

and leaders have consequently tended to emphasize their loyalty to the Malay and Islamic expectations.

This dilemma has triggered PAS, with its forthright commitment to Islam, to charge UMNO with little and reluctant support for Islam, and to denounce its presumed "excessive leniency" in yielding to the demands of its non-Malay and non-Muslim parties in the National Coalition. Doubtless, Islam has constituted a powerful weapon in the struggle for political supremacy in Malaysia. To face intra-Malay rivalry, Islam has been used by successive Malaysian Prime Ministers as a continuing source of political legitimacy, and a shield against external interference in Malay politics. In their literature and activities since independence, the themes of Malayism and Islamism are, therefore, tightly fused together. As such, Malaysia since Tunku has pursued a pro-Muslim stand in its foreign policy. Curtailment of Islam may at any rate injure UMNO's image among the Malay-Muslim voters, thus the support of the Palestinian cause becomes inevitable and of utmost political necessity. Due to the intra-Malay political rivalry, especially from PAS, the government has also been fully aware of the power of Islamic resurgence at home and abroad, thus has given its full support to the Palestinian struggle. In analyzing Malaysian attitude and role to the Islamic cause, I venture to argue that Malaysia was more politically and symbolically committed to the Palestinian issue. Significantly, Malaysia's stance on the issue was consistently in line with that of other OIC member-states, and on the same track with the international community, especially as represented in the United Nations.

For instance, in the case of the Palestine issue, it

does not seem to be comparable with that of the Arab nations. For the Arab nations, the Palestinian issue has definitely become part and parcel of their daily lives, and was perhaps their most important concern. Without doubt, the Arabs' role in the issue is more remarkable and significant than that of Malaysia whose acquaintance and commitment is, rather recent, and of a more political nature, though the religious factor played a role in igniting the sympathy of the Malay-Muslims with the Palestinian tragedy. The study also suggests that the role of the Malaysian government concerning the Palestinian issue was largely motivated by pragmatic considerations resulting from an interplay between various factors: political, economic, religious and humanitarian. The government has been, first and foremost, instrumental in mobilizing support among the Malay population. Secondly, it has helped to preempt and diffuse Malay-Muslim opposition especially that of PAS, and, thirdly, it enhances the image of Malaysia within the Islamic world, through its membership in the OIC. Closer ties with the Muslim world, especially with the Arab nations, have, moreover, provided greater commercial, trade and investment opportunities for the country's various development plans.

Within the Malaysian context, 'Islamism' has also come to be seen as a catalyst that could pressurize the government to be more sensitive and responsive to the Palestinian issue, since its claim to uphold democracy dictated paying due attention and consideration to public opinion in any policy formulation. The Malaysian government is therefore, bound by these pragmatic considerations to maintain a pro-Muslim and a pro-