with Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, op. cit.: "What we are or are becoming is perceived as a problem by our neighbours".
87. *NST*, 5 and 6 June 1983; 16 May 1986; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 5, Nos 1 and 2, 1981; *Muslim World League Journal*, September 1982, p. 35. Between 1981 and 1983 an

estimated total of 350 pilgrims from these countries performed the Hajj with Malaysian assistance.

88. *NST*, 19 November 1988. Between 1982 and 1988, Malaysia made substantive contributions to the constructions of mosques and Islamic centres in Tokyo, Rome, New York and the Maldives.
89. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1987; *NST*, 4 December 1987.
90. See report in *Harakah*, 13 January 1995, on demonstrations outside the Russian embassy by political and student organizations protesting Russian action in Chechnya; Judith Nagata, "How to be Islamic without being an Islamic state: Contested Models of Development in Malaysia", in Akbar S.Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam Globalization and Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 64–90.

6 Co-religionism

Palestine and Afghanistan

Due to their particular status as co-religionist issues, over time, the Palestinian and Afghan struggles have come to symbolize the significance of a religious identity in contemporary international relations, not only from the Malaysian perspective but within the Muslim world in general.

Malaysia's foreign policy over these issues has clearly reflected the country's support for the principles of the right to self-determination and territorial integrity and for movements of national liberation such as that of the PLO and of the Afghan *Mujahideen*. Although their co-religionist character had been addressed, to some extent, by its predecessors, the Mahathir Administration has clearly had the greatest task of reconciling the nationalist and Islamic dimensions of both issues, at both the international and domestic levels, partly explained by the interlocking relationship over time between these spheres of policy.

THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE

From Independence, the Palestinian question had received much attention from Malaysian policy makers, figuring primarily as an issue of national liberation. The three preceding Malaysian administrations had gone some way towards supplementing moral support with other means. The King's annual address to Parliament consistently highlighted support for the Palestinian cause as a hallmark of Malaysian foreign policy. While continuing in this pattern, Dr Mahathir had also held a track record of personal commitment to the Palestinian cause, underlined by his strong opposition to Zionism and his record in lobbying for nationalist movements and for a more independent Third World-oriented foreign policy.

Shortly after assuming office in 1981, the new Administration announced its decision to accord the PLO full diplomatic status—Malaysia being the only country in the Southeast Asian region and the second country in the world (after

Pakistan) to have done so at the time.¹ Active lobbying for the Palestinian cause has been undertaken within the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and ASEAN, where Malaysia has been most critical and condemnatory of Israeli conduct in the Middle East.² Since 1969, Malaysia has acted in concert with its OIC partners over the Palestine Question and has consistently co-sponsored UN resolutions on the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem.³

In 1982, Malaysia was selected by the OIC to be represented on a committee of foreign ministers assigned the task of dealing with specific resolutions on Palestine through the UN and other bodies. When Iran initiated a move to oust Israel from the UN General Assembly in 1982 and in 1983, it appeared likely that Malaysia would have been pressed to vote with all OIC countries in support of the motion and although it was procedurally blocked, Malaysia did join in the challenge to the Credentials Committee over Israel's credentials.⁴

Since 1981, Malaysia has annually celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, designated as a government holiday since 1982. Apart from its annual contribution (cited at US\$5,000 in 1981) to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) operating in the West Bank and Gaza Strip towards the aid of Palestinian refugees, the Malaysian Government also contributed some M\$ 100,000 in 1982 to the inhabitants of Palestinian refugee camps, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Humanitarian aid has come in other forms—places and scholarships for learning at Malaysian universities and occupational training centres have also been offered to Palestinians.⁵

In 1983, the Malaysian Government spent some M\$1.5 million in hosting the Asian Regional Conference of the UN on the Question of Palestine including regional and Arab participation. Irrespective of the Conference's results, the level of participation was a measure of respect from Arab and Muslim states as well as confidence that Malaysia had attracted from these quarters. A nation-wide "Palestinian Week" was also instituted in conjunction with the Conference to create awareness among Malaysians. Consistent lobbying for the issue in international fora is explained by the perception that it represents the core of the overall problem of peace and stability in the Middle East (or West Asia). Dr Mahathir has himself displayed a greater willingness to publicly censure implicit US support of Israel's policies, particularly within UN fora.⁶ As Kuala Lumpur has displayed a higher profile in international affairs, and acted as host to major international conferences, the Malaysian government has also declined to host a number of fora at which the state of Israel would be seated as a member or an observer.⁷

In 1988, the Foreign Ministry launched a Palestinian People's Fund as an educational source and for other basic needs, in recognition of the hardship suffered since the launch of the *intifadah* in the occupied territories in 1987. The Fund was described by the Government as a non-racial and religious means for Malaysians to help (through donations) in an "international level humanitarian struggle". In 1989, the PLO's diplomatic status in Malaysia was elevated further, equating Palestinian representation with that of any other resident diplomatic mission in Kuala Lumpur.⁸

Malaysia has received public thanks and recognition for such vocal and material support from the PLO while the leader of the Organization, Yasser Arafat, has paid two official visits to Malaysia; in 1984 and in 1990. He has lauded “the long history of excellent relations and friendship” between Malaysian and Palestinian peoples, and noted that “compared with some Arab countries, Malaysia is even closer to us”.⁹

THE AFGHAN STRUGGLE

The issue of Afghanistan and its relevance to Malaysian foreign policy arose well after Dr Mahathir took office as Prime Minister. Pressure on the Government to act in support of the *Mujahideen* struggle in Afghanistan on a co-religionist basis was clear from 1978. However, the Malaysian Government practised a policy of non-interference until the actual invasion by Russian troops in December 1979.

From that juncture, Malaysia displayed clear and considerable support for the Afghan *Mujahideen* and their attempts to regain control of Afghanistan. Such support was made evident during Parliamentary debates over the Amendment to the Diplomatic Exclusivity Act 1966 (Vienna Convention) where parallels between the Palestinian and Afghan plight as issues of national liberation were frequently drawn by many Members of Parliament, urging equal support for the Afghans.¹⁰

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was marked annually by a statement from the Minister of Foreign Affairs (usually appealing for support for the *Mujahideen* from the world community). While March 21st was also officially designated as “Afghanistan Day” and celebrated annually in Malaysia since 1982, to “help remind the world of super power intervention in the affairs of a non-aligned Muslim nation”. By 1982, Malaysians had donated some M\$400,000 (M\$ 150,000 of this directly by the Government) to a special fund for Afghan refugees. In 1985, the Afghan Refugees Humanitarian Aid Fund was established to provide mainly non-military assistance. Similar to Malaysia’s support for the PLO cause, official Malaysian concern over the Afghan plight has been represented at various international fora.¹¹

While the Malaysian government allowed the *Mujahideen* to establish an office there, Kuala Lumpur has also served as the communications link for the global distribution of news on the *Mujahideen* struggle through communications linkages between the federal capital and Peshawar in Pakistan. Scholarships have also been offered to the children of Afghan *Mujahideen* for study at universities in Malaysia. While continuing to maintain relations with the Soviet Union, Malaysia also lobbied consistently for *Mujahideen* interests, exemplified by the Prime Minister’s public statements on his visit to the Soviet Union in August 1987, expressing his concern over non-resolution of the issue.¹²

At the Fifth Islamic Summit in Kuwait in 1987, Malaysia pledged support for Afghan *Mujahideen* representation at the OIC, despite its non-acceptability to most member countries. In April 1989, the Government extended recognition to

Mujahideen guerillas as the interim government-in-exile of Afghanistan following Soviet withdrawal. Such support won Malaysia praise from guerilla representatives as “the most resolute country in supporting the *Mujahideen* struggle”.¹³

Officially, and especially within the diplomatic arena, the Malaysian Government has been at some pains to underline support for both causes as being based on strict adherence to the international principles of territorial sovereignty, non-intervention and the right of self-determination of a people. Viewed from this perspective, support for these causes is described as being grounded in long-established general foreign policy principles that explain previous Malaysian support for other causes such as that of the African National Congress’ struggle in South Africa and in the condemnation of apartheid. Indeed, Malaysia’s increasing initiatives over Palestine and Afghanistan have paralleled the Mahathir Administration’s increased affiliation with the Third World on international issues.¹⁴

The fact is, however, that both issues are also undeniably understood domestically as lying within the context of “Islamic brotherhood”, a perception in part magnified at UMNO’s behest as part of its armoury in the battle against political rivals for Islamic credentials. Indeed, as concerns the issue of Palestine, any foreign policy with an “Islamic” dimension must be understood within the various aspects of that issue: the question of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the status of Jerusalem (more clearly a religious issue), the principle of non-aggression and territorial integrity as well as opposition to Zionism as a doctrine.

UMNO Youth’s International Bureau has also proven influential in lobbying for Muslim-nationalist causes. It initiated the first official fund for Afghan refugees to be administered by the Foreign Ministry, providing funding for *Mujahideen* representation in Kuala Lumpur. It also played a particularly important role in lobbying for their recognition by the Malaysian Government. In 1989, Anwar Ibrahim, by then Education Minister, was instrumental in securing their recognition as the government in exile of Afghanistan, despite advice from the Foreign Ministry to delay the extension of such recognition; the Bureau itself lobbied the Government on upgrading the *Mujahideen* office in Kuala Lumpur to that of embassy status. In fact, Malaysia has been one of only a handful of countries to have extended such recognition, including Saudi Arabia.¹⁵

The Government has also been subjected to pressure from UMNO Youth on its policy on Israel and Zionism. The organization protested to the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and in 1989, urged other countries to cut off diplomatic and trade ties with Israel in order to force its recognition of Palestinian rights, even calling for *jihad* against Israel by all member countries of the OIC.¹⁶ Its role in mobilizing support, particularly within its Muslim-nationalist mould, is important because it indicates the increasing politicization of these issues (in part unavoidable) and the divergence between “official” Malaysian foreign policy represented by Wisma Putra and “unofficial foreign policy” as represented by an increasingly articulate section of the ruling party.

A co-religionist perspective on these issues is not particular to Malaysia; the perception of any Palestinian and Afghan future as fundamental to the concerns of the contemporary *umma* is significant in the discourse of international Islam. Yet Palestine and Afghanistan stand apart as issues in Malaysian foreign policy because they have also come to define the ideological difference between UMNO and PAS as Malay-Muslim parties as well as within UMNO itself, involving as they do a fundamental and perennial debate within Islam, of the place of nationalism as an ideology in competition with Islam.

NATIONALISM OR ISLAM?

A historical tension between political conformism and nonconformism underlies contemporary debates over the validity of nationalism or Islam as governing ideas in Muslim societies. The popularity of nationalism in defining anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements in the Muslim world after the nineteenth century was not without its detractors. *Qur'anic* exegesis has enabled support for but also objection to nationalism and the idea of the nation state. As James Piscatori explains, their historical origins and practical experience have, in many instances, invoked Muslim resistance to them as essentially Western concepts, the imitation of which might constitute *b'ida* (inappropriate and alien innovation) because it displaces the supreme principle of submission to *Allah*, and counters the universality of the *umma* by promoting a belonging of ignorance (*'asabiyya jahilyya*) whether by family, race, tribe, language, ethnicity or particular territory.¹⁷ Furthermore, some "nonconformist" thinking has emphasized the historical experience of nationalism as being no more than that of an immoral tyranny and the further enslavement of Muslims by the West. Ultimately, it is suggested that any form of sectarianism, even anti-imperialist, anti-colonial nationalism, cannot adequately substitute Islam. Yet there has also been a practical tradition of more conformist thinking on nationalism among Muslim states and thinkers, manifested in the energies behind Arab nationalism (*watanniyah*) and the idea of pan-Islamism which have tended to perceive no contradiction between loyalty to one's particular nation and to Islam.¹⁸

While significant degrees of difference have existed within either category of thinking, all have clearly also been shaped by fundamental developments in the history of twentieth-century international society, including that of the global revival of Islam since the 1970s. Understanding the tension between those who perceive the possibilities (or imperatives) of accommodation with if not acceptance of the Westphalian system of nation states and those who perceive Islam as the only valid and appropriate world philosophy or social value system is important for understanding how contemporary Muslims perceive international relations and foreign policy in particular.

Malay public awareness of the religious dimensions of these issues increased in tandem with Malaysia's increasing association with the Muslim world and official sponsorship of its post-1969 Malay-Muslim identity. This association

has been intensified by the unresolved issue of the status of Jerusalem, which remains under Israeli administration. Official Malaysian foreign policy statements have depicted Israeli actions over Jerusalem as “brazen and insolent” acts against Muslims and as being part of a “Zionist” scheme directed not only against the Palestinian people but aimed also at “undermining the *Umma* and Islam”. Dr Mahathir himself has maintained that the struggle “to redeem the dignity and territory of Jerusalem” is not the sole responsibility of the Palestinians but of all Muslims”, while his Administration’s policies have continued to draw attention to the issue. In 1984 Malaysia was one part of a delegation of Islamic ambassadors that visited US Secretary of State, George Schultz, to lobby against Congressional moves to relocate the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.¹⁹

Apart from the issue of Jerusalem, however, official government statements, particularly within international circles, have scrupulously avoided identifying any specific Islamic linkage to either the Palestinian or Afghan causes as a basis for Malaysian support. While foreign policy concerning these issues has not been specifically altered by their co-religionist linkage, they have proven to be useful in serving to legitimize the ruling party’s religious identity domestically.

Support for these “struggles” has been consistently highlighted in the Presidential speech at UMNO’s annual General Assembly. Since 1981, however, these speeches have also increasingly been paraded as proof of UMNO’s legitimacy as an Islamic organization. Indeed, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam drew such a linkage when he announced Malaysia’s successful hosting of the Asian Conference on the Question of Palestine in 1983 as proof that “Malaysia was not a Muslim country which only made empty talk”. In fact, the PAS President had claimed responsibility for the eventual government change in policy on the Afghan struggle; explained by the increasing cordiality established between visiting *Mujahideen* representatives and PAS in the period 1979–1980.²⁰

As pointed out earlier, the spectre of inter-communal conflict and the capacity for ethnic issues to cross territorial boundaries in the region, determined an official predominance of nationalist thinking as well as a Malaysian propensity for the intertwining of Malay nationalism with that of Malaysian sovereignty. Although already present in the language of Malay political contest in the 1920s and 1930s, the prominence of dissenting opinion on the question of nationalism (as an authentic ideology for Muslims) was enabled by the discourse of Islamic revivalism within Malaysia from about the 1970s.

Tensions between conformist and nonconformist thinking referred to above, have been represented in intra-Malay disputes in particular, over foreign policy employed towards the issues of Palestine and Afghanistan and the validity of support for particular parties within these individual struggles of liberation. Over time, the accommodation between nationalist and religious sentiments has proven less comfortable and has come to reflect domestic dissension over the objective of the Malay “struggle” in general—that of nationalism or of Islam.

The nationalist dimension

Malay support for the Palestinian search for a homeland and the Afghan struggle to regain theirs, reflect, in part, a Malay sentiment of prerogative right to the land expressed through a Malay nationalist idiom. This general sympathy with the plight of cultural displacement—the Malays see themselves as faced with the fundamental issue of cultural survival due to “immigrant” (particularly Chinese) pre-eminence in the economic sphere—was in fact highlighted by Dr Mahathir himself, who, early in his career, drew a parallel between Britain’s willingness (after the Second World War) to imperil the political birthright of the indigenous Malay-Muslim community in Peninsular Malaya and its corresponding conduct in Palestine.²¹

For both UMNO and the Mahathir administration co-religionist sentiment has been backed by an equally forceful appeal to this sense of Malay nationalism as a means of rallying domestic support on the issues of Palestine and Afghanistan. Their relevance to the theme of Malay unity in the face of dissension, disruption and fragmentation in Malay politics in the 1980s has been consistently alluded to by this leadership. In emphasizing the parallels between the Palestinian and Afghan scenarios and those faced by Malay nationalists against colonialism, UMNO (and government) leaders have underlined the party’s “unifying force” and its position at the forefront of Malay politics.

The perception of parallel struggle is underscored by the language of political debate concerning Palestine and Afghanistan. In drawing the same conclusions from both—that the plight of both the Palestinians and the Afghans are the result of the exploitation of a weak and divided polity by outside powers and interests—these particular foreign policy issues have worked as useful inference in the Malay context; namely as lessons in the likely consequences of continued Malay disunity. By appealing to a sense of Malay nationalism, using these examples, the point is made that the survival of the nation as a whole is threatened by the lack of Malay unity; the struggle for which UMNO has sought to uphold. As a source of Malay identity the idea of *bangsa* (race) remains integral to the idea of Malay nationalism. Yet, its tenure as a concept constituent to a popular definition of the modern Malaysian nation state is also explained by two other political facts. First, the fundamental idea of Malaysia as an inherently Malay nation and second, that the “moral authority” and legitimacy of its political elite is derived from their continued ability to “protect” this identity.

While both the Government and UMNO had been chastised previously by Islamic and *dakwah* organizations like ABIM for drawing such simple parallels and “false deductions” about these issues, Malay political rhetoric is replete with such analogies. According to Anwar Ibrahim (when President of ABIM), it was more likely that the oppressive character of the Afghan government had led to its eventual subjugation and not the fact of disunity within its Islamic community as deduced by certain Malay politicians. It is therefore somewhat ironic that some years later, he was himself to employ such parables as an UMNO politician. These have been useful in conflating the “threat” to Malay

unity from within with that of Malaysian unity from without. Malay unity through UMNO and Malaysian unity through the Barisan Nasional (BN) were essential in the face of the threat from superpowers such as the Soviet Union, if Malaysia was not to be victimized as Afghanistan had been.

Indeed, he suggested that if conflict within the Malay community were perpetuated, there was every likelihood that the situation in Afghanistan might be repeated in Malaysia. Anwar urged Malaysian youth to emulate the Mujahideen by likening their “struggle” against the Soviets to Malaysia’s fight against the Communists. Indeed, Muslims in Malaysia might usefully draw a lesson from the experience of Muslim peoples in Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Albania and South Yemen who, through their disunity, had been subjugated by Communism.²²

Appeals for Malay unity, however, have not relied solely on nationalist sentiments but have been backed by images drawn from Islam, as part of the quest for the unity of the *umma*. At the height of the “*kafir-mengkafir*” debate between UMNO and PAS in 1984, the Foreign Minister Ghazali Shafie warned that the lesson of Afghanistan was an important one for Malaysia which was itself threatened by political parties and religious bodies that sought to further fragment the Muslims and threaten Islam. Indeed, it was only through such unity that all threats to Islam including the Soviet Union and Israel (which was aided by the US) could be removed from Muslim soil.²³

While Anwar Ibrahim’s entry into UMNO signalled the considerable co-option of ABIM and certain other *dakwah* organizations, it also intensified rivalry with PAS over these international issues. His membership of UMNO has been a great asset to the party in terms of its credibility in the sphere of international Islam, but this co-option has also served to intensify UMNO’s vocal public support of the PLO and the *Mujahideen* on co-religionist terms. Indeed, his high profile role in support of the Palestinian plight has won him praise from the PLO as its strongest supporter in the region. In the run-up to his election as UMNO Youth President, he articulated his vision of such lobbying as significant to the organization’s aims, “to achieve independence, fight oppression and imperialism”.²⁴

In fact, Anwar has himself wavered between the images of Malay nationalist and Islamic leader, finding some combination between the two, even in his stand on other issues of foreign policy. He was, for instance, particularly vocal over Britain’s continued rights to the land and property of the British Resident General’s (later the British High Commissioner) former residence, Bukit Carcosa. In lobbying for its return Anwar described the issue as being “about a hill in Malaysia that is owned by others through an agreement that was unfair and incompatible with the aspirations of the struggles of the race. Since the coming of the Portuguese, many of our warriors died defending this land. If it is possible, even just an inch of our land must be prevented from falling into the hands of foreigners. Although independence was achieved relatively easily, without bloodshed, this does not mean that we are indebted to and must make a present of something to the imperialists. Independence and freedom are not for sale.” Similarly, UMNO Youth’s “natural sympathy” for the *Afghan Mujahideen*

has been articulated as being based (though not exclusively) on “struggle against a foreign enemy”.²⁵

The challenge of Islam

The religious significance of Palestine and Afghanistan to ordinary Malaysian Muslims is perhaps reflected in the frequency with which they serve as topics of sermon in Friday prayers in Malaysian mosques. The status of Jerusalem (*Baitul Muqqadis*), in particular, is indivisible for most Muslims from the question of Palestine. Although co-religionism has provided domestic political mileage for the ruling party, UMNO leaders have also appealed for perception of the Palestinian plight as being of international concern, not just of Muslims, because it involved universal rights. The alternate emphases accorded these issues by UMNO leaders suggests not only the increasing inseparability of the Islamic dimension from the resolution of the Palestinian and Afghan problems, but has confirmed their dual value in terms of political discourse in intra-Malay rivalry.²⁶

Inasmuch as the party has sought to mobilize domestic opinion by appealing to co-religionist sentiment, pressure has also come from other quarters. Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, ABIM initiated a nation-wide boycott of US goods due to the perception of its implicit support for Israeli actions. It protested at the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur, organized the celebration of a Palestinian Solidarity Day and resolved to urge the forging of a united struggle by Muslim countries to free Jerusalem from Israel by using their fullest economic influence and military resources towards creating an independent Palestinian nation.²⁷

Since 1982, this co-religionist perspective has been further promoted by PAS. Although consistent expressions of clear support for the struggle had been forthcoming since the party’s inception, a definitive ideological shift was set in train by its new leadership. It was given further expression in foreign policy attitudes clearly articulated in the presidential address to the annual party general assembly and in its bi-weekly party publication *Harakah*.

At its Twenty-Ninth Assembly in 1983, there was an extensive debate over the propriety of PAS support for a body like the PLO whose secular nature and aims were “clear and perpetual”, as well as over the mapping out of a new strategy towards the issue. From the perspective of the Party’s then Vice-President, Ustaz Fadzhl Noor, the significance of the Palestinian struggle lay in its religious mission—“For PAS, Palestine is the land that bore many prophets and because of that it belongs to all Muslims whose responsibility it is to free the land from Israeli occupation.”

The Party’s opposition to movements (political or “so-called Muslim”), including liberation movements, that base their struggle on nationalism or any other ideology to the detriment or demotion of Islam was clearly outlined in the presidential address to the 1985 General Assembly. Noting the dangers of “*Gerakan Assabiyah Antarabangsa*” (International Racist or Sectarian Movements) to Malaysia and the region (perceived as being headed by the US),

the President, Haji Yusuf Rawa, spent much attention on the issue of Afghanistan. In explaining its initiative, PAS condemned UMNO's philosophy because of its basic premise of "narrow nationalism" (ethnic chauvinism). Domestically, the party has continued its intensive religio-political attacks on UMNO as *haram* (taboo), as an organization basing itself on *assabiyah* and therefore as un-Islamic.²⁸

UMNO was, however, also facing a fundamental challenge from within its ranks. A debate on the role of nationalism or even "narrow nationalism" as the basis of the Malay "struggle" within the party was indicative of growing tensions between younger members (many of whom were part of "new blood" injected into UMNO as a response to the Islamic challenge in the late 1970s and early 1980s) and the older, more established membership. Although Dr Mahathir, prior to assuming office, articulated his view of the commonalities between Islam and nationalism as powerful sources of Malay identity, his Deputy, Datuk Musa Hitam was in the same year critical of UMNO leaders who were trying to be "too Islamic" without understanding its philosophies. He warned that "anti-national elements" lay in wait to capitalize on such mistakes in order to create chaos in the country. Accusations were simultaneously directed at "Malay anti-nationalist republicans" and "pro-religious groups" who were destroying the Malay race by separating Islam and Malay nationalism.²⁹

By 1985, there were many within UMNO who were registering concern that, due to its increasing attention towards Islamization, the Party was steadily being steered away from its "original struggle" on behalf of Malay nationalism; a view already hinted at by the Deputy President's address to the UMNO Assembly in 1983. Leaders and Supreme Council members such as Datuk Musa Hitam, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie were somewhat representative of this "old-guard". The party organ, *Merdeka*, between August and November 1985, articulated this problem, suggesting that nationalism was still vital to the party philosophy.³⁰ While the debate involved intra-party dissension over its changing character, this was also reflective of factionalism and personal political rivalries. Dr Mahathir's Islamization policy gave a great boost to the careers of politicians who were somehow linked with an "Islamic" background and basis of support; a development resented by many other politicians whose rise to party and national rank had taken the more traditional route.

UMNO's response to such attacks were equally indicative of how and why the question of Islam and Malaysia's support of the Palestinian and Afghan struggles came to involve domestic political rivalry. Support for nationalist struggles that increasingly invoke the language of Islamic struggle are important to the ruling party because of the credence and legitimacy that they have lent to UMNO's own domestic political struggle. This support is also convenient because it reinforces and legitimizes a compatibility between Islamic and nationalist ideals.

The point of departure, if not confusion, in this tension between Islam and nationalism, at least in the Malaysian context, lies in the "undefined" debate over what the concept of nationalism itself constitutes. In Malay political

culture, the term has been given a complicating twist by the large presence of non-Malay-Muslims who claim an equal right to the land. The lack of appeal (and sometimes suppression) of cross-ethnic parties and political interests within early anti-colonial and independence struggles, the capacity of UMNO to champion Malay prerogative to the land, the constitutional contract that enshrined this, and the post-1969 restructuring of politics and society ensured that UMNO's brand of Malay nationalism would predominate although this would increasingly be redefined with reference to Islam.

Indeed, as Anthony Milner points out, prevailing ideas of political community in Malaysia have been historically shaped by the ideological variants of Malay nationalism (*bangsa*), Islam (*umma*) and monarchy (*kerajaan*), none of which are fixed. Indeed, it is the contest as well as some manner of accommodation between them that has helped contour the political concepts and ideals in Malaysian discourse that hold a dominating significance.³¹

In its more contemporary manifestation as a religious movement, PAS has argued that Islam prohibits the "nationalism" promoted by UMNO, that it is alien, since it is essentially a Western ideology and that, in fact, it ultimately damages the cause of Islam in Malaysia. UMNO on the other hand, has defended its continued adherence to "nationalist" principles (which it claims as being different from the Western concept) because it is precisely such "struggle" that has protected the Malays. Party leadership and the Administration, however, also claim this nationalism as protective of Malaysian territorial integrity. Ultimately, the concept of Malay exclusivity and prerogative has held sway, and Malay nationalism has come to be considered as fundamental to the country's security.³²

In his address to the UMNO General Assembly in 1985, Dr Mahathir launched an attack on those who claimed that nationalism was contrary to Islam by emphasizing the former's power to "protect" Malays who were all Muslims, just as it had "defended" the Muslims in Afghanistan or Lebanon. By 1985, as intra-Malay-Muslim rivalry was taking its toll, he warned Malaysians to beware of "certain circles" who were making efforts to "tarnish" Malaysia's image through false rumours about Islam, instigating Muslims to oppose the Government, while urging that the spirit of nationalism be maintained in the face of a neo-colonialist onslaught. In the same year, the theme for the national *Quran* reading competition was designated as "Nationalism—the basis of the *umma's* unity".³³

His 1986 Assembly address also emphasized UMNO's standing as a Malay nationalist organization that nevertheless gave great importance to Islam because nationalism "gave strength" to the Islamic struggle and brotherhood. UMNO would continue to adhere to its nationalist spirit—a spirit reflected by the Afghan *Mujahideen*—which was a vital means towards preserving and protecting the integrity of the Malays as well as the territorial integrity of Malaysia.³⁴

The changing language of intra-Malay political debate is reflective also of significant developments in the way that Palestinians and others in the Muslim

world have come to perceive the nature and object of the Palestinian struggle itself. Nels Johnson, for instance, points to the increased significance that Islamic language and symbols have gradually come to occupy in the articulation of Palestinian nationalism.³⁵ One “official” Malaysian perspective suggests that the Islamic concept of *jihad* contributes greatly to an understanding of Malaysian attitudes on the issues of Palestine and Afghanistan. Such a view emphasizes, however, a wider reading of such language than is normally understood in the West. The concept of *jihad* then bears a defensive connotation in its promotion of Palestinian rights through religious duty and attitudes rather than through aggression, by seeking to promote the interdependent, transcendent and immanent security of the *umma*.³⁶

On the other hand, the Chairman of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, has himself demonstrated some caution in any overt reference to the co-religionist dimension of the Palestinian struggle for fear of arousing the ire of governments of largely Muslim countries such as Indonesia which have specifically sought to avoid the engagement of international Islamic sentiment, for their own reasons. On his visit to Indonesia in 1984, for instance, he emphasized that the PLO was a nationalist movement embracing all creeds, and that it was not an Islamic movement.³⁷

The confusion of terms in the Malaysian case however appears, to some extent, to be deliberate. By underlining its role as the sole defender of Malay nationalism and by stretching the domestic debate over the legitimacy of this ideology to include the concept of nationalism as a concept of territoriality and sovereignty, UMNO challenges PAS (and all others critical of Malay nationalism) on a point of loyalty to the state. In combining its ideology of Malay nationalism with Islam, UMNO has claimed a more “appropriate” defence of the Malaysian nation, perhaps contesting the “un-patriotic” philosophy of PAS’s Islam (itself professed as devoid of ethnic nationalism) as a threat to Malaysian sovereignty.

UMNO leaders have also extended the argument that Islamic universalism itself could only be realized after Muslim communities had secured their own national strength while the potential for accommodation between these two concepts has also been assented to by some religious authorities. In 1980, an UMNO *‘alim* pointed out that the development of Malaysian nationhood as well as Malay nationality had in fact served only as a means of “preparation” for international understanding and harmony.³⁸ Such thinking is justified through *Surah* 49:13 of the *Quran*, which says that *Allah* divided men into nations and tribes so that they might come to know each other. Yet *Qur’anic* exegesis has also allowed for the invocation of the same verse in support of nonconformist thinking on nationalism. As James Piscatori has pointed out, by emphasizing the need for recognizing the similarities rather than differences between Muslims (in the verse), such theological argument also calls to mind the example of the Prophet’s earliest community said to be distinct in its complete disregard for any forms of discrimination.³⁹

Political rhetoric extended by the ruling party continues to project any attempt to divide the Malays as a “neo-colonialist” threat. The language of

Islamic nationalism has thus conveniently come to be used with reference both to “narrow nationalism” (as symbolized by UMNO’s “protector” role) as well as to Malaysian nationalism (symbolized by the Administration’s protection of Malaysia’s identity as a viable nation state).⁴⁰

Indeed, in the General Election year of 1986, when PAS had made its own efforts at addressing and attracting the non-Muslim community, particularly the Chinese, by emphasizing that Islam did not discriminate between its citizens (unlike UMNO’s form of Malay nationalism), it was crucial that the ruling party meet this challenge to its “protector” role, as the promoter of Malay nationalism and as the only “moderate” party that was able to co-operate with the non-Malays in order to form the Government. At the General Assembly that year, Dr Mahathir reiterated that Islam and nationalism were not opposed to each other and that as an “Islamic” party, UMNO in continuing to “protect the special rights of the Malays would not forgo this responsibility in order to fish for votes”.⁴¹

Despite the ruling party’s resounding victory in that Election, it has continued to remain vulnerable to attacks on its identity. This has been reflected in its own defensiveness on these issues and by its co-option of the rhetoric and language of its domestic opposition. In 1987, for instance, when addressing the Fifth OIC Summit, the Prime Minister suggested that political problems in the Middle East and the continuing war between Iran and Iraq were in fact symptomatic of the continuing power of “narrow nationalism” over Islamic brotherhood while acknowledging the reality of “separate countries and races” that do not threaten “the *ummah* as a whole”.⁴²

Nevertheless, UMNO’s brand of nationalism has remained vulnerable to charges of perpetuating the weakness of Islam in Malaysia. As the PAS newspaper, *Harakah*, has pointed out, Muslim countries that have gained their independence through nationalism have received their basis for existence from the *mustakbirin* (oppressors) of the West and the East, and this has restricted the practice of Islam to the personal and private realm only. Hardly what is required of Islam’s true believers in the creation of the *Dar-al-Islam* (abode of Islam) over the *Dar-al-Harb* (abode of war/unbelievers). Indeed, international Islamic movements, such as PAS, or indeed “Muslim” Palestinians cannot rely on secular Muslim organizations such as UMNO or the PLO to establish Islamic countries.⁴³

As Palestine and Afghanistan have become central to this debate between nationalism and Islam they also hold clear, if easily exploitable parallels (at least in terms of domestic political rivalry), between the nationalist (UMNO’s) and the Islamic cause in Malaysia (primarily represented by PAS in the political arena, but supported by a variety of *dakwah* and other religious bodies and sources in a more general sense). PAS’s intention to associate itself only with those movements basing their “struggle” on the *Quran* and *Hadith*, has led to its exclusive support of those within the “Palestinian struggle” who more clearly seek “freedom of the *umma*” and the establishment of a state based on Islamic principles. As the party ideologue and Vice-President, Haji Hadi Awang, has

emphasized, this is due to the fact that the issue of Palestine is one concerning “Islam and the *umma*, not just that of the PLO or of the Arabs”. Indeed, the PLO’s past failures to obtain a homeland for the Palestinians has been attributed to their “un-Islamic” struggle and as a secular organization perceived as merely a pawn of the big powers, the Security Council and the UN—none of which have ever proved conducive to the toleration if not the promotion of Islam. The party condemned the PLO’s acceptance of UN Security Council Resolutions 181 and 242 (which were depicted as being representative of the “immorality of the nationalists”) because they directly recognized the right of the “Zionist” and “unlawful” state of Israel to exist.⁴⁴

PAS’s interests and faith behind support for an “Islamic” Palestinian and Afghan struggle towards the liberation of their “homeland” draws particular lessons, no doubt, from its own experience and the perceived fate of “Islamically-based” parties in Malaysian political history. As Haji Hadi has pointed out, the Islamic defenders of Palestinian and Afghan rights must beware. While their role and struggle is significant if not central to the attainment of liberation for their peoples, it is the nationalists who claim leadership and victory when that independence has been attained.⁴⁵

In the midst of debate over the position of Islam, it is important to note that the backlash of strong Malay nationalist sentiment particularly in the late 1980s, appears to have been a reassertion against the onslaught and challenge from Islamic forces in intra-Malay rivalry (manifested in the UMNO party split of 1987) as well as within the context of a multi-racial environment. Controversy over the accommodation between nationalism and Islam as a basis for the Malay “struggle” has also emanated from other religious quarters. The head of the *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia* (Malaysian Ulama’s Association—PUM), has perceived Islam as a vital means of identity for the Malay race that protected it from the threats of outside powers which might be realized if Malaysia’s Islamic leadership ranks were not united, claiming “the country only needs the camps of Muslim and non-Muslim”. He has also argued that the problem should be viewed as an Islamic and not just a Palestinian or Arab issue. Even the announcement of the unilateral establishment of a Palestinian state in 1988 gained an uncertain reception from many Islamic quarters in Malaysia, some noting that it spelt the failure of Palestinian nationalism to regain all of the holy land belonging to Muslims.⁴⁶

In 1988, the ABIM President Siddiq Fadhil publicly maintained that only Islamic groups had the means “to remove Jews from Palestinian soil” and called for the support of Islamic movements to free Palestine from Israeli aggression, reflecting as they do the “true Islamic struggle” and not that of socialists, nationalists or Communists or of any other forms of *assabiyah*. Indeed, only “*iman* (faith) and *jihad* (holy war) could resolve the problems in West Asia”.⁴⁷ In the same year, PAS support for an Islamic Palestinian struggle was intensified with the launch of the *intifadah* in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was perceived not only as a means of reacting against Israel but as a movement to free Jerusalem. PAS has since articulated more clear support

for HAMAS, the radical Islamic organization that has contested the PLO's leadership of the Palestinian movement. The announcement of the establishment of the nation of Palestine in 1988 prompted the Party's conclusion that this was proof of the failure of the PLO's struggle based on nationalism.⁴⁸ Its exclusion from Government-hosted conferences on these issues has not, however, prevented its active participation at other international Islamic fora where it has obtained consensus on its views.⁴⁹

In fact, the party itself played host to a conference in 1989 to commemorate the first anniversary of the uprising in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza and the ninth anniversary of the revival of *Jihad* in Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, these have served as important venues for the party in underlining its rejection of nationalism as a governing concept for Muslims. In drawing comparisons between the plight of the Palestinians and that of the experience of the Malays, the party Vice-President projected the idea that nationalism as an ideology did not in fact give the Malays prerogative to the land (this being the right of the native or indigenous, peoples), although a struggle based on Islam would endow them with such rights.⁵⁰

The attendance and participation at the Conference of prominent members of *Semangat '46* was also demonstrative of the growing perception of the inseparability of religion from the question of establishing a Palestinian homeland, among other Malay nationalists. A working paper presented at the conference by the former Foreign Minister, Datuk Rais Yatim, drew attention to this indivisibility, although in more muted terms, linking the interests of the PLO with the future of Islam in the region, the struggle to free *Al-Quds* as a challenge against Zionism; a challenge already undertaken by the Afghan *Mujahideen*, for instance, and as being part of Malaysia's role within the OIC.⁵¹

It is worth noting that most material Malaysian support channelled towards the Palestinian and Afghan liberation causes and their refugees has been done so privately. The Government's adherence to a basically "welfare" approach to these issues has brought criticism and challenge from many Islamic groups who have articulated an expectation of greater "commitment" because of their religious importance.

Despite the establishment of a *Tabung Rakyat Palestine* (Fund for the Palestinian People) which is managed by the Government as well as the *Agensi Bantuan Rakyat Malaysia* (The Malaysian People's Agency for Aid) established in 1989 for the collection of contributions for the Afghan government (in exile), actual aid administered by these bodies comes directly from the Malaysian public. What is more, these private sources tend to be characterised as largely Malay-Muslim or at least hold a connection with such an identity. Indeed, prior to the establishment of these funds, the Government's contributions to these causes were little known or publicized. In 1988, an Opposition MP noted that while the initiative in establishing the Palestinian Fund was welcomed, the Government itself should equally meet the amount of aid extended by the public. Moral (and limited material) support for these causes, on the part of the Administration, has in fact been defended by the Foreign Ministry as being the

most effective form of aid rather than through Malaysia's actual physical involvement.⁵²

Other forms of Islamic voluntarism among the Malaysian public have however continued to provide a challenge to the Government. Well publicized visits by organizations such as ABIM and the student PKPIM have continued to help raise and sustain religious consciousness over these issues. The co-religionist dimension has also given rise to some other challenges for UMNO and the Government, from other quarters not otherwise directly involved in the political process. In 1982, ABIM's Secretary General floated the idea of sending paramedical personnel to help the war victims in Lebanon or even "fighters" to help the Palestinians in their war against Israel. Whether such goals were eventually realized is uncertain, but reports have occasionally surfaced over independent action by extra-political organizations in the Afghan "struggle". At its 1989 General Assembly, for instance, a student leader from the UMNO club in New Zealand, reported that some Malaysian student volunteers were being trained in a third country to participate in the *Mujahideen* struggle. Similarly, the PAS newspaper *Harakah* reported receiving notification, in 1989, of a few Malaysian volunteers who had been killed in action fighting with the *Mujahideen* in Afghanistan—and whom the party identifies as *syahid* (martyrs) in a "just war".⁵³ While the Government has continued to maintain that its official policy is not to encourage these forms of support, such voluntarism, even if only present to a limited extent, offers symbolic challenge to the limits of UMNO's own attitude and support for such causes.

Malay opinion on these international issues has thus increasingly been focused on the relative value of their Islamic versus their nationalist dimensions and has provided fuel for a renewed attack by PAS on UMNO's status. They have also reflected larger debates within the Islamic world and a general consciousness of global Islamic issues among an increasingly literate and urbane domestic Muslim public informed and sustained by the plethora of local and international Islamic publications widely available and freely circulated in Malaysia exemplifying the increasing international reassertion of Islam.⁵⁴ Despite domestic interest in the religious dimensions of these issues, support for them has not been confined entirely to the Malay community.

NON-MUSLIM SUPPORT: THE MALAYSIAN IDENTITY

Wider support for the Palestinian plight has traditionally been forthcoming from a variety of quarters, beyond the Malay-Muslim community. Most political parties and non-governmental organizations in Malaysia, cutting across racial and religious boundaries have consistently articulated a moral empathy for the Palestinian plight as a struggle for the self-determination of a people. Such empathy is linked to the projection of a Third World nationalism that has obtained popular support and collective consciousness within Malaysia.⁵⁵

Yet the expression of significant dissatisfaction by non-Malay political parties has accompanied increasing identification of the Palestinian issue as co-

religionist within Malaysia. It has been noted that its democratic socialism notwithstanding, the DAP's muted response to the tragedy of Palestinian refugees during the 1982 conflict in Beirut (following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon) might have been explained by the "erroneous" perception of the issue in local circles as a Malay-Muslim cause. In 1983, prior to Malaysia's hosting of the Asian Conference on the Question of Palestine, the DAP did in fact articulate concern that there should be neither racial nor religious reasons for supporting the Palestinian cause because the focus of the issue centred on the right to self-determination, a cause which the party supported unequivocally. The DAP has thus urged Malaysians to understand the Palestinian problem as not just Islamic, underlined by the fact that there were many non-Muslim Palestinians fighting for the right to a homeland. The depth of sentiment over injustices towards Palestinians has also prompted the Youth section of the DAP to equate Israeli actions against Palestinians with that of Nazi crimes against the Jews.⁵⁶

Yasser Arafat's visit to Malaysia in 1984, occasioned a large "national rally", organized as a show of support for the visiting PLO leader. Arafat's visit was an obvious coup for the Administration and the rally was an unusual exercise on the occasion of a state visit, itself indicating the level of emotional appeal that the issue held for Malaysians. Despite the claim by several politicians of non-partisanship in promising to fill the venue, it was however clear that the rally was largely an UMNO affair, underscored by minuscule non-Malay-Muslim attendance. Against the expression of non-Malay uneasiness at the probable use of public audience for partisan benefit by Opposition parliamentarians, a Ministry of Home Affairs representative refuted this, stressing that the visit had been made at the invitation of the Government.⁵⁷

ANTI-ZIONISM

Support for the causes of Palestine and Afghanistan within an intertwining nationalist and co-religionist framework has been made more complex by the perception of Zionism as being specifically an international force that poses a threat not just to the territorial integrity of individual countries but to Islam as well. Global Islamic consensus locating Zionism as being specifically directed against Muslim nation states and as ideologically opposed to Islam, expressed (by some accounts) through its subtle control of the world economy, the media and through the implicit support of the US, has been steadily built over time. Even as Zionism itself is being re-worked between its variants of orthodoxy, socialism, revisionism and nationalism, its conflicting perspectives of global inclusion and group exclusivity have rendered it problematic for Muslim communities (themselves involved in self-definition through such dynamic processes). Accordingly, Malaysia was one of 73 countries that voted, in 1975, in favour of the controversial UN resolution that determined Zionism to be a form of racism and its exercise a policy of racial discrimination.⁵⁸

Anti-Zionism has not, however, been confined to the Malay community, obtaining consistent support from other political parties, including the DAP as

well as social consciousness movements such as Aliran. It has constituted an important element of general Malaysian support for the Palestinian cause located within a larger popular consciousness and expression of a Third World nationalism.⁵⁹ It must also be understood, however, within the context of the religious climate that Dr Mahathir has himself helped to promote. While official Malaysian foreign policy has given some attention to this stance, intense and involved opposition to Zionism has been more particularly a Mahathir Administration initiative.

Dr Mahathir has in fact projected himself as a staunch anti-Zionist leader. He has repeatedly publicized his belief that Zionism is a threat to the well-being of Malaysia and has even accused his political opponents of being unwitting parties to such a conspiracy. He has, more than any other Malaysian Prime Minister, been willing to publicly criticize implicit US support for Zionism, frequently in strong language although this has occasionally been muted. The strength of his personal conviction of “the Zionist threat” is undeniable and in more recent times has led to the conclusion that active Malaysian support for the Palestinian cause has gone beyond the fulfilment of a domestic function. His earliest campaigns for Palestinian rights marked his identity as a Third Worldist and Malay nationalist sensitive to the rights of the world’s disenfranchised. He has condemned the US supply of weaponry to “an international delinquent” for “nothing less than murder” and for their “hypocrisy and double standards” in human rights yet helping to “perpetuate the misery of the Palestinians”. Much of his frustration with the US is also to do with the alleged strength of the “US Jewish lobby” that has been seen to have impeded Malaysian attempts towards the international settlement of the Palestinian question.⁶⁰ These anti-Zionist campaigns have received the support of a large cross-section of Malaysian political interests, but it has not been exempted from co-option into domestic intra-Malay rivalry.

PAS has, in the past, accused high-ranking UMNO members of involvement in Freemasonry, perceived as holding a connection to Zionist and “Jewish” ideologies. In fact, PAS has maintained that Malaysia remains vulnerable to such influence and exploitation because of the Government’s over-reliance on Western models for economic development and on foreign investors, a prime means by which “Jews and Christians” influence the politics and economy of a country and provide avenues by which they might attempt to halt the resurgence of Islam. By 1982, UMNO Youth itself urged the Party’s Supreme Council to verify the extent of influence of Freemasonry and other Zionist organizations in Malaysia because “these movements were opposed to Islam”.⁶¹

In February 1982, the Kuwaiti black-listing of a local company (due to its connections with Israel), similarly embarrassed the Malaysian Government at a time when the new Administration was trying to build its economic relations with the Muslim world (Kuwait then playing a most promising role). In fact, UMNO and the Government have been intermittently challenged by PAS on its links with all foreign investors and organizations alleged to have connections to Zionist organizations.⁶²

Dr Mahathir has himself displayed a personal sensitivity to foreign reporting of internal UMNO dissension, commonly citing these as Zionist attempts at undermining Malaysia. Indeed, similar opinion has been expressed by the Foreign Ministry itself over the power of Zionism to “distort” facts and “manipulate international opinion”, resulting in the Ministry’s publication of a book in 1983 “to correct such images”.⁶³ Foreign press reports over intra-UMNO dissension over the “Look East Policy”, similarly prompted accusations from the Prime Minister of “campaigns” by developed countries to undermine Malaysia through internationally published “untruths”.

The strength of anti-Zionist sentiment in Malaysia may be explained, in part, by a growing Malay awareness of their own association with a universal Muslim identity. The perception of a long-standing Zionist threat to Malay-Muslim integrity and global Islamic aspirations has also received confirmation from religious authority such as the PUM, which has warned of the subtle tactics used in such endeavours by Zionists, even strategies of attempting to speak through international Islamic personalities.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, and partially through political rhetoric, the confusion of anti-Zionist sentiment with that of anti-Semitism has also been encouraged. The interchange of such sentiment has been articulated not only by PAS and some official *ulama* but by the Government itself.

In 1984, for instance, the New York Philharmonic’s scheduled visit to Kuala Lumpur was cancelled following the Ministry of Information’s official objections to part of its scheduled repertoire on grounds that the Government did not encourage the public performance of works of “Jewish origin”. Confusion over Malaysia’s anti-Zionist policy was intensified by subsequent comments made by certain politicians and government officers, prompting a clarification by the then Foreign Minister, Datuk Rais Yatim, that Malaysia was “only opposed to Zionism and not the Jewish people or the existence of Israel as had been assumed by several countries”. It is significant that the occasion he chose to make this statement was at an UMNO gathering and that the Foreign Minister was himself to be part of intra-UMNO dissension over foreign policy pursued by Dr Mahathir. Nevertheless, the incident was to build into one of some international import, bringing a formal protest from the US Chairman of the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs, that the Malaysian government had acted in “patently discriminatory, prejudiced and anti-Semitic” ways and that this was damaging Malaysian-US relations. Malaysian Youth organizations in Washington, on the other hand, threatened to hold demonstrations in front of the White House if Malaysia was to be “bullied” in such manner.⁶⁵

In spite (or because) of the widespread support for anti-Zionism, Dr Mahathir has himself demonstrated a capacity for employing such sentiment towards influencing domestic political rivalry. To some extent, the Prime Minister’s intermittent prioritization for the particular causes of Palestine and Afghanistan, over and above other foreign policy considerations, helped create an atmosphere in which his Administration’s foreign policy came under greater scrutiny and were fair game for domestic political challenge. One particular incident helps to

explain the myriad interests involved and demonstrates why the Palestinian issue has come to play such an important role in intra-Malay rivalry.

THE HERZOG INCIDENT

In the light of such substantial anti-Zionist sentiment and policy, public acrimony was aroused, not surprisingly, when it was announced that the neighbouring country of Singapore was to host the visit of the Israeli President, Chaim Herzog, in November 1986. The issue itself, the depth of animosity expressed and its aftermath can, however, only be more clearly understood within the context of the intense and seriously threatening political competition that the Mahathir Administration faced, at the time, from within its own ranks and its interplay with the factors of Islam, nationalism and anti-Zionism described above.

The Administration's increased attention towards the Palestinian cause and its greater focus on the threat of Zionism to Malaysia and the region have in part, also affected its relationships with other countries, particularly the United States. While much of this change might be limited to public rhetoric, its significance has been in its capacity to spark serious diplomatic tension, which has in turn affected domestic politics and brought with it increasing intra-UMNO dissension over such policies.

It was clear that by 1986, serious differences over the policies and style of Dr Mahathir's leadership were surfacing within UMNO with greater frequency, publicly underscored by the abrupt resignation of the Deputy Prime Minister from his governmental (but not his Party) post in February 1986. As the split became more obvious and Dr Mahathir's political authority was placed under greater scrutiny, the Administration displayed heightened sensitivity to the intense publicity and media attention given to the issue. These were increasingly referred to as "attacks" by outside interests on its credibility and image.

Although intra-UMNO differences ranged over a host of policy issues and strategies (including Dr Mahathir's foreign policy, in particular his anti-Zionism), the Administration was particularly vulnerable at the time to challenges over the state of the Malaysian economy which was in the throes of an exacting recession. The saliency of this economic context is underlined by the fact that ethnic harmony and political stability are predicated on the consistent growth of the Malaysian economy, creating an expanding pie capable of accommodating virtually all economic interests. In its absence, inter and intra-ethnic tensions and issues hold the capacity to take centre stage.⁶⁶ Furthermore the Herzog affair occurred not long after a General Election in which UMNO, in the face of intense challenge from PAS, had been forced to defend the ideological validity of its Malay nationalist identity over and above Islam. Added to this were pressures on the ruling party from non-Malay youth leaders, both within and outside the BN, over claims of racial bias in the implementation of national policies.⁶⁷

In February 1986, the UMNO Youth leader (and prominent Mahathir supporter), Anwar Ibrahim, accused "certain foreign countries" of trying to

undermine the Malaysian Government due to their dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister's "boldness" on foreign issues such as Palestine and Afghanistan. By May, as the recession worsened and press speculation on his Administration's capacity to cope intensified, Dr Mahathir accused the media (local and more particularly foreign) of being pawns of "the Jewish lobby" intent on bringing down the Government and destabilising Malaysia. *The Asian Wall Street Journal* in particular, was condemned as a Zionist tool because of its allegations against the Malaysian Finance Minister of manipulations of the stock market.⁶⁸ Much of this suspicion was in fact fuelled by the falling world price of Malaysian commodities, particularly that of palm oil which was believed by Malaysia to be sabotaged by the US soya bean oil lobby. By 1987, the Government was taking specific steps to counter the "smear campaign" while PAS organized demonstrations against this lobby in front of the US embassy.

This "threat" was given more substantial articulation, in October 1986, when the Prime Minister informed Parliament of a Zionist plot to destabilize the country by employing a host of instruments including the mass media. Dr Mahathir had earlier made a direct link between this threat and the Government's support of Palestinian and Arab rights in West Asia, alluding to its probable direction against himself or his leadership of the party. Announcing that individuals and groups had been made use of, knowingly or otherwise, by "these Zionists" in order to discredit the Government and weaken the economy by exaggerating certain issues, the Prime Minister promised immediate action to counter such threats, before they could "influence and poison the thinking of the people and of investors".⁶⁹

Further alarm was sounded a month later when the Home Minister disclosed that "Zionists" had provided financial support in the region of M\$ 1 million to a Western group (with Christian organizational connections) to conduct a smear campaign against the Malaysian Government and that it was closely monitoring "the Zionist movement based in a neighbouring country". Such claims however, invited criticism of hypocrisy and "paranoia" about opposition to the Administration. PAS, for instance, claimed that UMNO itself had hired the firm of Saatchi & Saatchi—"a company owned by Zionists" to handle its election campaign a few months earlier.⁷⁰

In fact, Dr Mahathir had already been lobbied (in 1982) by the (multi-racial, multi-religious) Joint Action Committee for the Palestinian Struggle over the alleged presence and function of Israeli intelligence in the Southeast Asian region, based in Singapore; a claim echoed by Siddiq Fadhil, the ABIM President in addressing the 1982 Palestinian Solidarity Day celebrations, noting its presence as threatening ASEAN. Fearing this threat to Malaysian as well as regional security, they urged a Government review of attitudes to and relations with the US and other big powers, the lobbying of ASEAN countries to sever ties with Israel and also met with the Singapore High Commissioner in November 1982 to express similar concern. A Penang UMNO Youth branch urged the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Islamic Centre in Kuala Lumpur to investigate the alleged circulation of Israeli propaganda pamphlets from

Singapore to Malaysian heads of government departments and business leaders.⁷¹

It is however, probable that much of Dr Mahathir's anti-Zionist rhetoric in 1986 had been delivered without the full knowledge of the impending visit by the Israeli President to Singapore. Nevertheless, an advance official announcement of the visit by Singapore elicited strong public protest precisely against Malaysia's official adherence to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of another country. In fact, the dynamic behind building protest demonstrated the entrenchment of perceptions about the co-religionist (given greater force by anti-Zionism) and nationalist (reflective of the Malay nationalist struggle) dimensions of the Palestinian issue as inter-linked. This effectively mobilized serious large-scale opposition that held the capacity to threaten the ruling party's religio-political credibility. Admittedly, the circumstances were complicated by UMNO's particular political and economic vulnerability at the time and the fact that the dispute concerned the actions of a neighbouring Chinese dominant state that had once been part of Malaysia. In the event, the few weeks preceding the visit allowed for the coalition of a variety of political forces to be mobilized against it. Significantly, such protest was later to be officially surmised as holding the ulterior objective of embarrassing the Mahathir Administration.⁷²

The UMNO Youth wing of the party's Kedah branch (Dr Mahathir's home state), supported by ABIM, publicly expressed anger once the visit was officially announced, criticizing the invitation as an act of insensitivity towards Malaysian feelings. Its own haste in condemning the visit might be partially explained by PAS's intensive and partially successful efforts at expanding its political base in Kedah in 1986, prior to the General Elections. Indeed, shortly before Herzog's arrival, the UMNO General Assembly held in September 1986 was notable for the stridency with which Malay demands for racial preference beyond 1990 (following the expiration of the NEP) had been articulated, which, in turn, bore some relation to PAS's attempts in the same year to woo Chinese voters.⁷³

At any rate, co-religionist opposition gained praise from foreign Muslim sources. Arab envoys in Kuala Lumpur issued a joint communiqué, through the PLO office, condemning the visit as "hurtful" to the Arab world and to Muslims. As the articulation of public opposition in Malaysia multiplied, Saudi Arabia also pledged itself fully behind the Malaysian stand and Saudi papers carried reports of the protests. The WAMY (World Assembly of Muslim Youth) representative in Kuala Lumpur cited the visit as constituting implicit Singaporean support for Israel's "expansionist Zionist influence" in the Asia-Pacific region, while editorial opinion in the major Malay language dailies, echoed this, labelling Singapore a "Second Israel" and expressing fear over the long-term effect of the visit on regional stability.⁷⁴

Amidst varied calls for the severance of diplomatic relations, air and rail links, the Malaysian water supply to Singapore, and dramatic PAS demonstrations at the Singapore High Commission and US embassy in Kuala

Lumpur, including the burning of the Israeli flag, it was clear that party and Government credibility would be seriously damaged if such anger was not managed to UMNO's advantage. Subsequently, the Malaysian diplomatic representative to Singapore was temporarily recalled although the Government's initial stance of non-interference was maintained. Indeed, Dr Mahathir sought to down play this diplomatic move when he insisted, at the MCA's General Assembly a few days later, that the visit would not affect bilateral relations.

Others within his Administration did not, however, display similar restraint. Anwar Ibrahim, then Agriculture Minister and UMNO Youth chief warned that the visit could affect friendly relations between Malaysia and Singapore and cause tension within the country. Datuk Abdullah Badawi, another Supreme Council member and later Defence Minister, also criticized Singapore's invitation as unwise and contrary to the sentiments of its neighbours. While cautioning against extremist actions, Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, the chief minister of Trengganu, maintained that Singapore should show some consideration for Muslim feelings in Malaysia. It is perhaps unsurprising that all three were successful contenders for the three posts of UMNO Vice-President, five months later.⁷⁵

Indeed, the diplomatic action taken thus far was deemed insufficient by many who opposed the visit and UMNO Youth re-iterated a call to the Government to act "firmly", arguing against the maintenance of diplomatic relations with "a country supporting the Zionist struggle", at a Palestinian Action Committee (PAC) meeting. A review of ties was also proposed by two former Malaysian Prime Ministers and some members of royalty who interpreted Singapore's actions as insulting to all Muslims. In fact, by allowing military co-operation and exercises with Singapore to continue, some Malaysian leaders were accused of insensitivity and of abetting a grave security risk to the country.⁷⁶

While co-religionist appeal helped greatly towards mobilizing opposition to the Herzog visit, there was a considerable amount of non-sectarian support from organizations such as the PAC, the Chinese Organizations' Civil Rights Committee, Aliran and the DAP who pointedly articulated their non-partisanship.⁷⁷ Although the Government did convey satisfaction at their participation, continued expressions of opposition led to suspicions of their political motives (i.e. directed against the Administration).⁷⁸ On the other hand, although supportive of the official stand, component non-Malay parties of the BN such as the MCA, the MIC and Gerakan, in opposing Zionism, also cautioned that it was "something far away" and that the rebuilding of the domestic economy should be given greater priority.

In fact, as emotions heightened, any temperance of attitude was highly suspect. A reported statement by the Deputy Prime Minister Encik Ghafar Baba, reaffirming Singapore's sovereignty and suggesting that the government exercise great caution before taking further action, had to be retracted by the national news agency, while the acting Foreign Minister subsequently issued a promise that the Government would not ignore "the people's feelings".⁷⁹

At the commencement of the Israeli President's visit, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry issued a formal protest note through the Singapore High Commissioner citing this as "provocation" on the part of Singapore. Defending its public image, the Foreign Minister announced in Parliament that Malaysia had not been informed of the visit, while reaffirming its support for the Palestinians as not only co-religionist but as also being based on human rights. Officially, then, the Herzog visit was perceived as a demonstration of Singapore's insensitivity to its neighbours' interests and policies.

As rivalry for political credibility increased, calls for the severance of diplomatic relations continued. Significantly, although the Philippines was part of President Herzog's itinerary, its government did not come in for similar vilification. In the event, the Aquino administration cancelled the visit at the last minute, undoubtedly acknowledging its own proceeding negotiations with Muslim separatists in the Southern Philippines at the time and the potential for serious repercussions once regional Muslim sentiment had been aroused.⁸⁰

Indeed, the Herzog controversy did come to affect ASEAN relationships as well. While their right to a homeland has been acknowledged by all ASEAN countries, the Association itself has never expressed a common position on the Palestinian question, in part explained by the fears of individual administrations over how this might reflect on their own domestic problems. Indonesia has for instance specifically avoided the linkage of religious sentiment with national liberation due to deliberate domestic control of Islamic politics, while Thailand's own problems with Muslim separatists have induced aversion to involvement in any international issues with the potential for inflaming co-religionist sentiment.

An *Utusan Malaysia* editorial expressed the opinion that once Indonesia and Brunei (the two most numerously Malay-Muslim populated states in the region), had also issued their disapproval of the visit and deplored Singapore's "insensitivity" towards some of its Southeast Asian neighbours by hosting the visit, the concept of co-religionist solidarity had been solidified and vindicated the Malaysian reaction as "proper". The ruling party in Indonesia, in fact, noted that the Herzog visit jeopardized ASEAN unity, although caution was advised over "political outbursts and demonstrations" which might create "unnecessary tensions", suggesting that the issue might be better dealt with at the formal inter-ASEAN level instead.⁸¹

While the Director of the *Fatwa* (religious ruling) Committee on the National Council of Islamic Affairs confirmed the visit's threat to the ASEAN and Malaysian Islamic community, this was supported by other Malaysian leaders. The head of the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Office, Datuk Dr Yusof Noor, accused Singapore of turning into a regional centre for Zionism and appealed to collective Muslim solidarity to, counter this, insisting that Malaysian Muslim objection to the visit held the objective of defending humanity against Zionist oppression: "The presence of Israeli military experts and weapons in Singapore indicated that weapons could one day be used against Muslims in this region, especially those of Malaysia". The Defence Minister, in underlining

the need for Singapore to comprehend Muslim sentiment against Israel and Zionism, also articulated the fear that Singapore's insistence on proceeding with the visit, despite these objections, might erode the spirit of co-operation among ASEAN countries. Indeed, the UMNO Information Chief cited Singapore's actions as evidence of its inherent fear and distrust of ASEAN leaders.⁸²

Despite public airing of these sentiments, the Malaysian Government issued a declaration, after the conclusion of the visit, that ASEAN relations had not been undermined by the incident. As Michael Leifer points out, however, the Herzog incident was revealing of ASEAN's paradox: despite its establishment as an enterprise aimed at promoting a structure of reconciliation through which, it was hoped, regional security might be promoted, it was also realized that certain underlying facts of political life could not be changed at will, including the mixed sense of vulnerability of member states. As such foreign policy would therefore always be a problem among member states; some partners in reconciliation would likely remain potential enemies. Indeed, from Malaysia's point of view, there were certain "sensitivities" or conditionalities that had to be attached to a sense of sovereignty in foreign policy, not just for Singapore but for all ASEAN partners.⁸³

Serious damage had, however, been inflicted on Malaysia-Singapore relations, admitted by the Malaysian Prime Minister after the visit was concluded, echoed by his Deputy, Encik Ghafar Baba and by Anwar Ibrahim, who publicized a request to the Cabinet to review its ties with Singapore, including any proposed joint venture projects. Continued anti-Zionist opposition was in fact, deemed to be *necessary* by the UMNO Youth International Bureau, a call supported by the Malay newspapers.⁸⁴ Much of this dissatisfaction was, in part, prompted by remarks made by the Israeli President while in Singapore and by provocative comments made by the former Singaporean Foreign Minister, cited by Malaysians as demonstrative of "sheer arrogance".

Nevertheless, there were efforts at damage control by some within the Administration, the Foreign Minister emphasizing in Parliament, for instance, the interdependent nature of Malaysia-Singapore ties and the need for peaceful co-existence. By mid-December 1986, the Prime Minister suggested that Malaysians put the incident behind them, and was conspicuously absent at subsequent Palestine Week celebrations in Johor in March 1987, organized by the UMNO Youth International Affairs Bureau. Meanwhile, the "official" press had begun speculation that continued debate over the issue was increasingly manifested as political opposition to the Administration itself.⁸⁵

THE POLITICAL AFTERMATH

The Administration's foreign policy postures and handling of the Herzog affair became part of the fallout in April 1987 in the first serious intra-UMNO challenge in Malaysian political history. Indeed, much of this internally articulated opposition had as much to do with dissatisfaction over Dr Mahathir's distribution of power within his Administration as it did with differences over

policy. By 1986, personalities more clearly allied with his political power and patronage had been moved into the Cabinet.

The appointment of men such as Daim Zainuddin (Finance Minister), Anwar Ibrahim (Agriculture), Abdullah Badawi (Education) and Sanusi Junid (National and Rural Development) proved to marginalize the political standing of men like Datuk Musa Hitam and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah who were publicly known to be less enamoured of a number of Dr Mahathir's policies, eventually challenging his authority through UMNO Elections. As the political camps aligned for battle, foreign policy became an easy target, particularly within the context of Malay sensitivity to issues of nationalism, religion, Zionism and the plight of the Palestinians. The political challenge was however, also coincidental to a severe economic recession (including a serious decline in foreign investment) which became easy fodder for such challenge.

Tengku Razaleigh, who was to contest the post of party President, had already made public his stand, shortly after the Herzog visit, insisting that relations with Singapore should also be based on Malaysian national and economic interest,⁸⁶ while the MB of Kelantan explained the boldness of Singaporean action as prompted precisely by Malay-Muslim disunity.

It is necessary to point out that Malay political commentary was also given ample fuel by incendiary comments made on the other side of the causeway. In particular, certain remarks made by the then Defence Minister, BrigadierGeneral Lee Hsien Loong about the role of Singapore Malays in the country's Armed Forces implicitly questioned the loyalty of that community based on their own reaction to the Herzog visit which prompted reactions from a variety of political personalities in Malaysia. In March, Datuk Rais Yatim, as UMNO Supreme Council member, articulated concern about an "external plot" waiting to weaken the Malays and which was cynical of UMNO's political strength. Underlining UMNO's capacity to resolve its problems, he urged party members and Malays to assess the situation and to take action on the matter.⁸⁷

The interchangeable Zionist-Jewish link was also employed as intra-Malay politics intensified in the months preceding the 1987 UMNO General Assembly. A profound split was by now evident within UMNO between the supporters of Dr Mahathir on the one hand (now popularly referred to as Team A), and those of Tengku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa Hitam (Team B) on the other. This split was increasingly to impose itself on foreign policy issues. In March 1987, a prominent Team B MP queried the Administration's "discrepancy" in its actions: while the Government opposed the Herzog visit, it had also invited Dr Henry Kissinger—"a Jew"—only a few months later to Malaysia.⁸⁸ The entanglement of foreign policy issues in intra-Malay rivalry was balanced, to some extent, by the gradual reduction of tension between Singapore and Malaysia. Pains were taken to explain that on the Government's part, the issue was considered closed and that Palestine Week celebrations in Johore were not aimed at Singapore. But political ambition demanded their continued deployment as issues. Anwar Ibrahim, by then firmly within the Team A UMNO camp, used the occasion for effective campaigning, resurrecting parallels

between the Palestinian struggle and Malay independence while insisting that Malaysian support was not simply co-religionist or pro-Arab but deep “although some quarters believe [it] will create problems for us”.⁸⁹

In the run-up to the election, Datuk Musa Hitam, contender for the post of UMNO Deputy President, was quoted, in interview with a widely circulated American newspaper, as being highly critical of the Administration’s current foreign policy, arguing that new attitudes were required which were more reflective of original policy concerns and design as the nature of its anti-Zionist outbursts had cost Malaysia much needed foreign investment. In fact, these criticisms were especially pertinent to recently launched initiatives (1986) changing such investment regulations, in a bid to re-invigorate the Malaysian economy and identifying this as the engine of growth for Malaysian development.

In an interview with the same newspaper, Dr Mahathir was, however, dismissive of charges that his anti-Zionism and criticism of the industrialized West had hampered Malaysian development and defended it as reflective only of his opposition to an “extremist nationalism...manifested by some Jews”, not as anti-Semitic. Attributing political opposition to his Administration instead to recessionary problems, he noted that a “shrinking economic cake” in Malaysia among “ordinary people” had encouraged the location of ethnic causes for hardships suffered.⁹⁰

Yet as campaigning intensified, evidence and articulation of co-religionist commitment became more important. In an effort to discredit their rivals’ stand on such issues, the Team A camp resorted to demonstrating Dr Mahathir’s credibility. A few days before the General Assembly, the Deputy Home Affairs Minister (another prominent Team A member) alleged the existence of Arab fears of a Zionist-influenced government succeeding Dr Mahathir, whom they regarded as “a Muslim leader with the courage to openly oppose the Zionists”.⁹¹

The UMNO General Assembly itself witnessed intense debate over the “follies” of the Administration’s foreign policy. Differences centred on the negative impact foreign policy was having on the economy and on the propriety of Malaysian support for the Afghan *Mujahideen* which was staunchly defended by Anwar Ibrahim, accusing dissenters of being obsessed with “Western ideologies” and whose “false” view of Islam was more akin to that of Orientalists—of Islam as being “something between Idi Amin and Khomeini’s Iran”.⁹²

The political aftermath of the Herzog affair also, however, prompted reaction from influential quarters within the US administration with the power to withhold some US\$4 million of military assistance to Malaysia (as requested by the US Executive). When the Chairman of the House Sub-Committee on Asian and Pacific Affairs announced that “anti-Semitic” Malaysian statements were diminishing US sympathy towards Malaysian aid requests and sought clarification from the Malaysian ambassador in the US on the matter, he was assured that freedom of religion and prohibition against discrimination based on community, race or religion was enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution.⁹³

Indeed, such external pressure has been complicated by the fact that the US is one of Malaysia’s largest foreign investors and major trading partners. In 1983,

the US reportedly invested more than M\$2.5 billion in Malaysia, ranking it as the second largest investor in Malaysia, after Japan. By 1986, this accounted for some M\$17.1 million out of a total of M\$524.5 million worth of foreign investment. Ironically, Malaysia had played host to a major investment seminar sponsored by the American International Group in October 1986 which both Dr Mahathir (as Prime Minister) and Tengku Razaleigh (as Minister of Trade and Industry) had addressed, urging further American investments in Malaysia.⁹⁴

The Administration had displayed some cognizance of these external pressures. Although Dr Mahathir himself had clearly articulated an opinion of US responsibility for Israeli intransigence over the matter of Palestine, Malaysia has also traditionally believed in the exercise of quiet diplomacy. Indeed, in the final resolutions of the Asian Conference on Palestine held in Kuala Lumpur in 1983, Malaysia had strongly objected to any rhetoric condemning the US, “fearing that would only take away from what it saw as a substantive conference resolution, devoid of the usual haranguing and condemnation of Israel and the US” even while organizations like the OIC had previously requested that its member states “examine” their diplomatic relations with the US over the Palestine Question.⁹⁵

Continuing domestic political competition, however, relegated such caution to the side-lines, and rhetoric on the dangers of neo-colonialism and Zionism was increasingly employed by Malay politicians. In the midst of the UMNO crisis in October 1987, the Malacca Chief Minister, Datuk Rahim Tamby Cik (of the Team A camp) criticized those who were not “Malays at heart” as being prepared to “pawn the integrity of their own race” for personal interest and as holding links to “Zionist writers in the foreign mass media” who were deliberately attempting to weaken the Administration and the country.⁹⁶

Open criticism of the Mahathir Administration had surfaced by 1988, intensified by UMNO Team B attacks on foreign policy towards Afghanistan and Palestine as being heavy on rhetoric but short on action and as clearly favourable of the US. In the view of one Team B member, the Malaysian Government had to realize and appreciate that “as long as the US supports Israel and strengthens its grip on West Asia, the problem of Palestine will be hard to solve” and that Malaysia should not only condemn Israel’s actions on the Palestinians but actively work towards halting American intervention there.⁹⁷

The political value that Malay-Muslim parties might find in the issues of Palestine and Afghanistan has not, however, negated their significance as issues, the determination of which many Muslims find inseparable from the future of their religion. Indeed, it would take a hardened cynic to deny that even the foreign policy establishment, while not exercising any particular Islamic approach to these problems, are unaware or even dismissive of Palestinian and Afghan liberation as issues concerning the fate of fellow Muslims. It is as likely that an active role for Malaysia on these issues is perceived as necessary precisely (if not partly) due to the country’s Muslim identity albeit on the periphery of the Muslim centre.

Co-religionism in fact appears to add to rather than detract from the perception of these issues within official Malaysian circles, as liberation struggles. In articulating his Administration’s abhorrence of “extremist” Islam

to an American audience, such as that manifested through “acts of terrorism, export of revolution or acts of interference”, Malaysia’s Foreign Minister has distinguished these from “acts of national liberation that may or may not employ violent tactics” and which *do* receive Malaysian support.⁹⁸

It would also be unwise to deflect attention from the fact that these are issues which are inherently important to the character and approach of the Administration in international relations. Dr Mahathir’s personal commitment to the plight of Third World countries and Malaysia’s long-standing commitment to the justice of the Palestinian cause and the right to self-determination of all peoples, must surely underscore official Malaysian activism in the international arena over these two issues. Indeed, at the conclusion of the Herzog incident, it was officially explained that Malaysia did not oppose the right of any nation or country to exist but “only the policies that they practise”.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, Malaysia has also found it prudent to indicate to foreign audiences, that despite the country’s “strong Islamic bias and its character as a *moderate* Muslim nation”, foreign policy on the issues of Palestine and Afghanistan have been guided more by a primary belief in the principles of justice and non-interference and in negotiation over violence. Indeed, “religious affinity” has been only one deciding factor in Malaysian foreign policy.¹⁰⁰

As Malaysian foreign policy formulation, implementation and legitimation on the issues of Palestine and Afghanistan have incorporated the competing contexts and expression of Malay nationalism, Islamic brotherhood, anti-Zionism and general support for the self-determination of a people, in particular that of a small community against the rivalries and interests of larger powers, they have also provided some conflict. The intensified relationship that these dimensions have produced between the external context of foreign policy and its domestic repercussions has ensured that any international issue with a perceived co-religionist dimension has the capacity to mobilize internal political rivalry and the potential to threaten UMNO’s advantage in the communal balance. While it is conceded that the Herzog affair might have been exceptional (in terms of its timing, context and circumstances), it was demonstrative of how the Mahathir Administration, through a particular foreign policy emphasis, was at once protagonist and victim of this complicated play of factors.

Additionally, the particular but widely accepted status of the issues as both co-religionist and nationalist has meant that, as causes, they have managed to expose specifically the “Islamic” character of Malaysian foreign policy; a pattern which in the 1990s has been increasingly applied to certain other international issues. Although, under these circumstances, the emphasis of this “character” has been perceived as prudent, its measure has not been solely determined by the Administration.

In fact, intra-Malay rivalry has continued to flavour the arena of foreign affairs, in part because Dr Mahathir has frequently resorted himself to employing foreign policy for the benefit of entrenching if not enhancing his own position domestically. Malaysia’s hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and the Southeast Asian Games in 1989, the visits of the

PLO leader Yasser Arafat and the African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela to Kuala Lumpur in 1990, all contributed tremendously to the image of stability of his Administration and to Dr Mahathir's personal image, so soon after the demise of the original ruling party.

Dialogue and debate that has ensued from different ways of Muslim thinking on questions of nationalism, Islam and international relations have also contributed to the substance of Malaysian thinking on foreign policy, both official and non-official. In as much as continued tensions between conformist and nonconformist thinking in Malaysia are reflective of increasing concern over the general marginalization of Muslims in international society and of their appropriate means of defence against an increasingly suspicious if not hostile West, they have been particularly relevant to the substance of the Malaysian foreign policy agenda in a post-Cold War age.

NOTES

1. The Diplomatic Exclusivity Act 1966 (Vienna Convention), was amended by the Malaysian Parliament, making possible the recognition of a political entity or body not in possession of physical territory or a state as such.
2. *Utusan Malaysia (UM)*, 15 January 1983.
3. Malaysia considers Israel's attempts to alter the character and identity of Jerusalem as unacceptable and contrary to international law, consistently stressing the restoration of Jerusalem to the Arabs as an essential precondition to a political settlement of the Palestinian problem.
4. Para. 12, Resolution No. 1/13-P, The Palestine Question and the Middle East, *Thirteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Republic of Niger, 22–26 August 1982*; Rajmah Hussain, *Malaysia at the United Nations: A Study of Foreign Policy Priorities, 1957–1987*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1988, p. 209.
5. *Foreign Affairs Malaysia (FAM)*, Vol. 14, No. 4, December 1981 pp. 440–441; Vol. 15, No. 4, December 1982, p. 345, Vol. 17, No.3, September 1984, pp. 24–25 *The Star*, 15 April 1982; *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat (PRPDR)*, 26 November 1980, pp. 6257–6260, 15 October 1981, p. 3692. November 30 marks Palestine Day in line with a proposal by the Saudi Chairman of the OIC, King Khaled, aimed at “displaying solidarity among Islamic countries”. Total Malaysian contributions to the Islamic Solidarity Fund (under OIC auspices) have amounted to US\$10,000 with an additional pledge of US\$15,000 towards funding Palestinian child education. A joint communique issued during Yasser Arafat's Malaysia visit in 1984 indicated Dr Mahathir's offer of training facilities for Palestinians.
6. *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, July 1983, p. 16; Rajmah Hussain, op. cit., p.288; *FAM*, Vol.16, No.2, June 1983, p. 38. Malaysia was elected as one of 21 Vice-Presidents of the UN International Conference on Palestine in 1983 for which the Asian Regional Conference was preparatory but was boycotted by the US and Israel. Malaysian lobbying had managed to secure the highest level of participation of any of the preparatory meetings on the Palestine question, with most delegations led by senior foreign ministerial representation.
7. The most recent examples are the World Bank Conference which was to have been held in Kuala Lumpur in 1986 and the conference of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 1989.

8. *PRPDR*, Vol. II, No. 1–4, 9 March 1988; *Malaysian Digest*, February 1988, p.12; *Berita Harian (BH)*, 13 January 1989. In 1988 the Fund also included a donation of M\$10,000 from each of the nine Malay Sultans and M\$5,000 from each of the Regents.
9. *FAM*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 1984; *The Star*, 12 February 1983; *BH*, 19 January 1989. This was echoed by the Palestinian representative to Malaysia, in 1989, who noted that Malaysia's support for the Palestinians was far in excess of that of most other Islamic countries.
10. See debates in Parliament over the Amendments to Diplomatic Exclusivity Act 1966 (Vienna Convention) in *PRPDR*, 14–15 October 1981 (second and third readings), pp. 3575–369.
11. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 9 and 10, 1982, p. 23; *PRPDR*, 27 March 1984, pp. 1501–1504.
12. *Malaysian Digest*, January 1987, p. 3; August 1987, p. 3 and 7. Education Minister, Anwar Ibrahim's announced Malaysia's offer of 50 places to Afghan *Mujahideen* students in local universities.
13. *UM*, 7 January 1987; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 8, Nos 1 and 2, 1984, p. 3 and *New Straits Times (NST)*, 5 February 1985.
14. *PRPDR*, 15 October 1981, pp. 3693–3696; *FAM*, Vol. 14, No. 4, December 1981, p. 440.
15. Interview with Haji Mustafa Yaakob, Vice-President, UMNO Youth International Bureau, Kuala Lumpur, 27 December 1990; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 8, Nos 1 and 2, 1984, p. 3; 57, 14 April 1989. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has subsequently assisted in maintenance of the Afghan *Mujahideen* facilities. Shortly after the announcement of the Soviet pull-out, the Foreign Minister had indicated that Malaysia would review its relations with the Najibullah government. Anwar's welcoming of the *Mujahideen* delegation to Malaysia was given extensive publicity.
16. *Watan*, 20 May 1989. This public call was made by the Secretary General of the International Bureau. In association with *Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah* and the *Persatuan Setiakawan dan Persahabatan Malaysia-Palestin* (Association of Malaysian–Palestinian Friendship) it also held a *Khutbah* and special prayers for the Palestinians.
17. James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986 pp. 40–75. He quotes nonconformist thinkers such as Abul A'la Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, and 'Abd Al Aziz Ibn Baz.
18. *Ibid.* Piscatori uses the terms of conformism in reference to Muslims either in agreement or not with the prevailing political order.
19. *NST*, 5 April 1982; *FAM*, Vol. 15, No. 2, June 1982, pp. 154–155; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 5 and 6, 1982, p. 31; *FAM*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 1984, p. 23.
20. *UM*, 14 May 1983; interview with Haji Fadzil Nor, Kuala Lumpur, 28 December 1990. In his opinion, PAS was supportive of the *Mujahideen* at a time when the Government preferred "to look the other way".
21. Michael Leifer, "Israel's President in Singapore: Political Catalysis and Transnational Politics", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1988, p. 345.
22. *Watan*, 7 March 1980; Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, then Minister of Finance's comments in *UM*, 30 January 1981, 12 May 1983; *NST*, 16 March 1985; *The Star*, 4 February 1985; Dr Mahathir Mohammed's comments in *NST*, 22 February 1986. A statement from the Soviet Union that it would not surrender its object of influence in the Southeast Asian region had produced a massive local rally condemning this threat against ASEAN countries. Addressing the rally as President of UMNO Youth, Anwar Ibrahim maintained that Malaysians had to oppose all external threats and defend the country's sovereignty. At a rally for Barisan Nasional leaders, Dr

- Mahathir used the analogy and example of Afghanistan when warning against Malaysian disunity.
23. *PRPDR*, 21 March 1984, Vol. II, No. 7, pp. 990–991.
 24. *NST*, 15 July 1982; Khalid Jaafar, “Antara Anwar Dengan Suhaimi” (Between Anwar and Suhaimi), in *Dewan Masyarakat*, May 1984, pp. 12–15. In 1983, he led a Malaysian delegation to witness the opening session of the National Council of the PLO held in Algiers.
 25. Khalid Jaafar, *op. cit.*
 26. *NST*, 16 March and 6 May 1983. This was particularly obvious prior to and during Malaysia’s hosting of the Asian Conference on the Question of Palestine. The Menteri Besar of Perak, for instance, maintained that the struggle of the Palestinians was more than a question of ideology, race or religion and that it represented the struggle for legitimate rights and peace. The universal dimensions of the issue have also constituted important dimensions of Malaysian agreements with countries such as Turkey over the issue of Palestine.
 27. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 5 and 6, 1982, pp. 31–32.
 28. See “PAS Tidak Setuju Cara PLO” (PAS Does Not Agree with PLO Methods) in *Sarina*, 1 June 1983, pp. 19–20; “*Bertindak Menentang Kezaliman*” (Fighting Oppression), *Vcapan Dasar, Muktamar Tahunan PAS Ke-31* (31st Annual General Assembly Address of PAS), 13 April 1985, PAS, Kuala Lumpur 1985, pp. 8–15; *Asiaweek*, 27 March 1981, pp. 30–35 cited in Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 99. *Assabiyah* is an Arabic word generally referring to all types of communal sentiment including the concept of nationalism perceived as being at any rate of purely Western origin and in opposition to the supremacy of Islam as a governing concept.
 29. *The Star*, 27 February 1983; remarks of Datuk Abdullah Badawi, then Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department in *UM*, 13 April 1983; “*Nasionalisme Melayu Tugas Generasi Kita*” (Malay Nationalism—Duty of Our Generation) in *Dewan Masyarakat*, October 1983, pp. 9–10; Datuk Musa’s opinion of such a threat is made all the more evident in a selection of his speeches in *Nasionalisme: Krisis dan Kematangan* (Nationalism: Crisis and Evolution), Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1986.
 30. See for instance, Ghazali Shafie’s comments in “*UMNO mesti kekalkan lunas perjuangan asal*” (UMNO must perpetuate the principles of its original struggle), *Merdeka*, November 1985, p. 7; Datuk Musa Hitam’s address to Malaysian students overseas, reminding them that the “struggle” of Malay nationalists had enabled them to study abroad in *NST*, 21 July 1983; “*Kembalikan semangat asal perjuangan UMNO*” (Return the original spirit of UMNO’s struggle) in *Merdeka*, August 1985, pp. 7 and 13; “*Nasionalisme melalui tulisan dan kesanya*” (Nationalist Writings and their traces) in *Merdeka*, September 1985, pp. 7, 12 and 25; “*Neokolonialisme dan bahayanya*” (Neo-colonialism and its dangers); “UMNO Continues to Struggle For the Good of the Race”, “*Hak Istimewa Melayu—Cabaran Pada Perlembagaan*” (Special Rights of the Malays—Challenge to the Constitution) in *Merdeka*, October 1985, pp. 7–11; 18–19.
 31. Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 282–283.
 32. The magazine of the National Language and Literary Organization in fact carried a Special Focus issue on the confusion of the subject. See “*Nasionalisme Malaysia*” in *Dewan Masyarakat*, October 1983, pp. 4–12, which carried a number of articles by Malaysian intellectuals (including Chinese and a Kadazan) and speeches by Dr Mahathir and Datuk Musa.
 33. *Penyata UMNO 1985/86*, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp. 605–615; Prime Minister’s

- National Day message in *Business Times*, 31 August 1985; address to seminar on Concept of an Islamic State in *NST*, 12 June 1985.
34. *Penyata UMNO 1986*, Kuala Lumpur, 1987, pp. 32, 34, 38; *FEER*, 9 August 1984, pp. 24–25.
 35. See Nels Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1982.
 36. See Mokhtar A.Kadir, *Keamanan Sejagat: Peranan Malaysia dalam Politik Antarabangsa*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 94. He argues that *jihad* was a concept readily adopted by OIC member countries at their conference in Taif, Saudi Arabia in 1981 on the security of the Holy Land (*Tanah Suci*) through a re-orientation of Muslim attitudes towards “this-worldly” and “otherworldly” security which would involve concern for raising the standards of living of Muslim communities and their physical well-being in order that they might lead more secure religious lives. *Jihad* therefore also constitutes religious duty (*ibadah*) as a human objective of God’s creation.
 37. This has been echoed by a commentary in the English language daily, *The Star*, 18 April 1985 owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association.
 38. Haji Dusuki Haji Ahmad, *Islam Di-Malaysia—Kebangkitan Dan Masa Depan* (Islam in Malaysia, Its Resurgence and the Future), Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Adabi Sendirian Berhad, 1980, particularly Chapter 12, “Assabiyah dan Kebangsaan” (“Racism and Nationalism”), pp. 317–337.
 39. James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States*, op. cit., p. 103.
 40. See Datuk Musa Hitam’s depiction of PAS as a “colonialist” in *The Star*, 1 November 1981.
 41. *Penyata UMNO 1986*, op. cit., p. 34.
 42. *FAM*, March 1987, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 49–53.
 43. *Harakah*, 11 March 1988; 27 January 1989.
 44. *Watan*, 19 November 1988, *Harakah*, 11 March and 18 November 1988.
 45. *Harakah*, 11 March 1988; 13 January 1989. Haji Hadi was addressing the *Majlis Sambutan Intifadah Islam Ke-Abad 15 Hijrah* (Committee for Welcoming the Islamic Intifadah Towards the Fifteenth Century Hijra), and expressed similar sentiments to a visiting Afghan *Mujahideen* representative: “whenever Islamic land needs to be freed, it is Islamic groups that are at the forefront of that struggle but it is the secular groups that take the credit for that freedom”.
 46. See Haji Ahmad Awang’s comments in *Watan*, 26–27 September 1987; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 5 and 6, 1982, pp. 31–32. See also opinions of PAS, Malaysian Muslim students’ organizations, the PUM and the Malaysian Muslim Lawyers Association, in *Watan*, 19 November 1988.
 47. *Harakah*, 25 March 1988 which read the absence of any mention of the PLO or Yasser Arafat in the President’s speech as a significant sign of change in ABIM’s attitude towards the West Asian situation.
 48. “*Membina Ketahanan Ummah*” (Building the Strength of the *Umma*), *Ucapan Dasar Muktamar Tahunan PAS ke-35* (Policy Speech of Thirty-Fifth Annual Assembly), 31 March 1989, Kuala Lumpur, p. 35; *Watan*, 19 November 1988.
 49. *Sarina*, 1 June 1983, p. 19; *Harakah*, 6 January 1989. Although its President, Haji Yusuf Rawa, attended the Asian Conference on the Question of Palestine in Kuala Lumpur in May 1983, PAS claimed that the Government denied the party any opportunity to participate “effectively”. See resolutions passed at the International Conference on the Islamic Uprising (*Intifadah Islamiyyah*) in the US where PAS was represented by its President and Vice-President, sought to promote the future of Palestine as “not just an issue of Arab nationalism but of all Muslims because Palestinian soil is part of the country of the Islamic *umma*”.
 50. *Watan*, 10 January 1989 which reported more than 3,000 participants in attendance at this national seminar where nine working papers were tabled. See, for instance, the

eight resolutions pertaining to the Islamic struggle in Palestine and Afghanistan, passed at the end of the Conference. The third Resolution rejects the UN Security Council Resolution 242 as “secularist”, the Fifth refers to the “Islamic” nature of the “*intifadah*” that is free from the “*fitnah kuffar mustakbirin*” (slander and blasphemy of the oppressors) and the seventh calls on all “*dakwah*” and Islamic movements to fulfil the meaning of the *Intifadah*. The party Youth Chief, Haji Mustafa Ali, called on all Arab countries to admit their error and return to Islam in order to avoid being victims of the big powers.

51. *Harakah*, 13 January 1989: “If the hopes of the Islamic struggle are to be successful, then the question and interests of the PLO must itself progress because when the Palestinian land is returned to the Palestinians, the situation of *Al-Quds* will itself become the focal point, the motherland to all new Islamic countries.”
52. *Watan*, 18 April 1989; *BH*, 17 June 1987; statement by Haji Ibrahim Ali in Parliament referred to in fn. 137; Statement by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in *PRPDR*, 27 March 1984, pp. 1501–1504; and on the establishment of the Palestinian People’s Fund in *PRPDR*, 9 March 1988. *FAM* frequently cites large amounts of donations for these causes through the Fund (from readers of the Malay-language daily, *Utusan Malaysia*) or the Afghan Restoration Fund (administered by ABIM and the newspaper, *Berita Harian*). In 1984, the *Himpunan Belia Islam* (Muslim Youth Assembly) established a permanent fund for *Mujahideen* fighters in Afghanistan—AMAL—which as a co-operative is fully responsible to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which has suggested a Malaysian-Afghan agreement would ease the issue of charitable donations and aid).
53. *NST*, 23 June 1982, 8 December 1989; *Harakah*, 8 September 1989. Although impossible to verify, the paper claims evidence by way of photographs and letters written to *Harakah* by such volunteers.
54. Amidst the multitude of national liberation struggles, the Afghan issue has gained particular attention in Malay publications such as *Dewan Masyarakat*, *Panji Masyarakat*, *Sarina*, *Watan*, *Harakah*, *Utusan Malaysia*, not to mention specifically Islamic publications such as *Media Islam*, *al-Ummah*.
55. See debates in Parliament in 1981 over according full diplomatic recognition to the PLO in *PRPDR*, 14 and 15 October 1981, pp. 3575–3698, in particular the speech by the Secretary-General of the DAP, Mr Lim Kit Siang who noted the party’s long-standing moral support for Palestinian nationalism and for the PLO, “because the DAP always stands behind those who have been persecuted”.
56. Chandra Muzaffar, “Has The Communal Situation Worsened Over the Last Decade? Some Preliminary Thoughts”, in S.Husin Ali (ed.), *Ethnicity, Class and Development*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial, 1984, pp. 356–381; *NST*, 28 April 1983; *Watan*, 10–12 May 1988. It also protested the “atrocities” against the Palestinian refugees of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip because “it violated all decent bounds and human rights”.
57. *Dewan Masyarakat*, August 1984, pp. 33–34; *NST*, 14 July 1984; noted that the rally was as beneficial to UMNO as it was to Yasser Arafat, and was attended by only a few MCA and MIC Youth and questioned how non-Malay Malaysians might feel over the prospect of scholarships and places of learning to Palestinians and Afghans, when their own access to higher education in the country was limited by quota; interview with DAP Secretary-General, Mr Lim Kit Siang, Petaling Jaya, 15 April 1990—who maintains that the issue of Islam in Malaysia’s international profile, has been directed largely towards domestic consumption and primarily to UMNO’s benefit.
58. Rajmah Hussain, op. cit., p. 279.
59. The magazine of the national language and literary agency, in fact ran a special focus issue on Zionism in 1983, shortly before Yasser Arafat’s visit, noting its threat as an ideology to all concerned, not just Muslims. See *Dewan Masyarakat*, April 1983.

60. Mahathir Mohammed, *The Malay Dilemma*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1969, p. 130, where he condemns Zionism and the usurpation of Arab rights by “the Jews”; address to the UN General Assembly in September 1982 in *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 7 and 8, 1982, pp. 41–42; clarification on a reported statement by Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, issued by Wisma Putra on September 24 in *FAM*, Vol. 15, No. 3, September 1982, p. 229; Prime Minister’s Address to the Asian Regional Conference on the Question of Palestine, in *FAM*, Vol. 16, No. 2, June 1983, pp. 206–209. See for instance, his veiled reference to this lobby at the Conference in 1983 in *NST*, 9 May 1983; Michael Leifer, “Mahathir’s Anti-Zionist Rhetoric” in *International Herald Tribune*, 9 October 1986.
61. *Suara Islam*, No. 5, December 1980, pp. 17–18; UMNO Youth President’s address in *Penyata UMNO 1982/83*, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, pp. 399–400.
62. *NST*, 9 February 1982. In the wake of widespread protest over the Israeli atrocities in Southern Lebanon in 1982, the Kuwait Bureau for the Boycott of Israel campaign black-listed Cadbury Confectionery, explaining that although action taken was directed at the parent company in Britain this also had to cover all subsidiaries and sister companies. See for instance questions in Parliament over the Palestinian issue and the Government’s links with the international financier Rothschild in *PRPDR*, 26 November 1980, pp. 6257–6260.
63. *Malaysian Digest*, 15 May 1983, p. 5; comments by the Parliamentary Secretary of the Foreign Ministry when launching its publication, “The Question of Palestine”, in *The Star*, 28 April 1983.
64. *Watan*, 14–17 April 1987 and 26–27 September 1987. The VP confirmed this threat to Malaysia shortly after the Minister of Information released a statement warning of the involvement of outside forces.
65. *NST*, 13 August 1984; *PRPDR*, 11 October 1984, pp. 4585–4586; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 8, Nos 5 and 6, 1984, p. 44; see comments by Datuk Dr Yusoff Noor on the development of Singapore as a centre for Jewish activity in the region in *Berita Mingguan*, 23 November 1986; statement by Datuk Rais Yatim, in the *ST*, 6 December 1986. The piece was entitled *Schelomo: A Hebrew Rhapsody* by the Jewish composer Ernest Bloch. In fact, the Deputy Foreign Minister refuted claims that the Government was responsible for forcing cancellation of the show, blaming its sponsors instead.
66. By 1985, Malaysia’s public debt had increased to account for nearly 86 per cent of the nation’s Gross National Product, while in 1986, per capita income had declined by 15.7 per cent. In such circumstances, the Government had to devise new policies for dealing with the recession, while attempting at the same time to manage escalating ethnic demands with fewer resources and benefits to distribute.
67. *The Star*, 22 April 1986.
68. *NST*, 2 February 1986, 21 May 1986.
69. *PRPDR*, 10 October 1986; *UM*, 16 August 1986. While Dr Mahathir did make a pointed distinction between Jews and Zionists and claimed to be aware of the identity of these perpetrators, the Government could not release their names. “These Zionists” were claimed as holding a preference for parties like PAS and the DAP in the General Elections “because the country would have been easily weakened if they formed the government”.
70. *The Star*, 3 November 1986, 19 November 1986. Aliran, a social consciousness movement, believed itself to be the target of such accusations.
71. *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 6, Nos 5 and 6, 1982, p. 31; *Utusan Zaman*, and *NST*, 10 October 1982; *BH*, 13 November 1982; *UM*, 21 October 1982.
72. The following analysis has been culled from reporting in a variety of Malaysian newspapers, including *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian*, *Mingguan Malaysia*, *The Star* and the Chinese newspapers *Lianhe Zabao* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (the latter two

- newspapers cited from *Mirror of Opinion*, an official digest of the vernacular papers in the region) in the period 23 October 1986 to 31 March 1987.
73. See reports of the UMNO General Assembly in *UM*, 20–22 September 1986. The Israeli embassy in Singapore announced the three-day visit (scheduled to begin 18 November) on 23 October 1986 and it was reported in Malaysian newspapers the following day.
 74. *UM*, 30 October and 31 October 1986. The joint Arab communiqué expressed gratitude to Malaysian “Muslim brothers” for firmly opposing the “controversial” visit and indicated astonishment at “the invitation to the head of a Zionist entity” which was “intensifying attacks on the Palestinians and the Lebanese, continuing its occupation of Palestine and the holy city of Jerusalem and altering its Islamic features”.
 75. Another Supreme Council member, the MB of Johor, Muhyiddin Yasin, in sharing these sentiments pledged to withdraw from public events between Malaysia and Singapore to which he had already committed. His own hopes for election to UMNO Vice-Presidency at the time, were seriously weakened by perception of his “pro-Singapore” attitude. Indeed, the increasing sale of property and land in Johor to Singaporeans, particularly when the Malaysian ringgit had dipped dramatically against the Singapore dollar, brought much criticism of the MB from opponents within UMNO as well as outside the party.
 76. *ST*, 18 and 19 November 1986; *Merdeka*, 28 November 1986. The PAC was a loose affiliation of Opposition parties, non-partisan, non-communal groups that were organized for the purpose of protesting the visit of the Israeli President. The Committee itself comprised some 26 political and social bodies such as UMNO Youth, the DAP, PAS, Gerakan, the Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia, Perkim and several others, whose collective opposition was voiced in non-religious terms. Tunku Abdul Rahman urged the government to review the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore as the visit had “added insult to injury”, noting that it was hard for Muslims in the region to “pass it over” due to Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem. Tun Hussein Onn warned that Singapore should not regard Malaysia’s protest with disdain, agreeing with anti-Zionist groups that Malaysia-Singapore diplomatic ties should be reviewed, and economic and water links severed.
 77. These three organizations in particular contradicted a report in the *Asian Wall Street Journal* that the protests were held by Malaysian Muslims, arguing that they were motivated by human rights and opposition to the Zionist political doctrine.
 78. *NST*, 22 November 1986. An alternative news magazine suggested, however, that the Government’s stance needed closer analysis, as there were indications that it had been informed of the visit in advance and had given its implicit blessing. See *ERA*, 29 November 1986, pp. 6–7.
 79. The Deputy Prime Minister was quoted as supporting Singapore’s sovereign rights and actions, restating the Government’s strict adherence to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and maintaining that action would only be taken after considering “many factors”.
 80. *ST*, 21 November 1986; Michael Leifer, “Israel’s President in Singapore, Political Catalysis and Transnational Politics”, *op. cit.*, p. 348.
 81. *UM*, Editorial, 4 December 1986; Foreign Minister, Datuk Rais Yatim’s comments in *The Star*, 6 December 1986; *Merdeka* (Indonesia), 20 November 1986, in *Mirror of Opinion*, January–March 1987.
 82. *UM*, 18 November 1986; *Mingguan Malaysia*, 23 November 1986; *NST*, 16 November 1986.
 83. *Merdeka*, 4 December 1986; *Lianhe Zabao*, 5 December 1986, in *Mirror of Opinion*, January–March 1987; Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of Southeast Asia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–146; interviews with Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, Tan Sri Zakaria Ali, and Datuk Musa Hitam, *op. cit.*

84. *UM*, 3 December 1986; *Islamic Herald*, Vol. 10, No. 6, 1986, p. 4.
85. *Lianhe Zabao*, 13 December 1986 in *Mirror of Opinion*, January-March 1987; *UM* and *NST*, 12 December 1986. All the English and vernacular newspapers ran similar editorial comment and articles supporting this notion, underlining UMNO's active opposition to the visit as "necessary", within the context of intra-UMNO rivalry over the issue.
86. Tengku Razaleigh called for a fundamental appraisal of Malaysia's air accord with Singapore, not to jeopardize either nation's interest but to protect and promote Malaysian tourism, national and economic interest.
87. *Mingguan Malaysia*, 15 March 1987 and *UM*, 16 March 1987. Datuk Rais linked his comments to Lee Hsien Loong's remarks about Malays in the armed forces earlier that month.
88. *PRPDR*, 13 March 1987. See comments of Encik Ibrahim Ali, then a "spokesman" of sorts for the UMNO "Team B", over foreign policy. Dr Kissinger had attended a Round Table Conference in Kuala Lumpur, at the invitation of the governmentsponsored Institute of Strategic and International Studies. In fact, a prominent member of the PAC also articulated objection to Dr Kissinger's visit, but on the grounds of his close involvement with Israel and that he was "probably the master-mind of US-Israeli imperialism", noting that most Malaysians were not in fact aware of "what is going on around them". This no doubt refers to the gulf between the Administration's stated ideological convictions and its actions.
89. Anwar was quoted as claiming that "other people laughed at us when we opposed British rule but this did not deter our forefathers from standing up and fighting for their rights. The Palestinian cause is no different" and that support for the Palestinian cause came from "the masses" and was not restricted to the Prime Minister's and Foreign Minister's speeches at international conferences.
90. See report on *New York Times* interviews in March 1987 in *ST*, 30 March 1987. Datuk Musa is quoted as advising that Malaysia should "be diplomatic, be friendly to all nations, as we started off. Don't try to lecture the world. Don't try to become a big power". Dr Mahathir was quoted as insisting: "I'm not anti-Jew. Henry Kissinger was just here...we talk...we are friends. I have a lot of American businessmen who are my friends. They are Jews." In May 1986, the Malaysian Parliament passed the Promotion of Investments Act (PIA) and the New Investment Fund aimed at providing a more favourable tax climate for certain productive sectors of the economy.
91. Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub quoted in *ST*, 19 April 1987.
92. See 1987 UMNO General Assembly debates reported in *UM*, 25-27 April 1987; interview with Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Kuala Lumpur, 30 April 1990 who similarly expressed opinion on the incongruity of Malaysia, as a small nation, "strutting the world stage" arguing that too much anti-West, anti-Zionist rhetoric had discouraged foreign investors.
93. *ST*, 21 March 1987; the Foreign Minister's official explanation to Parliament in *PRPDR*, 18 October 1987. Senator Solarz was himself particularly influential in lobbying US Government policy on Israel, and was quoted as saying that "some of the anti-semitic drivel that emanates from that government is shameful".
94. See *Economic Report 1987*, Ministry of Finance, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1987, p. vii; *FAM*, December 1986, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 6-15.
95. See "High Profile Mahathir Mutes Criticism of the US" in *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, July 1983, p. 16; *NST*, 6 May 1983; Para. 23, Resolution No. 1/13-P, The Palestine Question and The Middle East, *The Thirteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Niger, 22-26 August 1982*. Mahathir is reported to have told Palestinian circles that while Malaysia would continue to be active in pressing for a solution to the Palestinian problem, it could not be expected to condemn the US directly.

96. *ST*, 22 October 1987.
97. Ibrahim Ali in *PRPDR*, 9 March 1988.
98. Malaysian Foreign Minister's Address to Council on Foreign Relations in New York, 1 October 1987 in *FAM*, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 44.
99. See Foreign Minister, Datuk Rais Yatim's comments in *The Star*, 6 December 1986.
100. Malaysian Foreign Minister's Address to Council on Foreign Relations in New York, 1 October 1987, *FAM*, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 44.

7 Post-Cold War religious identity

At the close of the twentieth century, the political imagination of all states and societies has undeniably been coloured by the resurgence of religious ideas and movements. While the demise of the Cold War has occasioned vast and dramatic changes to the pattern of international relations, a mainstream discourse on global politics has tended to remain focused on the projected threat of such religious resurgence, in particular, that of a singular Islam in hostile contention with Western civilization or indeed with the non-Muslim world.

The employment of a religious identity in Malaysian foreign policy has undoubtedly been significantly influenced by these new contexts of international relations. Two major events in this era have dramatically tested the extent of Malaysia's global image in religious terms, even while they have set the tone for the conduct of international relations in a supposedly post-ideological age. In the post-Cold War context, international issues such as the Gulf War and the Bosnian crisis have further engaged an Islamic dimension in Malaysian foreign policy under the Mahathir Administration.

THE GULF WAR

The Gulf War of 1991 in fact demonstrated the limits of Malaysia's Islamic identity as well as its vulnerabilities. The event was of particular importance because of Malaysia's tenure of a non-permanent seat in the United Nations' Security Council in the period August to December 1990.¹ The event's domestic relevance, on the other hand, was magnified by the fact that it had followed closely on the heels of the first Malaysian general election which was itself preceded by the most serious intra-UMNO split and the establishment of significant Malay-Muslim political expression outside of it; namely, the *Semangat* '46-PAS coalition government in Kelantan. In the aftermath of a virtually crippling fracas between rival Malay political interests, Malaysia's

(and most particularly, the Mahathir Administration's) international image needed significant repairing.

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, Malaysia co-sponsored several UN Security Council resolutions which condemned the Iraqi invasion and demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces, based on the clear violations of sovereignty, national integrity and independence by the invasion, all of which have previously served as significant guiding principles for Malaysia in the conduct of *all* its foreign relations. Although Malaysia called for a negotiated settlement and suggested that the UN should play an important mediatory role, it was also in favour of exerting some pressure on Iraq, supporting the UN sponsored trade sanctions on that country in the hope that Saddam Hussein would be forced to the negotiating table and that the US and the world community would refrain from the use of force to expel Iraq from Kuwait.

Despite its support for these UN resolutions, the Government tried to portray an even-handed approach. Malaysia had after all, thus far, maintained good relations with both Iraq and Kuwait, had helped in mediation efforts during the Iran-Iraq war, and held substantial economic investment guarantee agreements with Kuwait. Iraq's decision to annex Kuwait as its nineteenth province, however, signalled Malaysia's eventual support for UN Security Council Resolution 678 which empowered the allied forces assembled in the Middle East to use force, if necessary, to ensure the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. One of Malaysia's immediate concerns was for the evacuation of its citizens stranded there, but it was clear that the Government also feared that the lack of a quick (and amicable) solution would help escalate the War, with the potential for the involvement of the major powers which would ultimately hold more serious political, military, economic and most significantly here, religious implications.

Despite official Malaysian efforts to identify the issue as one concerning the violation of international principles, the fact was that both Iraq and Kuwait were Muslim countries and the invasion as such had fractured Islamic solidarity. Indeed, Dr Mahathir, in supporting the initial UN sanctions, had sought to legitimize this with reference to Islam, declaring that the invasion was not only against the teachings of Islam but had also tarnished the religion's image among non-Muslims. The Foreign Minister, in his statement to the Security Council, had similarly used evocative religious language to legitimize Malaysian support of Resolution 678.² On the other hand, in his statement in support of that Resolution, the Prime Minister qualified the Malaysian stand as having been decided only after "very careful consideration" and as "uncompromising" on the principle of "aggression" of large states over small nations in the settlement of disputes in particular because of Malaysia's membership within the OIC and the non-aligned movement and as itself a small nation.³

In fact, Dr Mahathir also chose to point out in his statement that the appeal to Malaysia, specifically by the governments of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other OIC countries had weighed heavily in its decision to back the Resolution. Nevertheless, Malaysia declined a public request from Saudi Arabia to send

troops for the effort of implementing Resolution 678, except in the event of any threat to the security of the Holy Land of Mecca and Medina.

Once support for the Resolution was announced, however, the Government faced severe criticism at home. The force of the issue within the Malaysian domestic context was attributable precisely to its co-religionist dimensions. Although theoretically a dispute between two Muslim countries, the Saudi invitation to the US and other Western countries to help defend their territory, gave weight to the perception that Islam was pitted against the Western and therefore “infidel” powers. Saddam Hussein’s representation of the threatened Allied invasion as an attack on Islam in fact helped to inflame the fears of Muslim communities globally that superpower, Israeli and therefore Zionist intervention in the Gulf was aimed specifically against Islam.

In defending Malaysia’s stand at the UMNO General Assembly in December 1990, the Prime Minister stressed that when a country faced external aggression, the identity of those extending aid (i.e. the non-Muslim Western powers), was less significant than the aggression itself. Drawing an analogy to Malaysia’s situation during the crisis of *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia, he pointed to the fact that, at the time, Malaysia had needed all the help it could get from the international community.⁴

Once the War had begun and the Iraqi regime attempted to depict it as *jihad* (holy war), however, the Malaysian public’s perception of the issue as primarily co-religionist was heightened, becoming more acute when the issue of the security of the Holy Land (*Tanah Suci*) under Saudi guardianship was also given attention. Once regional Muslim sentiment was engaged (public protest among Muslim communities within Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines receiving much media publicity in Malaysia) the Administration was even more vulnerable to criticism on any action it took.

What is particularly important here is that while engaging co-religionist sensitivities, the issue of the Gulf War was also perceived as invoking international principles concerning the sovereign rights and independence of small countries. Indeed, local and international discourse on the vulnerabilities of Islam as an expression of Third World nationalism to “the machinations of the West” and of non-Muslims was prosaic. In contemporary terms, Islamic language has become an expressive if convenient medium for the articulation of a broad range of interests and sentiments in Malaysia, most particularly that of nationalism, even Malay nationalism (as discussed in the previous chapter). Indeed, its particular significance lay in its potential for domestic repercussions and the *manner* in which it also engaged Malay-Muslim nationalist sentiment. Due to (and perhaps serving as evidence of) the effectiveness of the identity it had built for itself as bridging both nationalist and Islamic interests, the Mahathir Administration (and indeed UMNO) were particularly vulnerable over the issue.

Furthermore, from Malaysia’s perspective, the clear conceptual parallels between the international principles argued for in the case of Kuwait in the Gulf War and a UN secured resolution to the Palestinian problem were too obvious to be disregarded by the international community. Although the official Malaysian

statement to the UN Security Council in support of Resolution 678, pointed out that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was not perceived as a means of solving the question of Palestine, it did also make clear reference, in fact, to Malaysia's disappointment thus far over US ambivalence concerning the issue of Palestine. Linkage between the issues was thus created through the implication that support for the principle of concerted global action over the invasion of one state by another should find equal application and solution in the case of Palestine. Indeed, specific attempts were persistently made by the Malaysian delegation to connect the issues, although Dr Mahathir appears also to have been pressured into moderating this. In a sense, de-linkage of the issue from Malaysia's role within the UN and on the Security Council was difficult, if undesirable, due not only to Malaysian fidelity in support of Palestinian nationalism and the PLO, but also because, as part of its agenda during its term on the Council, Malaysia had sought precisely to promote the Palestine Question for discussion.⁵

Domestic public criticism also stemmed from the perception that while Malaysia had thus far supported Palestinian rights, US involvement and motivation in the War was calculated (other than for its own economic interests) towards the protection of Israel (and therefore of Zionism). This highlighted the Administration's vulnerability to accusations that it had compromised Malaysia's stated foreign policy objectives. Nevertheless, it was the idiom of Islam which was most frequently employed in debate over the issue within Malaysia. Parties such as PAS strongly dissented from Malaysia's official stand, even convening a special conference to discuss the issue. Significant among PAS criticisms was not simply the Government's betrayal of another Muslim country, but its apparent lack of *independence* in arriving at its decision, therefore seriously indicting Dr Mahathir's frequent rhetoric on his dissenting views within the international community, and his desire to project Malaysia as an independent state and a leader of the Third World.⁶

Despite Government attempts at quashing overt demonstrations against the War (perceived as being implicitly directed against the Administration) for fear that this would further arouse religious sentiment, once the War itself escalated, the issue was debated at some length in Parliament. Indeed, the Government faced a formidable challenge when all parties of the Opposition, including, significantly, *Semangat '46*, expressed disappointment and shock at the Malaysian Government's stand, issuing a joint statement to President Bush, criticizing the decision. PAS introduced several proposals in Parliament as a means of resolving the issue, pointedly insisting that it was for Arab and Muslim countries to solve their own problems, without the involvement of superpowers. These proposals were supported by the leader of *Semangat '46*, employing inspiring Islamic language in doing so.⁷ Other opinion offered that it was perhaps better for Muslims to support a co-religionist government, even if bad, against non-Muslim antagonists.⁸

Indeed, such a challenge helped create a context in which the Government found it increasingly necessary to legitimize its own position through the similar deployment of evocative religious symbols. The expanding hostilities in the

Gulf also provided the opportunity for Malaysia to express fears about the future of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina (linked to official perceptions of problems over Malaysian performance of the *Hajj*). During Parliamentary debate over the Gulf War, the Government proposed that the Cities be declared “Open” in an effort to safeguard them from any disaster arising from the conflict (in response to a motion tabled by a Member of Parliament from PAS). Memories of Saudi insensitivities over the 1990 tunnel stampede in Mecca, which involved the death of thousands of Muslims, including Malaysians, were no doubt still fresh in the minds of those dissenting from any Malaysian-Muslim consensus over the imperatives of co-operation with Saudi defence.

As the war continued, the Government was faced with dissension from a variety of non-governmental Muslim organizations, through independent action taken by the *PAS-Semangat '46* coalition (*Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah*) government of Kelantan (including a proposal to recruit volunteers to fight on Iraq’s part), as well as from within UMNO. A forum held to discuss the Gulf crisis at an UMNO division meeting witnessed the articulation of ideas not simply co-religionist but also concerned with Western intervention against a Third World and Arab country. Although UMNO Youth’s President had initially appealed for Muslim caution in Malaysia over the issue because of its complexity, once the Government had itself articulated concern over the deviation from the original functions of Resolution 678, the section’s International Bureau issued similar protests to the US.

While the Malaysian delegation at the UN had consistently stressed that the use of force to expel Iraq from Kuwait was to be conducted within limits, as the war advanced and the Administration came under severe domestic criticism the Government increasingly articulated its concern over the potential of any unnecessary violation of Iraqi sovereignty. In fact, as the Administration argued, support for the Resolution had clearly articulated that the use of force was envisioned (at least by Malaysia) as being within limits.⁹ Once the US came to dominate “international” efforts which were at any rate perceived to be advancing beyond the original function of extracting Iraq from Kuwait, Dr Mahathir increasingly signalled Malaysia’s dissent, pointing out that his country could not support further action which appeared to seek the complete destruction of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein, even suggesting that this might be the US’s disguised ulterior motive.¹⁰

Despite its continued insistence that the Gulf conflict was not *a jihad*, heightened domestic dissension from the official position increasingly forced the Government to be on the defensive, frequently qualifying, if not legitimizing, its position in religious terms. Maintaining that Muslims should remain neutral in intra-religious conflict, the Administration revealed Iranian mediation with Malaysia for the convening of an OIC Summit to prevent the conflict, although Malaysian enthusiasm alone for such mediation had been insufficient. The exclusion of all warring parties from the annual international *Quran* reading competition in Kuala Lumpur was aimed at symbolizing Malaysia’s neutrality. Dr Mahathir was persistently called on to make public pronouncements on every turn

in the War and he sought increasingly to do so with reference to Islam, even implying at one point that had Iraq declared war on Israel and not on Kuwait, it would have received Malaysia's support as an Islamic country.

In fact, the significance of political challenge on religious grounds was reflected in the fact that the Government's position was increasingly defended in Parliament by a Minister in the Religious Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Office (and not by the Foreign Minister nor his officials), stressing Malaysia's position as that of "a middle path, but *not against* Islam". Indeed, actions taken by the Government thus far were not only in line with international principles but with those of Islam as well: "The Prophet had himself called upon the aid of non-Muslims when it had been necessary".¹¹

It would be entirely speculative to suggest that the Malaysian Government might have been forced to retract its support for the Resolution, had the War continued. Despite its projections as pragmatic peace-maker, Malaysia's "obvious" concession to pressure from the US, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in its position on the Gulf War (even if unavoidable on an issue that clearly involved its larger and long-term security interests), served as an embarrassment to the Administration's image with its domestic audience. In fact, a media report, issued shortly after the conclusion of the Gulf War, that President Bush had personally requested the US Congress to resume military aid to Malaysia in the region of US\$1.1 million per annum, served to reinforce the image that Malaysia was being "rewarded" for its support of Allied strategy during the War, acting as a further blow to Dr Mahathir's projection of any "independently-minded" Malaysian foreign policy.

However, having recently emerged from a political crisis inflamed by a severe recession, the context of an imminent threat to its national economy (through a protracted international war) and therefore the stability of the ruling party within a still highly charged scene of intra-Malay political rivalry, more "pragmatic" considerations were perhaps particularly influential. Most importantly, the "stick" of potential US withdrawal of Malaysia's Generalized System of Preferences status, as well as the consequences of any potential break with the country's second largest trading partner (at the time), might have been balanced by the "carrot" of significant Malaysian opportunities for aiding in the projected Allied reconstruction of Kuwait, following the conclusion of the War.¹² On balance, these were clearly all important factors in terms of Malaysian foreign policy decision making on the unavoidable co-religionist dimension of the Gulf War.

In the event, once Iraq agreed to withdraw from Kuwait, the Administration dispatched Malaysian troops as part of the peacekeeping force and continued to emphasize the importance of Muslim reconciliation between the warring countries. This was particularly important in salvaging the Administration's image, following the experience of concerted dissension on the type of "Islamic" identity the Mahathir Administration had been pressured into projecting during the Gulf War and to allay concerns that Malaysia was inevitably weighted towards more conservative Islamic interests and opinion and still trapped by biased (and false) depictions of Islam by the West.

In a significant address to an international Islamic conference, shortly after the Gulf War, then Finance Minister, Datuk Anwar Ibrahim, drew attention to the fact that Muslim division and confusion engendered during the Gulf War demonstrated the need for “positive, critical thinking and a tradition of sound scholarship” among Muslims.¹³ In fact, PAS itself had formulated an initiative towards joint co-operation of all Muslim bodies in Malaysia on formulating a common stand on post-war developments in the Gulf. As projected, official Malaysian efforts were also directed towards securing an economically beneficial stake in international reconstruction efforts in Kuwait, following the conclusion of the War and, in that, they were fairly successful with reports that Malaysia’s “firm” foreign policy had paid dividends on the trade and investment front.¹⁴

Continued international sanctions against Iraq did not always meet with Malaysian approval and on several occasions, Dr Mahathir articulated opposition to any attempt to remove Saddam Hussein by force or for the continued punishment of Iraqi society and in particular was opposed to independent US actions against Iraq that bore no “clear and specific” mandate from the UN Security Council, underlining that Malaysian foreign policy in the matter was consistently based on international principles.

While Malaysia had, in the eyes of its public, played a pivotal role on a co-religionist issue, the irony was that its term on the Security Council expired shortly after it voted in support of Resolution 678 and was therefore less able to exercise an influential position once the Gulf War had commenced. However, the issues debated within Malaysia during the Gulf War suggest, if anything, that Malaysian administrations in the future are likely to be more seriously challenged on foreign policy issues domestically as a rule, and that if these issues are perceived to involve a co-religionist dimension, the Administration is likely to prove even more vulnerable in the policy that it conducts.

MALAYSIA AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN THE 1990s

The overwhelming changes to the post-Cold War scene were to help induce the process of peace in the Middle East, the Gulf War notwithstanding, and initiate dialogue towards a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. These dramatic changes, while welcomed by Malaysia, were also greeted with caution partly reflective of continued suspicion and concern over Israeli sincerity and over the intentions of the US but partly also as a concession to domestic Muslim opinion.

While Malaysia confirmed its support for the Palestinian cause, endorsing all PLO (which it had already accorded full diplomatic status to in 1992) initiatives, extending a cautious welcome to Palestinian-Israeli mutual recognition and to the Peace Agreement of 1993, it has reiterated its conviction that the UN must play the primary role in ensuring a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the Question of Palestine and to the Arab-Israeli conflict. To some extent, opinion has also been expressed from within the Mahathir Administration that

the Agreement's initial framework has been "insufficient" towards any lasting peace in the Middle East.

While the support for a Palestinian homeland remains a strong foreign policy goal, the Administration has also sought to distance itself from the initiatives of more radical Palestinian movements such as HAMAS and has attempted to caution other Muslim states against resort to "extremist" actions, even while admitting to intolerable levels of frustration over the position of the Palestinians.

In fact the Administration has continued to express strong antipathy towards Zionism. Domestically, however, this has continued to become easily conflated, again, with sentiments possibly construed as anti-Semitic and given greater expression in political competition. An embarrassing incident involving the feature film, *Schindler's List*—a dramatic presentation lauded by international critics for its harrowing but accurate portrayal of Jewish experience during the Holocaust—revealed, however, that it was not only Malay politicians who could employ such sentiment, but the government bureaucracy itself.

The Malaysian Board of Film Censors decided to ban the film in March 1994, but when a spokesman for the film's director, Steven Spielberg, revealed that Malaysia's *official* objections had in fact been based on its perception that the film constituted "Jewish propaganda", the matter rapidly turned into a political issue. As Home Affairs Minister at the time, Dr Mahathir initially defended Malaysia's prerogative "to ban any film in this country", denying any charges of anti-Semitism. However, as details of the Malaysian Censorship Board's official letter sent to the film's distributors, United Pictures International (UPI), explaining the reasons for the ban, were released to the press, a minor international furore was raised.

The Board was quoted as suggesting that the film reflected "the privilege and virtues of a certain race only" and appeared as "propaganda with the purpose of asking sympathy as well as to tarnish the other race". The US State Department promptly issued a statement maintaining that the film depicted historical events and Nazi atrocities accurately. The film was banned in a number of Middle Eastern countries and certain religious authorities had called for similar action in Indonesia. Amidst a groundswell of international criticism, the Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, attempted to reverse the negative publicity and suggested that the Administration might review the ban. The Cabinet (with the absence of Dr Mahathir who was on an official visit to India) eventually overturned the decision, noting that the Malaysian Government was "consistently opposed to all forms of oppression...irrespective of race, nationality or religion". In the event, the film was withdrawn from distribution in Malaysia, due to the director's objections to any cuts and the Censorship Board's usual guidelines on nudity and violence. Although the incident elicited some politically opportunistic statements, the Malaysian Censorship Board and its bureaucrats were largely pilloried by the domestic press for causing "undue embarrassment" to the Prime Minister and to Malaysia.¹⁵

The continuing strength of domestic sensitivities has meant that the question of official and overt Malaysian recognition of Israel has proceeded with extreme

caution even while other Middle Eastern Muslim countries have set a precedent. Anticipating the signing of the peace accord in 1993, that would grant limited Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho in the West Bank, Dr Mahathir noted that Malaysia would need some time to consider the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. Underlining its policy as being based on the lead of Arab states and of the Muslims in Palestine, Malaysia pledged M\$12.5 million towards Palestinian administration of this territory and technical aid for infrastructure while urging Israel to “do more” for peace in the Middle East.¹⁶

In fact, in 1994, the Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister, Chua Jui Ming, had floated the idea that the Israeli market might be a new area for the expansion of Malaysian investment once the strengthening of ties between Israel and Palestine had allowed for the lifting of trade and diplomatic sanctions. However, when Israeli television reported a meeting between its leaders and a brother of the then Malaysian King (who was a noted businessman, the head of one of Malaysia’s largest private corporations and a close friend of Dr Mahathir’s), suggesting that Malaysia was on the verge of recognizing Israel, a domestic political storm broke, forcing the Government to admit to prior contacts that it had made with Tel Aviv.

In the midst of further revelations alleging prior secret commercial exchanges between Israel and Malaysia and of Mahathir’s own alleged meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister in France in July of the same year, PAS issued a swift response against any diplomatic recognition (“which would betray Muslims around the world”). Such controversy was to increasingly force the Prime Minister into a more defensive position, insisting that Malaysia would not extend recognition to Israel until “everything is settled” and would retain its ban on trade ties.¹⁷ Although Dr Mahathir had initially maintained that the Government would not prosecute any Malaysian for visiting Israel, he was forced to reverse that position within the space of a month, under pressure from a number of Islamic groups, including ABIM, resulting in the Cabinet’s decision to impound the Prince’s passport. The significance of domestic opinion was particularly reflected in UMNO Youth’s initiative two weeks later urging Malaysia to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, citing religious evidence of Jewish and Muslim co-existence and defending the right for such ties since “not all Jews are Zionists”.

By 1994, however, the Government announced arrangements for Malaysians to travel to Jerusalem for religious purposes claiming pursuit henceforth of an independent policy towards Israel uninfluenced by the decision of other Muslim nations in recognising the country.¹⁸ The Mahathir Administration has since displayed a desire to remain focused on the peace process and its outcome against the dramatic assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister in 1995 to which Dr Mahathir did not directly respond.

Although the eventual establishment of some form of relations with Israel appears inevitable, if the peace process remains on course, it appears likely that the Government will have to initiate more effective strategies for dealing with continued opposition within Malaysia to any such recognition of Israel and the furtherance of ties even as the fundamental tensions within Malay society

(described in Chapter 6) continue to influence official attitudes on the Palestinian issue. At any rate, PAS has been extremely supportive of more radical moves towards establishing the Islamic identity of Palestine through organizations like HAMAS and has rejected the Israeli-Palestinian Accord as a “sham” which it describes as being designed to perpetuate Zionist and Western imperialist control of Palestine and the Arab world and has continued to question the viability of a nationalist ideology there.¹⁹

Significant also to an assessment of a religious identity in Malaysian foreign policy is the realization that policy thinking and decision making in the decade of the nineties have been effected within the context of a post-Cold War global order or indeed by the process of *constructing* that order. An issue clearly demonstrative of this dramatically altered context and its relevance to the “measured” promotion of an Islamic identity in Malaysian foreign relations is the issue of BosniaHerzegovina and the related perceptions of an embattled Muslim population.

THE ISSUE OF BOSNIA

Since the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia and the onset of a civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Malaysian attention has been sharply focused on the plight of the Bosnian Muslim peoples and the international community’s management of that issue. Malaysia has acted as a vociferous critic of the extended paralysis of the United Nations in the matter, of the West’s relative indecisiveness and inaction for almost four years and the apparent operation of a double standard in human rights considerations concerning Bosnia’s Muslims. Whereas the Gulf War presented a clear dilemma in the defence of choices made with foreign policy principles beyond that of co-religionism, the issue of Bosnia has also allowed for the articulation and confirmation of the Mahathir Administration’s deepest convictions and fears about the West and the post-Cold War order.

As the situation deteriorated in Bosnia-Herzegovina and reports of the atrocities committed against the Muslim population, including a policy of “ethnic cleansing” by Serbian nationalists, mounted, Malaysia increasingly took a more vocal stance in condemning the inaction of the international community, particularly that of the West. To some extent, Malaysian action on the issue in terms of its religious and more general international identity might be said to have outstripped previous foreign policy stances while the Mahathir Administration has appeared more committed to a role as high profile policy activist on Bosnia, not only within the community of co-religionists but within international society in general.

At the earliest stages of the crisis, in 1992, Malaysia was among activist OIC members pressuring the UN Security Council to debate the issue. Facing resistance from Western countries and Security Council members, efforts were redirected towards intensive lobbying at other international fora in which Malaysia has traditionally played a high profile role such as that of the Non-Aligned Movement and within the Commonwealth.

As part of a persistent Muslim lobby for a resolution by the Non-Aligned Movement against recognition of Serbia and Montenegro (following their unilateral declaration of independence), Malaysia was highly supportive of the UN General Assembly's decision in October 1992 to expel Yugoslavia. The Administration called upon the OIC to address the plight of the Bosnian Muslims and the issue of Bosnia-Herzegovina more substantially. It advocated going beyond valuable moral and political support through two clear courses: the establishment of safe havens in various Bosnian civilian populated areas and through the lifting of the arms embargo and increase in humanitarian aid. From that point on, Malaysia also consistently lobbied the UN to use military force in halting Serbian aggression in Bosnia. Indeed, in diplomatic terms, Malaysia continued to pressure its partners within international and regional fora for their active support in enabling the lifting of the UN arms embargo and in solving the overall crisis.²⁰

Most significantly, Malaysia rejected any international attempts to resolve the issue through a dismemberment of Bosnia-Herzegovina along racial or religious lines. Following the deteriorating situation for Muslim security and the continued international arms embargo on Bosnia, in December 1992, Malaysia unilaterally "adopted" Bosnian refugee camps in European countries neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina, activated with the assistance of the UNHCR, as well as providing direct refuge to slightly more than 300 Bosnian refugees in Malaysia. The Bosnian Fund, established by the main newspaper group, *Utusan Malaysia*, attracted contributions from a variety of private quarters and by 1994 had raised more than M\$3 million for Bosnian war victims.

While such moves have been reflective of Malaysian commitment to the plight of the Palestinians, one significant area in which Malaysian action was somewhat unprecedented was in its participation in peace-keeping efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1993 as part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). Although Malaysian peace-keeping troops have participated in other international missions, such as those in Somalia and Cambodia, the religious and ethnic implications of the situation in Bosnia and the fact that Malaysian troops there stood as part of a Muslim force, aimed at securing and protecting Muslim safe havens in Bosnia (being one of only three Muslim nations accepted by the UN for these purposes), clearly differentiated this mission in both international and domestic terms.²¹

Even more significantly, there were official attempts to legitimize Malaysian involvement as being based on religious grounds. Prior to confirmation of the involvement of its troops, in July 1993, the Ministry of Defence announced that it would seek a *fatwa* from the National Islamic Council on the status of Malaysian soldiers in Bosnia as being involved in *jihād*. This was however retracted after concerns were expressed a week later by the Russian Foreign Minister that any semblance of a religious crusade had to be avoided and that it would only welcome "moderate and reasonable" Muslim countries willing to stick to the UN concept of peace-keeping and abide strictly by its mandate.²²

Indeed possible domestic political jockeying on the matter cannot be

discounted. The then Defence Minister, Datuk Najib Tun Razak, was running for an UMNO Vice-Presidential post that year, against the Foreign Minister, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and in informal discussions with ASEAN counterparts on security matters the Russian Foreign Minister maintained that he had earlier laid out his country's position to the Malaysian Foreign Minister. On the other hand, the Prime Minister had himself made a point of explaining to domestic audiences the imperatives of Malaysia's status as a peaceful and relatively prosperous nation in aiding those "who are of the same religion and status as ours".

Thus the active, if more measured, actions of Malaysia's official foreign policy establishment did not entirely remove more vocal and defiant articulation of co-religionist sentiment by Dr Mahathir himself nor indeed the valuable domestic political mileage to be gained from the issue by a variety of interests. Indeed, the Malaysian Government has been both supported and lobbied over its actions towards Bosnia by such groups.

UMNO Youth made formal protestations to the UN while PAS claimed Malaysia was indirectly responsible for the killing of Bosnian Muslims since it was part of a UN peace-keeping force yet could do nothing to stop Serbian atrocities. In May 1994, the Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, in a massive national rally for the Bosnian cause, addressed the Government's commitment to the cause of Muslims everywhere. A number of non-governmental organizations established the *Barisan Bertindak Bosnia* (BBB—Bosnia Action Front) in May 1994 to push for a solution to the Bosnian conflict.²³

From the start, Malaysia was also concerned about the purposes of its presence in Bosnia and had sought clarification on its mandate as a peace-keeping force, assurance of UN front-line protection, urging UN consent to allied air strikes on Serbian territory and expressing frustration and disappointment that the Bosnians had been denied their inherent right to individual or collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Since its involvement, Malaysia has maintained a troop strength in Bosnia of some 1,500 men and whereas it attempted to gradually scale down its other peace-keeping missions, its commitment to maintaining troops in Bosnia was reaffirmed for as long as was "necessary". Escalation of the war and the worsening situation, in particular for the Bosnian Muslims, in fact prompted the Mahathir Administration to propose increasing its troop strength in February 1994, in accordance with an OIC proposal towards the defence of Muslims in Bosnia. This proposal was rejected by the UN. Together with OIC countries, Malaysia in fact frequently lobbied for the mandate for their troops to be changed to that of peace-enforcing, implying a willingness to engage in battle if necessary. Indeed, Malaysia also pledged to continue to defend Bosnia even if the UN decided to withdraw UNPROFOR troops in the event of possible further escalation of the war.

The strength of domestic sentiment has also been reflected in allegations of Malaysian voluntary participation in fighting Serbian forces. Reports surfaced that between 500 and 3,000 Malaysian volunteers (together with Afghans and

Algerians) were moving in the areas of Bihac, Mostar and Sarajevo as part of militia forces of the Seventh Islamic Brigade at the height of hostilities. On the other hand, Malaysian peace-keeping troops themselves were apprized of the difficulties as an outside force with a distinctly different religious identity even in such exercises and the seriousness of sensitivities involved. In August 1994, Malaysian troops were accused of knowingly destroying a cross in Croat territory and Croat forces claimed that unless it was replaced, the security of Malaysian troops could not be guaranteed. Malaysia's official response was prompt in its apology over the incident, insisting that its destruction had not been deliberate, nor did its soldiers mean to insult any religion and subsequently, Christian soldiers within the Malaysian contingent replaced the cross.

Dr Mahathir's frustrations at the continued genocidal drives by Serbia and the insistence of the Security Council in maintaining the arms embargo on Bosnia thus leaving Bosnian Muslims with no way of protecting themselves, led Malaysia to make repeated calls for the resignation of Boutros Boutros Ghali as Secretary General of the UN due to what was perceived as his ineffectiveness in that role and in his blatant disregard for the issue. Partly in frustration at repeated UN rejection of Malaysian offers to double its troop strength, Dr Mahathir proclaimed in July 1995 that unless there was more effective action on the part of the West and the UN, Malaysia would itself sell arms to the Bosnian Muslims (an idea supported by Indonesia) although, following an OIC meeting a week later, Malaysia softened its stance confirming that it would not act unilaterally but in accordance with OIC decisions.

Eventual news of the last minute agreements arrived at between warring parties by December 1995, through the Dayton Accords, were understandably greeted cautiously on the part of Malaysia. Dr Mahathir himself reiterated his concern that even with the long awaited decision by the West to engage itself with greater commitment and risk through the despatch of NATO and US forces on a massive scale (after almost four years of wavering), the ending of conflict in Bosnia would have little hope of being realized without real commitment to what he called "peace enforcement". To this end, responding to a personal request by the US President, Bill Clinton, in May 1996, Dr Mahathir pledged a Malaysian contribution of US\$10 million towards a projected launch by the Clinton Administration of a US\$500 million programme to equip and train the Bosnian army.

It is worth bearing in mind that despite the co-religionist dimension (and as in the Palestinian, Afghan and Gulf War issues), Malaysia has expressed its concerns and chosen to act largely through the established channels of the international community and *primarily* through the United Nations system and *not* through unilateral action. More significantly, while Malaysian action and reaction over the issue is clearly focused on the plight of their co-religionists it is evident that the Bosnian issue has engaged the general Malaysian imagination (even from an official perspective) for a variety of other reasons.

Like the Palestinian and Gulf War issues, before it, the Bosnian crisis has engaged the fundamental security concerns of an ethnically plural state like

Malaysia that looks upon the international community to guarantee its perceived basic rights of sovereignty and territorial integrity as an independent nation. More importantly, perhaps even more than the Palestinian cause, Bosnia represents a clear reflection of Malaysia's own domestic concerns for the viability of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state in the midst of a rapidly changing global context, as well as the alarming and menacing re-emergence of decided ethnic and religious hostilities through protracted global and regional conflict.²⁴

Included in such calculations must also be the perception that Bosnia's Muslims, despite standing at a majority, have been embattled by a Serbian minority (seen as implicitly supported by the West). The potential parallels for Malaysian Muslims might therefore be obvious. Indeed, for all its proclamations of the uniqueness of its character and context as a primarily Muslim country with a heterogeneous (Muslim and non-Muslim, Malay and non-Malay) population, the Mahathir Administration has proven keenly aware that the confessional and ethnic role of Islam in the Malaysian context is one that is increasingly mirrored globally, particularly in the West. As a variant of Islamic politics, where the religion has served to define new communities within secular, post-Christian societies, it is increasingly important as a feature of modern national and international society.²⁵ Certainly Malaysia's foreign policy establishment has demonstrated a keen sensitivity to such dimensions, reflected in its increasing articulation of a position over the status of this Muslim diaspora in the West. These attitudes have likely also influenced official Malaysian policy towards the Muslim community in Bosnia.

Furthermore, the country's foreign policy during the Bosnian crisis has been strategically linked to larger foreign policy thinking on the need for radical restructuring of the UN and, in particular, effective change in the Security Council as part of a Malaysian agenda for the more equitable representation of the developing world within such fora. These concerns are nowhere more important than in the context of the post-Cold War global order and for small countries like Malaysia who are particularly focused on how such order will eventually be determined, through the experience of international issues like that of Bosnia amidst the demise of traditional certainties and the resulting international political vacuum.

Official Malaysian perception of the issue therefore centred around Article 42, Chapter VII of the UN charter with an end to halting "foreign" interference and aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina and restoring peace and stability in the region. Citing the issue as a test-case for the credibility of the Security Council in guaranteeing "the survival of a new nation from external onslaught", Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN advocated that the Council act in accordance with "the responsibility given to it by the general membership of the United Nations under the Charter".²⁶

Dr Mahathir has also attempted to emphasize that while Malaysian empathy for Bosnia clearly holds co-religionist links, these are not its only motivations. The Foreign Minister in tabling a motion on genocide in Bosnia reminded Parliament that the country would have sent peace-keeping missions even if the

issue had concerned or involved primarily non-Muslims. Indeed, the severe violation of human rights in the War has been as troubling and has provided further fuel for the Mahathir Administration's offensive drive against any attempts by the West to promote human rights as the central focus of its international mission.

The UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, in fact provided the perfect forum for countries like Malaysia to attack the hypocrisy of the West over the issue, by drawing a direct link to inactivity over Bosnia even while pursuing or punishing other countries for their record on human rights. Malaysia in fact, worked strongly (with OIC support) to include a special declaration on Bosnia and was accused by the US as one of 10 countries responsible for delaying agreement on the final declaration of the Conference.²⁷ In the event, the declaration on Bosnia obtained inclusion. In fact, Malaysian disappointment with the efforts of the West in the resolution to the hostilities drew a direct contrast against its concerted purpose and activity when its economic and strategic interests were seriously jeopardized in the Gulf War.²⁸

ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN A POST-IDEOLOGICAL AGE

The contemporary image of Islam and its role in international society has more often than not been depicted as fundamentally threatening to international security. The end of the Cold War brought numerous projections of Islam as the "new" enemy of the West. The imagined context of an ideological vacuum in global politics, following the collapse of Communism, was soon replaced by predictions of another challenge. The imaginings and projections of a post-Cold War international environment has frequently alluded to an imminent global challenge by Islam as a remote continuation of the Arab and Ottoman conquests of medieval times.

The "challenge" of Islamist politics and of Islamic movements has been variously construed as the emergence of an ideological threat equal to Communism or as representative of a hostile and alien value system that is likely to bring prolonged conflict in world politics. Such "culturalist differentialism"—in particular, talk of Islam as a "historical enemy" of the West similar to Communism—is premised on the conviction that there exists an implicit and centuries-old hostility (stretching as far back as the confrontation between Islam and Christianity during the Crusades) between "Islam" and the West. Patently, for many Muslims, the "global events" of the Gulf War, of Bosnia and even the debate engendered over the *Satanic Verses* have to some extent helped seal the political symbolism and identity of Islam, serving as the last and only refuge for contemporary Muslim societies.²⁹ Other Muslims have projected the coming century as manifesting the dawn of a more glorious era for an Islamic civilization; their discourse portraying the religion as the only remaining contestatory ideology of any global potential.

It is possible if not necessary to decipher these projections of the role of Islam in international relations as largely over-blown and grossly under-estimating of

the reality of “Islam” or of the potential for conflict between Muslims themselves. The fact is that the political discourse of both Muslims and of the West continues largely to support the imagined idea of a singular Islam. This political imagination has been shaped by what Mohammed Arkoun calls a “tyranny of reason”—both Western and Islamic—which promotes a superior form of “religious” reason, yet which cannot itself solely defend the religion. Projections of the global potential of Islam articulated within the contemporary Islamic resurgence have, Arkoun argues, often put itself at odds not only with Western tradition but also with Islamic tradition as most Muslims have understood it over the past fourteen centuries.³⁰

The reality is, in fact, that Islam has meant many things to many people at different times. More importantly, rather than representing two opposed and divided realities, it is necessary to bear in mind that the history of the West and of Islam is inextricably linked and that the two have, rather, fed upon each other.

Even while the responses of Muslims might be projected as global, their international consequences are often over-stated—they are certainly always played out within a more particularistic context, within the local or national arena of politics. Indeed, any attempt to generalize about Muslim states or societies in their adherence to a global Islamic ideal denies the specific historical junctures which have shaped individual Muslim societies. Projections of a global Islam, singularly defined, also deny any sense of history and rupture—in the imagination and creation of new states, new social classes, new ideologies—in the determination of Muslim societies. Indeed, global Islamic resurgence might be read as being a product of the modern world as much as it is (if not more than) of “Islam”.³¹

There are other means as well in which the issue of identity is relevant to the role of Islam both at domestic and global levels. The scale and complexity of processes of late twentieth-century globalization have also meant that religious identity at both state and society level is contested even as it continues to evolve. This has been marked not insignificantly by the creation of Muslim diasporas which have demanded the moulding of Islam to foreign settings. At the same time, these processes of globalization are claimed also to have facilitated the development of religious sub-cultures that transcend state boundaries and compete with the state, its institutions and governing elites in influencing both domestic and foreign policy.³²

The global resurgence of religion has also been connected to the growth of a type of “public space”—international civil society—that can include the transnational activities of “Islamic” actors such as the OIC or indeed of religious social movements of global stature.³³ In as much as global Islamic activism is stereo-typically linked to “fundamentalist rage”, it also concerns itself with debate and discussion about the potential for an “Islamic” form of civil society and its compatibility with democracy.³⁴ To some extent, the tenure of “right” and “wrong” Islam in the Malaysian context acts as a confirmation of the multiplicity of responses to the problems of modernity and of modernization and that these conditions do not always produce secular, liberal, democratic

capitalist societies. Thus far, in the Malaysian context, a qualified religious response is increasingly expressed as a viable response to modernity.

It is worth bearing in mind that renewed attempts to establish an Islamic basis for the state in Malaysia and the furtherance of religious identity through foreign policy might also be interpreted as a search for identity which is at least partially stimulated by the presence of such a Muslim diaspora, and of the potential for competition from transnational religious movements, if not at least an awareness of their meaning. To that extent, the politics of all Muslim countries must also be seen within the global framework which has helped shape them.

In the search for identity and distinctiveness in a shifting world, there have been demands for a Muslim state, which, in the Malaysian case of its poly-ethnic and multi-religious national constituency, have raised great questions and difficulties about the specificity of the post-colonial order and of state identity. Thus far, the best that the Malaysian government has been able to achieve is a workable balance which has relied importantly on external projections of an Islamic identity.

The issues examined here help demonstrate that any religious role in external relations has, more often than not, been directed towards a resolution of domestic problems—a frequent preoccupation of Third World states in the process of their state-building. The concerns of such states have been towards the internal regeneration and order of their societies. The contemporary challenge of Islam has less to do with the security of inter-state relations than it has with how Muslim states and societies are (and will be) internally organized and what this implies for their relations with the world at large.

By its own admission, Malaysia's high-profile Islamic character has not been envisioned as dictating *all* foreign policy. In fact, the Government has chosen to clearly articulate the idea that the country's Muslim identity plays *only one part* in its foreign relations, while upholding its desire to "be friendly" with all countries, no matter what their persuasion.³⁵ This may demonstrate some official sensitivity to the potential for global apprehension over Islam's renewed vigour on the international scene. Malaysia's active support for the 1995 OIC resolution on extremism in Islam might also be read as an example of such sensitivity. In as much as it constitutes a desire by the Administration to underline its commitment to a tested framework of international principles and convictions, it is also aimed at emphasizing, in ideal terms at least, Islam's ideological compatibility with those principles.

Even so, it must be asked whether its self-proclaimed religious identity has had any effect on or relevance to Malaysia's relationships with the non-Muslim world and within other international fora, particularly economic groupings, strategic alliances, military agreements and so forth. This question is especially pertinent against heightened perceptions that the post-Cold War world has already begun to be shaped more by economic relations and exchange than it was, previously, by politics and ideology. As such, the future configurations of global power will likely be shaped by the re-writing of the global agenda through a radical shift of emphasis towards economic concerns as the primary foci of security, international co-operation and conflict.

The Mahathir Administration has, in the 1990s, actively pursued individual and original economic groupings such as the East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG) and the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), ostensibly to protect the interests of the region against the West and more importantly to secure its own economic advantage in the dramatically competitive context of this era. Such strategies appear all the more imperative against the predication of the country's "fragile" communal balance, thus far, on a continuously expanding economy that is able to address ethnically divergent needs equitably. Yet, little evidence appears of a concerted display of any Islamic principles in such groupings.

In Malaysia's relations with countries which hold no co-religionist status and appear themselves to be committed to secular identities—countries such as Australia, Japan, China or the East Asian region in general, the countries of the Pacific Rim and India—the evidence is equally unconvincing. Although included in the Mahathir agenda for the reconstruction of international exchange and intermittently subjected to his condemnations, many of these relationships appear to display no particular relevance to Malaysia's Islamic identity. That is to say in fact that in the majority of Malaysia's relations with countries of the West and East, as well as within many other kinds of international fora, the Mahathir Administration has not found it prudent to advocate, relate or involve Islam or Muslim interests directly. Indeed, it might even be argued that for all Dr Mahathir's haranguing of the US and other developed countries, Malaysia remains vitally dependent on their co-operation, sometimes even appearing to desire emulation of their essential strategies for development. Malaysia's largest and most important trading and investment partner and its prime source of technology remains the West, particularly the US.

From the perspective of Third World states (or countries of the "South") like Malaysia, the post-Cold War dilemmas in the international environment remain essentially the same. Despite all projections for a new world order, its reality remains little different from the old. If anything, these dilemmas appear more stark—there remains a sense of being under siege from an international community impatient to meddle in its affairs. Among these states of the South, there remains the sense that they are losing their sovereignty, which in many cases was only recently or tentatively acquired.³⁶ On the other hand, Third World governing elites have displayed a particular sensitivity and commitment to Westphalian principles even when the developed world is more concerned in the post-Cold War era to transcend these. This attachment is in fact a function of the weakness and vulnerability of their states.³⁷ Certainly, these states have depended more on international institutions and systems to protect their sovereignty, and in the Malaysian case this is reflected in continued acceptance of and active participation within that system (despite its fundamental problems).

None of the above arguments, however, should discount the sincerity of a co-religionist approach in Malaysian foreign policy or indeed its value to Muslims in general. It should be analysed against the context of growing Islamic opinion and discourse building gradually into consensus at an international level. Such consensus has been based on a sense of embattlement by the West, to some

extent, understood as a historical conflict as yet fundamentally unresolved. This mirrors, in part, Western perceptions of Islam and the West as mutually exclusive cultural phenomena. But it also springs from a sense of marginality and continued subjugation within the international environment, at least partly occasioned by the structural domination of the West. A deep and pervasive mistrust of the West emanates from this and some of its more contemporary actions in international relations. Certainly, any renewed enthusiasm for collective security expressed in the post-Cold War era appears for these states to be more particularly directed against the articulation of any alternative value system within international society, including that of Islam.³⁸

For many Third World states and predominantly for Muslim countries, the clash between cultural identities and political order, both national and international, has remained sharp. The reasons lie embedded in the history of Islam as much as they do in the history of the West. Despite a post-modern sensibility even in the imagination of the global order of the twenty-first century, the West continues to propose a singular interpretation of that order, economically, politically and socially.³⁹

These feelings go beyond the confines of a grand conspiracy theory and are in fact somewhat related to theological debates about the future of the religion, indeed of all religions in the world. It is reasonable to expect that foreign policy makers in “nations” that call themselves Muslim or Islamic have been influenced if not impressed to some degree by such discourse and that even if their decisions do not necessarily or even entirely reflect such beliefs, the very process of policy making itself as well as its implementation and concomitant legitimization are affected, at least to some degree, by them.

Indeed, Dr Mahathir himself articulated such suspicions in his address to the 48th UN General Assembly in 1993 when he referred to the apparent widespread mistrust of Muslims on the part of the international community in general, but more particularly of the West as concerns the intentions and agendas of Muslim nations. This address in fact is of fundamental importance to any discussion of Malaysian foreign policy because of its articulation of the principles and concerns of Malaysian foreign policy in the 1990s (projecting into the twenty-first century), even while serving to express the Administration’s particular interests and ideas about the international system and Malaysia’s place within it in the post-Cold War era.⁴⁰

More than anything, the Malaysian involvement in Bosnia and its frequently articulated position on the issue, is a demonstration of the purposes of a religious character to Malaysian foreign policy. Dr Mahathir has noted indications that the post-Cold War world has displayed a bias towards European nations struggling for democracy but has been far less enthusiastic about the actions of Iraqi Kurds or Bosnians. Indeed, there is also the perception that enhanced Malaysian efforts at involvement in UN peace-keeping was a means of helping to shape the new world order and proved that Malaysia’s commitment went beyond rhetoric.⁴¹

Even while the argument that there is something like a specifically Islamic foreign policy that can be clearly identified and measured might be specious, the

articulation of a religious identity itself and the idea that Islam offers a suitable if not righteous framework (or indeed instruments) for resistance against the structures and “realpolitik” through which international relations have thus far been conducted, is popular and persuasive. Indeed, the argument is often extended by Muslims that even while it offers the means towards altering the balance of power within the international system, Islam does not necessarily advocate dispensing with that system altogether.

As William Swatos perceptively notes, because religion has frequently served as a response to the powerlessness on the part of individuals in liberal democratic states (as well as their historic predecessors), it is not surprising that nations as corporate individuals might turn to religion as a vehicle to express frustration against the dominant power cliques in world politics.⁴² Indeed, in contemporary times, Islam has proved to be the instrument par *excellence* for the expression of such powerlessness on the part of Muslim individuals, communities and nations who have located the potential for their advantage within the existing system of international relations but not yet its reality. As such Islam has come to replace or challenge the “godless” ideologies of the past (such as nationalism, socialism, communism, even liberalism) which, while expressive of the universal predicaments of Muslim communities, cannot and have not brought the desired results. Related to this also is the search for *asala* or authenticity, frequently articulated as a necessary pursuit by Muslims in order that their societies be based on “Islamic” and not “Western” values—religious revivalists frequently share the common expression of a “longing for an indigenous form of religious politics free from the taint of Western culture”.⁴³ Attempting to counter conventional ideas of modernity and modernization as expressed by the West, these advocates also warn against *bida’* or “harmful” innovation with which all modern Muslim societies are implicitly threatened.

The fact is that much Islamist political discourse plainly evinces a type of Third World nationalism directed at reshaping the international order more advantageously but through or with reference to religion and religious principles. These Muslim activists have absorbed the political discourse of the traditional Left, but have also given it new shape, meaning and emphasis. This cooption appears almost inevitable in its anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist and proThird World resonance. It not only represents both conformist and non-conformist thinking on the nation state and the *umma* and on the validity and tenure of the Westphalian system but it also refers to how the agenda and substance of this form of inter-state relations might be different. The resurgence of Islamist politics at the global level might be read then also as a response by Muslim states and societies to their perceived weakness and subjugation within the international system as well as being directed at a kind of internal regeneration.

As a whole, Malaysia’s relations with the West in particular might be said to have some focus for its Islamic identity, giving expression to the sentiments outlined above. Within the decade and a half of his leadership, Dr Mahathir has sought to project himself as a leading and original voice from the Third World and Malaysia, as an activist member of that community. His own record of

combative or radical nationalism (with inherent contradictions) and his affinity for particular ideals enshrined within concepts of South-South co-operation, the Non-Aligned Movement and the generally developing world, have demonstrated his concern for the injustices inherent in existing structures of international organization and his personal belief that much of this has to do with Western apathy or indifference. One of the hallmarks of his Administration's foreign policy, particularly in the later years when there were less dissenting voices within his Cabinet, has been its agenda of attempting to correct these inequities through alternative frameworks and through Dr Mahathir's own tendency to more forcefully express his frustration with the state of international affairs and the actions of its actors.⁴⁴ Indeed, his frequent references to Malaysia's position as an independent nation and yet as not truly "free" within the context of the international system holds some validity.

Over time he appears to have been increasingly convinced of the propriety if not value of presenting these arguments, even if selectively, through the prism of Islam. Dr Mahathir has increasingly urged Muslim countries to speak in united fashion within the UN but also to continue to act within its framework if only because they are too weak individually and should thus look to means by which they might better exercise influence. He has frequently articulated the view that Muslims will continue to remain marginalized by the international system unless and until they are "internally" strong. Acting decisively to change the system of international relations requires, however, to his mind, working *within* the system. He might, as well, have been impressed and influenced by arguments made by others within his country which have expressed somewhat similar suspicions.

PAS, for instance, has increasingly articulated its conviction that the West in fact views Islam and Muslims as its enemy and that this will act as the battlefield of the future in the absence of any other significant contest of ideas, a projection echoed by many Islamic groups, movements and personalities within Malaysia.⁴⁵ Dr Mahathir's own current deputy who has had a previous career as a dissenter on state policy both foreign and domestic, through Islam, is also representative of such opinion if less combative in style.

Anwar Ibrahim has suggested that despite talk of the demise of ideology within a post-Marxist world, the concepts and principles of democracy, development and government while having different global applications must ultimately be able to address the aspirations of all peoples equitably—thus ideas, even religious ideas (or idealism), if not ideology, remain important to humanity. Anwar's high profile patronage of fora such as the International Seminar on Islam and Confucianism held in Kuala Lumpur in 1995, towards inter-religious dialogue and the role of religion and spirituality in general in reshaping international organization hints perhaps at his own future agenda for Malaysian international relations.⁴⁶

Having raised the parity between the interests of the developing world with Islamic ideals, it is as well to point out that the advantage as well as detriment of emotive considerations like religions in the contemporary global context is that there obviously exist contradictory perceptions and plans over how their ideals

might be obtained—radically, violently or through accommodative means. Most ideologies in the modern world (even democracy) have been furthered (or defeated) through similar conflict and contradiction, but what distinguishes religion (particularly theistic religion) from ideology is its appeal to higher and incontestable authority which has explained its greater if not grander appeal.

The degree of consensus on common values, principles, and norms supporting international society is clearly rooted in the ethical traditions of religions. Indeed, religious and multicultural sources continue to form some of the main normative issues facing international relations. Despite the daily evidence of the exacting and divisive effects of religious and ethnic dispute, there is also substantial evidence and experience of processes of “peaceful” debate and exchange (reflective of centuries-old traditions by which ideas and actions have been born), between and within religious communities that signify perhaps more positive intent and which might prove as influential in shaping the much talked about new world order. What is likely to be an immanent role for religion in the conduct of international relations is how religious actors influence societal elements in the international system in ways that support the international order—but from a multicultural perspective.⁴⁷

The earlier argument made about the growing importance of Muslim *intellectual* opinion ranged against traditional religious authority, in articulating and influencing if not vastly altering Muslim thought and action over time, even through international society, is relevant here. The representation of such “authority” (through consensus gained in speech, action or silence) either directly within the formal bureaucracies of the state or through their independent exchange with state authorities, can and probably will help determine the role which Islam (and of course other religions) will come to play in the international sphere and indeed what form this role will take. It is important to bear in mind that religious identity in foreign policy or international relations of any kind, will very likely also be shaped by the ongoing debate between Muslims of all inclinations (and however they may be labelled)—traditional, fundamentalist, modernist, conservative, liberal, radical, progressive, *Sunni*, *Shi’ a*, *Sufi*—on what Islam is and what relevance it holds to the modern world.

Overall, it might be argued that there exists a political economy to the employment of a religious identity by the Malaysian state. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, this has clearly been an evident process and pattern in Malay and Malaysian society that is at least currently tolerated if not actively supported by ruling elites, even while it might ultimately challenge the agendas and position of those elites. It is at any rate also significant that these patterns are being shaped as much by the international context of Islam as they are by the domestic context and by the interaction of these spheres, increasingly indistinguishable in terms of ideas. Additionally this is occurring in a context of necessary contact and exchange with other communities and other regions.

For states like Malaysia, geographically situated as they are on the periphery of the traditional Islamic heartland, and whose societies were historically influenced more by the aspects of piety and ritual within the religion, without

the radical or fundamental alteration of their indigenous systems through Islam's civilizational aspects, the future is portentous. The real and intense globalization of societies might yet prove that it is these peripheries that will have the greatest potential for shaping a world-wide Islamic civilization of the future, if not at least the shape of their own particular interpretations of it, even while they are themselves greatly impressed and influenced by the universal spirit of the religion.

NOTES

1. Malaysia was elected to be one of 10 non-permanent members on the Security Council for the period 1989 to 1990.
2. Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, after voting on Resolution 678, opened his address to the UN Security Council with the words: "Malaysia prays to the Almighty *Allah* that we have taken the right decision, that in the final analysis, in discharging our responsibilities, we are underlining the determination of the international community to push back aggression and restore Kuwait". See report in *Utusan Malaysia (UM)*, 12 December 1990; Khong Kim Hoong, "Malaysia 1990: The Election Showdown" in *Southeast Asian Affairs* 1991, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991, pp. 161–179.
3. See full text of Dr Mahathir's statement in *Straits Times (ST)*, 1 December 1990.
4. Dr Mahathir in his closing address, proffered this argument in reply to concerns articulated by "a party in a neighbouring country" (a delegation from a Malay opposition party from Singapore attending the UMNO General Assembly as observers) over Malaysia's decision to support the Resolution.
5. Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs before the Security Council on "The Question of Palestine" in New York, 15 March 1990 in *Foreign Affairs Malaysia (FAM)*, March 1990, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 49–52.
6. See Ketetapan Parti Islam SeMalaysia Tentang Krisis Teluk (PAS Resolutions Regarding the Gulf Crisis), 22 December 1990; *Harakah*, 28 December 1990.
7. See for instance, report on the speeches of the PAS MP Haji Hadi Awang and the Semangat '46 President, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah in Parliament in *Harakah*, 21 January 1991.
8. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 January; *ST*, 26 January 1991.
9. Dr Mahathir's statement in *ST*, 12 December 1990.
10. *New Straits Times (NST)*, 24 January 1991.
11. *UM*, 20 January 1991.
12. Bilateral trade between the US and Malaysia had improved dramatically from 1989 accounting for some US\$4.5 billion worth of Malaysian exports.
13. See Inaugural Address by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, to *International Conference on Future Directions for Muslim Cooperation*, Kuala Lumpur, 2–4 May 1991 in *FAM*, 1991.
14. NST, 8 and 11 August 1991. The Emir of Kuwait personally thanked Malaysia's then Deputy Prime Minister, Ghafar Baba for its strong support during the Gulf War. The official Malaysian delegation to Kuwait was reported to have obtained M\$7.2 million in direct sales in August 1991 with a projection of M\$32.5 million over the following year together with joint agreements on technical and information exchange.
15. See press reports and Editorials in *Utusan Malaysia*, *New Straits Times* and *Berita Harian* 23 March–15 April 1994. Following the announcement of the lifting of the ban, the Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayob was quoted as suggesting that the film's distributor, United Pictures International, should not attempt intimidating Malaysia: "Don't point a pistol at us while asking for

- something. Spielberg does not run this country...we own this country" (ST, 7 April 1994). Steven Spielberg subsequently decided to withdraw all his films from distribution in Malaysia, citing an "irreconcilable gulf in attitudes to artistic freedom. The film was also banned in a number of Middle Eastern countries.
16. *NST*, 14 September 1993.
 17. *ST*, 22 June 1994. The newspaper cited Israeli business sources as confirming Malaysia's alleged secret commercial ties with Israel, for a period of approximately two years. It also cited the Israeli daily, *Ha'aretz* as reporting that the Israeli envoy in Singapore had visited officials in Malaysia for political and economic talks, some weeks prior to the controversy.
 18. *ST*, 26 October 1994.
 19. *Harakah*, 11 and 21 February; 24 and 27 March 1995.
 20. By January 1994, Malaysia hosted an International Conference of Parliamentarians attended by the Bosnian President and the Ambassador to the UN. The Conference was designed to raise awareness of the Bosnian crisis among its Commonwealth partners and to discuss measures aimed at persuading the Security Council to take more decisive action to halt Serb aggression.
 21. Following a resolution taken at the OIC in 1992, Malaysia, together with Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Palestine and Turkey offered a total of 20,000 soldiers to the UN to defend the Muslim enclaves of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As a national exhibition in 1995 clearly displayed, Malaysia has been involved in more than 147 missions in UN peacekeeping since the country's independence and its participation within the UN system.
 22. *ST*, 16 and 23 July 1993.
 23. See *Harakah* and *Utusan Malaysia*, 28 April-7 May 1994.
 24. As a Foreign Ministry spokesman noted, "an independent, multiracial and multi-religious country, a member of the UN is being dismembered through genocide and ethnic cleansing. If the world did nothing, it might have an adverse impact on other multiracial societies especially those with Muslim minorities. For this reason, Malaysia had to take the lead in defending a sacred principle." See *ST*, 26 January 1994.
 25. For an outline of the "disaggregated" role of Islam in contemporary international relations see Fred Halliday, "The Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism" in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 91-113.
 26. *FAM*, Vol. 25, No. 3, September 1992, p. 9.
 27. Malaysia, with other Asian countries, has opposed international attempts to link human rights to issues of trade and development and was party to the Bangkok Declaration prior to the Conference in Vienna which demanded that human rights be considered in the context of the different historical, cultural and religious backgrounds of countries. See for instance, comments made by Malaysian Foreign Ministry representatives cited in *ST*, 22 and 23 June 1993.
 28. See Statement by Malaysian Permanent Representative to the UN, New York, 17 December 1993 in *FAM*, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 50.
 29. Akbar S.Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, "Islam in the Age of Postmodernity" in Akbar S.Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalism and Postmodernity*, op. cit., pp. 1-20.
 30. See Robert D.Lee's comments in his Foreword to Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam—Common Question, Uncommon Answers*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, pp.vii-xiii.
 31. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*, London: Routledge, 1989.
 32. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalisation*, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1994.

33. On the idea and future configurations of international civil society see M.J.Peterson, "Transnational Activity, International Society and World Politics" in *Millennium*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1992, pp. 371–388; on the role of transnational Muslim actors see Jacob M.Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; Mir Zohair Husain, *Global Islamic Politics*, London: HarperCollins, 1995.
34. Heather Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993.
35. R.S.Milne and Diane K.Mauzy, "The Mahathir Administration and Discipline Through Islam", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 4, (Winter 1983/84), p. 635; Jomo Kwame Sundram and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "The Politics of Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia", *Third World Quarterly*, April 1988, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 138; *Berita Harian*, 31 December 1981; address of the Foreign Minister to the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1 October 1987 in *FAM*, Vol. 20, No. 3, December 1987, pp. 40–45.
36. Sharam Chubin, "The South and the New World Order", *Washington Quarterly* 16, No. 4, (Autumn 1993), pp. 87–107.
37. Robert H.Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
38. See Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (trans. by Carol Volk), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 3–27.
39. Robert D.Lee, "Foreword" in Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam—Common Question, Uncommon Answers*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, pp. i–xiii.
40. See full text of Dr Mahathir's address in *Malaysian Digest*, October 1993, pp. 4–5. He was in fact referring to the UN decision to exclude Iran and Turkey from peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia despite their offer of such, defended by a UN guideline which prohibits a peace-keeping force in any country from having troops from neighbouring countries or from those which have historical ties with it. But as Dr Mahathir convincingly argues, this has not prevented significant European participation in peace-keeping efforts in Bosnia, particularly the involvement of Russia, all of whom would be included those categories. See *ST*, 13 March 1994.
41. See comments of the Malaysian Defence Minister in *ST*, 28 October 1993.
42. See William H.Swatos, Jr., "Losing Faith in the 'Religion' of Secularization: Worldwide Religious Resurgence and the Definition of Religion" in William H. Swatos, Jr. (ed.), *Religious Politics in Global and Comparative Perspective*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989, pp. 147–154.
43. Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 1.
44. See, for instance, Dr Mahathir's remarks, cited in *Business Times*, 4 June 1993, concerning the United Nations Development Programme's issue of its Human Development Report which ranked Malaysia below Israel and was taken to task by Dr Mahathir for displaying such a "clear" bias. It is important that he made these remarks at a conference on "Islam and Justice" organized by IKIM.
45. See for instance, *Harakah*, 21 and 24 March 1995.
46. See Anwar Ibrahim, "Era Politik Pasca-Marx" (Era of Post-Marxist Politics) in *Dewan Masyarakat*, December 1992, pp. 26–27; his opening address to the International Seminar on Confucianism and Islam, cited in *ST*, 18 March 1995.
47. Scott Thomas, "The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Study of World Politics", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1995, pp. 289–299.

Conclusion

there is no single model or panacea to help us tackle the threat of the revival of ethno-nationalist and religious conflicts and there can never be a solution imposed from the outside. Our own Malaysian experience underlines the importance of the need for countries especially those with multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies to come up with their own indigenous and complex formula.... In terms of encouraging international cooperation...we believe in a constructive dialogue that would strengthen national unity within ethnic, religious and linguistic pluralism....

Malaysia's Official Statement to the World Conference
on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993

What all Malaysian administrations have held in common is their perception of the importance of diplomacy and international representation as a means towards the achievement of national security for Malaysia. The emphasis placed on social and economic development and indeed on political resilience by this leadership is demonstrative of the perception that potential threat to the security of the "nation" emanates as much from within the state and its political system as it might from external sources. Indeed, the overriding Malaysian concern, in the process of interaction with the international system, is with security, not so much in physical terms but by means of reducing the vulnerabilities of its political structures, institutions and most particularly its ruling regime.

The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia from 1981 to the close of the 1990s has promoted an Islamic image of the country over and beyond any of its predecessors. This has been partly explained by the significantly different international contexts in which the Malaysian state has found itself over almost 40 years of its independence. However, from the current Administration's perspective, the engagement of a religious character within foreign policy has also been virtually necessitated by the circumstances of internal political flux and contention and the urgency of their management.

In turn, the increasing alteration to internal power structures that this has created and the enhanced atmosphere for Islamic debate and dialogue between different domestic expressions, have worked towards the shaping of even greater pressures on official Malaysian perceptions and attitudes towards international relations. This has been most evident in the 1990s and has allowed for the further emphasis of a religious identity where and when this has been considered necessary.

Islam has constituted a powerful weapon in the struggle for political supremacy. In the face of intensive intra-Malay rivalry, Islam has been used by the Mahathir Administration as a continuing source of political legitimacy and as a shield against external interference in Malay politics. The fear of the emasculation of Malay power through political divisions within the community, in part explains the special concern of Malaysian leaders over the theme of "unity". While each Administration since that of the first Prime Minister has found the emphasis of this goal imperative, the themes of Malay and of Islamic unity have become fused, in particular, under the Mahathir Administration.

Although the presence of Islam as a factor in foreign policy is not new, the manner in which it has been employed has necessarily been novel. While the Administration has sought to identify Malaysia in the international arena, with reference to Islam this has, for the most part, been symbolic, reactive and selective. Where that Islamic identity dovetails with the Administration's perception of a "positive" image of the religion that simultaneously contributes to the Malay-Muslim image of the ruling party against its rivals domestically (and in certain cases, internationally), such identity has been welcomed.

In effect, official delineation between a "right" and "wrong" Islam is acknowledgement of the significant diversity of views (political, social and theological) within Malaysia's Islamic community and an attempt to regulate this. Although punitive and coercive measures have been employed domestically (and with greater confidence in recent years) towards achieving such control, the very legitimacy of Islam's promotion within national political and social development has meant that the Government has had to temper this coercive capacity as well as combine this with more positive strategy. Indeed, the manifestation of such serious internal political struggle has highlighted the importance of external recognition and confidence in the Government. Foreign policy has therefore played a vital role towards this end.

Even more significantly the current Administration, more than any of its predecessors, has had to address Islam as a burgeoning international phenomenon in its own right. The ease and intensity of Islamic contact through transnational linkages outside of official avenues has meant that religious diversity continues to be nourished while the Administration is increasingly required to go beyond symbolic exercises in order to retain a stable support base and achieve its articulated priority of "unity".

Malaysia's participation within the OIC and other international Islamic fora has been, to some extent, an attempt to produce a common attitude aimed at achieving the desired solution of protracted international problems: witness its

stand on Afghanistan, Palestine and Bosnia and in the general problems of developing countries. In some instances, Islam has been invoked by the Administration in order to remind or suggest to non-Muslim nations that Muslim states are likely to have or develop common views and to imply therefore that they are also capable of common reaction.

While the measure of Islam displayed thus far might more appropriately describe the country as possessing a pro-Muslim foreign policy, it appears in the Malaysian case to have played four major roles. First, it has largely served as a means of mobilizing support among the Malay community. Second, it has helped disarm Malay-Muslim opposition and third, has helped stem the tide of international Islam flowing into Malaysia over the authority of government. Lastly, and in more recent times, it has increasingly been used, to some extent, to appeal to the Muslim community of other countries (although in carefully defined and qualified terms).

The general Islamic identity of Malaysia in international relations has always been qualified as one that is universal in its values and motives. Foreign policy is therefore designed to assist in legitimating UMNO's authority domestically, while maintaining the communal balance within Malaysian society. In the achievement of these functions, Islam has been perceived as a means of strengthening Malay identity and through the promotion of a modernist approach to the religion that is conducive to the goals of economic growth and development, goals perceived as central to the achievement of communal harmony.

The continued promotion of Islam might also be said to have encouraged communal exclusivity (because of its persistent ethnic identity), thus sustaining the political culture of the ruling elite. However, there remain perceptions within those circles (as well as at non-elite levels), that the building of a less communally fractious society through advancing levels of economic development across ethnic boundaries is necessary and, more importantly, desirable if not urgent.

Like all religious ideas, Islamic ideas are products of their times—of different political and historical periods. As such “Islam” in Malaysia (as elsewhere) has responded to the social, economic and political influences of its particular contexts. Islamic culture in Malaysia is produced and reproduced by every generation. Each particular context has thus been influenced by historical “conjunction”. While the contemporary functions of “universal” Islamic values and culture are, in the Malaysian case, more pointedly directed at their localization for the fulfilment of the State's agenda, this is not to suggest that discourse and ideas created and debated out of these contexts will not ultimately have a longer term effect on how Malay-Muslims and Malaysians perceive either Islam or their position in international society.

Whatever the political imperatives of his rhetoric and strategies, possibly rationalized as temporary or as short-term instruments towards long-term goals, Dr Mahathir, like his predecessors, has displayed an abiding commitment to such ideals and this appears to be the profile of his likely immediate successor, Anwar Ibrahim. While Dr Mahathir's respect for the greater entrenchment of

democratic forms and spirit might be questionable, it appears (at this point) that this is not necessarily the vision of his successor.

Indeed, whatever its disadvantages to the integration of a heterogenous society, Islam and its capacity for the expression of dissent, even within the Malaysian context, appears to hold at least the potential for helping to positively shape the survival if not the development of more democratic forms within the system. Any initial evidence of budding civil society in Malaysia, in fact draws on the intense interest in religious (if not purely spiritual), particularly Islamic ideas, issues, culture and values and of their relevance to a modernizing nation and/or as a balance to a rapidly growing capitalist and consumer society. It is in fact these emergent political but non-governmental forms that have also been increasingly articulate on matters of foreign policy. Thus, the future political structures of certainly Malay, but also possibly Malaysian, society might yet be tempered by the forces that have appeared thus far to be the most threatening.

As the country's longest serving Premier, Dr Mahathir has radically shaped Malaysia's political and economic fabric, heralding dramatic transformations but also deep structural change that will have a bearing on Malay and Malaysian socio-political development for some time to come. Such patterns have been duplicated in foreign policy. In fact, foreign policy appears to remain one of the most significant means by which Malaysian leaders (present and future) can affect their domestic environment to their advantage even as religious challenge continues to impress and influence their thinking and actions. The inspirational contributions of Islam within such foreign policy have clearly been constituent with this. Whether it can offer a framework for a more specific identity and fundamentally direct future policy will be determined over time. At any rate it is hard to imagine a religious element in Malaysian foreign policy not serving to considerably shape its domestic context.

Appendix

Table 1 Malaysian exports to Islamic* countries (in millions of \$US)

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Afghanistan	–	–	–	–	–	4
Algeria	3	1	3	1	3	2
Bahrain	6	5	6	5	4	5
Bangladesh	43	24	28	48	43	25
Brunei	29	46	46	97	31	35
Egypt	6	11	11	28	27	18
Indonesia	58	38	59	101	66	54
Iran	16	16	62	32	32	16
Iraq	13	23	45	53	38	42
Jordan	34	45	20	6	12	20
Kuwait	16	21	16	12	7	11
Lebanon	1	1	1	1	1	2
Liberia	2	2	2	2	3	2
Libya	2	–	–	–	2	1
Maldives	–	1	1	1	1	1
Mauritius	5	8	9	5	6	6
Morocco	1	1	2	3	2	2
Oman	10	8	9	10	10	8
Pakistan	130	124	161	178	121	200
Qatar	2	3	2	2	2	1
Saudi Arabia	61	71	64	121	91	53
Sudan	6	4	3	6	9	12
Syria	10	6	6	7	10	6
Turkey	14	25	43	56	40	59
UAE	25	16	18	18	17	16
Yemen	11	31	31	30	29	22
Yemen, PDR	10	4	3	13	1	2
Total	514	535	651	836	608	625
Total trade (TT)	11,770	12,030	14,204	16,484	15,441	13,876
Per cent of TT	4	4	5	5	4	5

Table 1 cont.

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Afghanistan	–	1	6	4	8	10
Algeria	1	3	9	1	–	28
Bahrain	10	4	5	16	7	13
Bangladesh	34	47	47	47	45	65
Brunei	93	56	82	85	117	150
Egypt	22	62	103	131	114	151
Indonesia	147	280	415	342	503	506
Iran	11	22	46	55	40	43
Iraq	51	77	56	48	–	–
Jordan	24	50	45	93	24	54
Kuwait	15	24	15	15	13	35
Lebanon	3	4	3	5	16	10
Liberia	2	2	2	2	1	–
Libya	1	1	–	–	3	9
Maldives	1	1	2	3	4	4
Mauritius	4	–	–	–	–	–
Morocco	2	2	3	6	10	14
Oman	9	15	15	17	23	28
Pakistan	171	245	235	233	352	370
Qatar	1	4	5	10	6	6
Saudi Arabia	83	127	144	151	192	266
Sudan	8	–	–	–	–	–
Syria	5	4	10	11	14	19
Turkey	55	80	88	–	114	116
UAE	29	61	98	139	243	276
Yemen	20	41	26	39	74	84
Yemen, PDR	1	5	13	7	–	–
Total	803	1,218	1,473	1,460	1,923	2,257
Total trade (TT)	17,939	21,110	25,053	29,416	34,349	40,709
Per cent of TT	4	6	6	5	6	5

Note: *Denotes countries predominantly Muslim and recognized as Islamic in official Malaysian rhetoric. Countries not listed hold miniscule or non-existent trade with Malaysia.

Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics (1989, 1994); Inter-Islamic Trade Annual Report (1984–1992)

Table 2 Malaysian exports to non-Islamic countries (in millions of \$US)

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
USA	1,538	1,399	1,864	2,231	1,970	2,297	2,972	3,663	4,684	4,986	5,808	7,594
Per cent of TT	13	12	13	14	13	17	17	17	19	17	17	19
Japan	2,489	2,449	2,782	3,770	3,784	3,257	3,504	3,577	4,106	4,506	5,458	5,401
Per cent of TT	21	20	19	23	24	23	20	17	16	15	16	13
Singapore	2,638	3,005	3,182	3,380	2,991	2,336	3,263	4,081	4,948	6,753	8,020	9,391
Per cent of TT	23	25	23	20	19	17	18	19	20	22	23	23
UK	346	330	384	421	397	481	574	738	943	1,160	1,503	1,643
Per cent of TT	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Germany	344	340	454	505	405	501	616	723	893	1,147	1,141	1,636
Per cent of TT	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	4
Australia	203	223	199	256	264	284	400	516	573	494	587	681
Per cent of TT	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Taiwan	-	312	351	377	347	340	504	623	566	639	932	1,270
Per cent of TT	-	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	3
China	-	110	157	165	161	163	279	415	481	619	639	772
Per cent of TT	-	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2

Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook (1983-1993). Economic Report, Ministry of Finance, Malaysia (19 83-1993)

Glossary

adat tradition or custom

ad-deen a comprehensive way of life

aqidah a world-view or ideology

assabiyah communal or ethnic parochialism or chauvinism

bangsa race or nation

bidā' religious innovations that are unacceptable

Bumiputera "sons of the earth"; official term referring to ethnic Malays and other "indigenous" peoples

ceramah talk usually delivered by religious leaders; used in Malaysia in contemporary context to include informal lecture delivered by non-religious personnel

dakwah refers to Muslim missionary activity which in the Malaysian sense also serves as a generic term for Muslim youth and missionary organizations

Datuk highest honorific title given by the Ruler or Sultan of a state in Malaysia

Dewan Negara Senate; Upper House of Parliament

Dewan Rakyat House of Representatives; Lower House of Parliament

fatwa religious ruling or legal opinion, usually the expertise of the *ulama* and considered legally binding upon Muslims

Hadith "tradition" or record of action or saying of the Prophet. One of the four roots of Islamic law

hajj annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina; one of the five pillars or duties of Islam required of Muslims at least once in their lifetime

halal that which is (religiously) permissible

haram that which is forbidden or taboo

ibadah duty; worship and glory of Allah

ijma consensus of the Muslim community or scholars as a basis for a legal decision

- 'ijtihad** individual reasoning or judgement to establish a legal ruling by creative interpretation of the existing body of law
- imam** prayer leader in a mosque or (for the *Shi'ia*) undisputed leader of the Islamic community
- kafir** infidel or unbeliever
- kaum** ethnic community
- Kaum Muda** younger generation; refers in Malaysian political history to reformist *ulama*
- Kaum Tua** older generation; traditionalist *ulama*
- Majlis Ugama (Agama)** Islamic Religious Council
- masjid** mosque
- masyarakat** community or society
- Menteri Besar** Chief Minister or head of state government within the federal system
- mesyuarat** discussion or consultation
- mustadafin** the oppressed or wretched, the powerless
- mustakbirin** the oppressors, the materially wealthy
- Pusat Islam** Islamic Centre
- Quran (Koran)** immutable body of revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad
- rakyat** citizens or "the people"
- riba** usury or interest prohibited in the Quran
- Shariah** divinely ordained law of Islam which governs all aspects of a Muslim's life
- Shi'ia** those who uphold the rights of 'Ali and his descendants to leadership of the *umma*
- shura** consultation or consensus
- sufi** follower of Sufism, the Islamic mystical path
- sunna** custom sanctioned by tradition, particularly of the Prophet enshrined in Hadith
- Sunni** those who uphold customs based on the practice and authority of the Prophet and his companions, as distinct from the *Shi'ites*
- takdir** fate; will of Allah
- taqlid** "imitation": strict adherence to legal precedent
- tarekat** Sufi brotherhood
- Tunku (Tengku)** a hereditary title denoting royalty; prince
- ulama** learned religious authorities
- ustaz** a religious teacher
- umma** universal Islamic community watan homeland
- Yang di-Pertuan Agung** paramount ruler of Malaysia over the other Sultans of the states of Peninsular Malaysia (excluding Penang) elected by the other rulers every five years
- zakat** alms-giving; one of the five pillars of Islam

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