

blow to the government's image, and especially to UMNO. They were, therefore, encouraged to enhance their participation and strengthen their association with the International Islamic community in order to boost their image and regain the confidence of the Malay-Muslim population in particular.

It is important to highlight that the outbreak of the Arab-Israel war of 1967, resulted in the major change in the policy of Malaysian government toward Israel. Since then, the Palestinian issue became one of the favorite topics in the Malaysian dailies³ and in Parliament.⁴ The withdrawal of the proposal to recognize Israel in 1967 was justified by the Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, in the following words, "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".⁵ Thus Malaysia's conviction in the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and its opposition to acts of terrorism was apparently the major reason for its refusal to recognize the Israeli regime. This change of attitude was presumably also partly motivated by the heightened domestic pressure. For instance, several UMNO branch resolutions urged the review of the recognition proposal in order "to keep up the good name of Malaya among Muslim countries in the Middle East".⁶

Prior to 1969, the Islamic consideration had apparently had an impact on the formulation of the Malaysian foreign policy. The Malaysian government believed that the issue was essentially a political one. It is important to highlight that early Malaysia's support for the Palestinian cause was more of a political nature, but partly as well a gesture of support for the co-religionists.

Another major landmark, perhaps that most important factor for the subsequent drastic change in the Malaysian government attitude and role towards the Islamic issue, was the arson of Al-Aqsa mosque on August 21, 1969. Since then, Malaysia's support for the

3. Since then events related to the Palestinian issue were reported in detail by the Malaysian dailies for example the Arab League Summit of 1967. See; *Utusan Malaysia*, 1 September 1967 and *The Straits Times*, 29 November 1967.

4. *Parliamentary Debates, House of Representative*, June 1967, pp. 860-867 and January 1968, pp. 3494-3495.

5. *Suara Malaysia*, 26 October 1967.

6. *Ibid.*

Palestinian cause was very much supportive and vigorous. In one of its statement on the problem, the Malaysian government pledged Malaysia's support for the Arab cause "until justice has been done for the Arabs".⁷ Noticeably, the arson led to the reenergizing of Islam in the International arena through the holding of the first Islamic Summit Conference in Rabat. Simultaneously Islam has increasingly influenced the foreign policies of the Malaysian government who, since 1969, acted in concert with fellow Muslim countries within the OIC over the Palestinian issue.

Tunku Abdul Rahman himself attended the Islamic Summit. His speech on the occasion suggested that Islam had already become an important pillar of Malaysian foreign policy. In his address, Tunku stressed that the Palestinian issue was actually an Islamic issue. He stated:

"I have come here as a brother in Islam, moved by my very deep concern and anxiety for the holy places of Jerusalem. We are all here at this gathering not as so called Arab Muslim or non Arab Muslims, but simply as brothers in Islam. The future is not a matter between Israel and Jordan only, or even between Israel and the other Arab states only. It is a matter of deepest concern to us all as Muslims."⁸

Malaysia regional Islamic profile has been maintained through her active participation at the non-governmental level, and in regional gatherings, to promote solidarity and cooperation among regional Muslim states. In 1981 for instance, Tunku Abdul Rahman was appointed the President of the RISEAP (Regional Islamic Dakwah Council for Southeast Asia and the Pacific).⁹ The headquarters of this organization and a training center were subsequently established in Kuala Lumpur to promote greater non-government cooperation in Islamic matters among the various regional Islamic organizations, and in June 1982, Kuala Lumpur was the venue of the first General

7. *The Straits Times*, 8 June 1970.

8. Speech by Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj at the first Islamic Summit Conference in Rabat, Morocco, September 22-24, 1969. See, *The Malay Mail*, 26 September 1969.

9. *New Straits Times*, 11 November 1981.