

Reviewing the address of His Majesty at the opening of the Fifth Parliamentary Meeting in March 16, 1981, one could also note the considerable Islamic dimension of the Malaysian foreign policy. In his address the King emphasized:

“My government is also concerned with International developments, such as the continuing conflict between Islamic states in West Asia and the Palestinian issue. The external aggression against Afghanistan is fraught with dark implications. In the light of these developments, my government is currently involved in several International organizations with a view to settling these disputes. I am also pleased that my government has been accorded high standing amongst Islamic nations. My government will also continue with efforts to consolidate cooperation and ties amongst Islamic nations.”²⁸

Dr. Mahathir the fourth Premier later shifted Malaysia's foreign policy from being essentially pro-Western and ASEAN-based to one with an increasing International profile and identification with the Third World problems.²⁹ Dr. Mahathir succeeded in bringing Malaysia to the fore, especially among the Third World countries, by voicing forcefully their aspiration and aims. Altaf Gauhar, Secretary General of the Third World Foundation, acknowledged Malaysia as a champion of the less developed Third World countries (Ahmad, Aziz Zariza, 1997: 137).

Significantly, Islam assumed growing prominence under Mahathir's administration. The cause of Islam can rightly be said to constitute the second most important dimension in his foreign policy throughout the 1980's. Dr. Mahathir's placement of the OIC and “pan-Islamism” at the second rung of Malaysia's foreign policy priority list in 1981 clearly testifies to this fact (Ahmad, M. Yusof, 1990: 170). Throughout the 1980's, Malaysia increasingly sought to identify itself with International Islamic issues, and as an activist member of the global Islamic community. Both government and UMNO rhetoric increasingly referred to Malaysia as an Islamic nation.

28. Ibid.

29. At the Islamic Development Bank Meeting in Istanbul in May 1982, Malaysia for instance, urged, in the words of its Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the rich Muslim countries to adopt appropriate policies and measures to counteract adverse international economic development affecting Third World nations. See, *Islamic Herald*, vol. 6, no. 3 & 4, 1982, p. 43.

Undoubtedly Mahathir, like his predecessors, continued to deal with Islam as an important policy tool to protect, promote and secure Malaysia's national interests within the International world of Islam,³⁰ but no radical departure occurred from the one already laid down by the previous administration. Perhaps it is in the Palestinian issue that a strong sense of continuity could be noted. Though there was no radical departure with regard to the government's attitude towards this issue, some new assertiveness could be noticed during Mahathir administration.

The Pro-Islamic orientation of Mahathir is also evident in foreign policy. It is apparent that Mahathir's leaning towards the Muslim world is even more pronounced than his predecessors. Dr. Mahathir's declaration, in 1983, that Non-Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth were no longer as important to Malaysia as the Muslim Bloc overtly verifies the above fact (Mutalib, Hussin, 1995: 32).

Dr Mahathir's high commitment to the Islamic cause and the Islamization policy is partly motivated by his desire of image enhancement at home and abroad, particularly to maintain the legitimacy of UMNO in the eyes of the Malay-Muslim populace (Mutalib, Hussin, 1995: 30). Dr. Mahathir's commitment to the Islamic cause, particularly the Palestinian issue, had become even more pronounced and assertive with his co-option of Anwar Ibrahim, the former President of ABIM, into the government in 1982.

Another factor for this commitment to the usage of Islam as a policy tools, is to maintain socio-political and religious stability amidst the challenge of *da'wah* movements resulting from the global Islamic resurgence since the late 1970's. The Iranian revolution, which took place at the close of 1979, posed a serious challenge to many 'secular-oriented' Muslim movements including Malaysia. Being fully aware of the power and pride of this movement, the government decided not to leave it to the manipulation or exploitation of the opposition Islamic parties. Since curtailment was expected at any rate to be injurious to the government reputation, it was thus persuaded, if not compelled, to respond to Islamic demands, especially to review its domestic Islamic policies, and its image within the Islamic world.

30. Ibid., p. 271.