

strategy of not being rigidly pro-West, but to extend its diplomatic relations with African, Asian and also Eastern European countries. During the Indonesian Confrontation years, Malaysia wooed Muslim and Afro-Asian countries to counter Indonesian diplomatic offense, and in the late sixties it became more Islamic as its relations with Britain became less dominant.⁶ Malaysia's preoccupation with the Palestinian issue is perhaps the earliest among other Islamic issues. Malaysia's stance towards the Palestinian struggle and the Zionist regime could be noticed ever since the early days of independence under the premiership of the first Prime Minister of Malaysia. The most important event that paved the way for a growing attention to Islam in Malaysian government policies was the occurrence of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. It is important to highlight that the outbreak of the Arab-Israel war of 1967,⁷ resulted in the major change in the policy of the Malaysian government toward Israel.

Since then, the Palestinian issue has become one of the favourite topics in the Malaysian dailies⁸ and in Parliament.⁹ The withdrawal of the proposal to recognize

⁶ Abdullah Ahmad, *Tengku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1963-1970* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 1985).

⁷ The war resulted in the occupation of Baitul Maqdis, the West Bank, Sinai and the Golan Heights. The war received wide coverage in the Malaysian dailies for example; *The Straits Time*, June 6, 1967.

⁸ 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.

⁹ *Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives*, June 1967, pp. 860-867 and January 1968, pp. 3494-3495.

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."¹⁰ 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."¹¹

Another important event that paved the way for a growing attention to Islam in Malaysian government policies in the late sixties under the administration of Tunku Abdul Rahman, was the occurrence of the riots of May 13, 1969.¹² They led to a growing Malay-Islamic

¹⁰ *Suara Malaysia*, 26 October 1967.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² 13th May Riot was regarded as the watershed in contemporary Malaysian history. The racial disturbance was caused by the inter-racial frustration and antagonism especially among the Malay and Chinese. This inter-racial friction seemed almost inevitable as a result of the racial insults which were bandied about irresponsibly both by the opposition parties and Alliance in the election campaign of 1969. Due to the riot, Parliament was suspended for twenty months and the country was ruled by a National Operation Council (NOC) and the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced to bridge the economic gap between various Malaysian races. For detail see; Leon Camber, *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Asia, 1983).