

thus represented a symbol of legitimacy for the ruling Malay party, UMNO, since its formation. Commenting on the importance of Islam in the Malay culture and Malay politics, it is by no means an exaggeration to suggest that religion and religious considerations are of great importance in the foreign policy making of Malaysia. Malaysia being a Muslim country with a sizable Muslim population and Islam as its official religion would have to show special concern and support to Muslim affairs and issues throughout the world. The spirit of ummatism, which advocates one single integrated Muslim community unseparated by boundaries of race and worldly ideologies, has made possible the gathering of Muslim countries in a number of organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Malaysia is indeed by no means an exception. The early years of independence were marked by the dilemma of formulating a truly independent foreign policy. Malaya's freedom of maneuvering in this respect was, in fact, limited by a number of considerations. Since independence was gained at a time when the fight against the communist rebels was still continuing, Malaysia's foreign policy was, therefore, resolutely anti-communist. The threat of communism at home became the main justification for Tunku's pro-Western stance, particularly with regard to defense and security matters.

In essence, Islam was not a major issue in the Malay search for identity in the 1960's, or in its foreign policy. Malaysia's long standing relations with the Muslim Middle Eastern states, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia, were mainly religious and educational in

nature, involving sending of its students there and the Malays' performance of hajj. However, interestingly, in so far as Malaysia's foreign policy under Tunku was concerned, relations with Muslim countries, particularly the Arab nations, saw some changes towards the later part of the 1960's, especially noticeable following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. This increasing tilt towards the Arabs must, however, be viewed within the context of the new circumstances and challenges that Malaysia faced, and which necessitated a change in its foreign policy. One of the most significant determinants that motivated a change in Malaysia's relations with the Islamic nations in the late sixties was the occurrence of the Indonesian Confrontation at the outset of the creation of Malaysia.<sup>5</sup> As early as January 1963, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Dr. Subandrio, announced a policy of Confrontation against the Malaysia's proposal, which he labeled as "neo-colonialist" and "neo-imperialist."

Apparently, it was "*Konfrontasi*" that endorsed the rethinking in Malaysian foreign policy. The Indonesian military and diplomatic offensive compelled the Malaysian government to find a new foreign policy

<sup>5</sup> Tunku made the first public proposal for a federation consisting of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah) and possibly Brunei as early as May 1961. There followed various phases in the Malaysia proposal thereafter and the official sanctioning of the proposal after a series of Anglo-Malayan talks between 1961-1962. See, Nordin M. Sophiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysian Region 1945-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1974), pp.125-182, and also see; Ghazali Shafie, *Ghazali Shafie's Memoirs on the Formation of Malaysia* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 1998). Also see, *Parliamentary Debates House of Representatives*, August 1963, pp.699-734