

reassertiveness and hence, as far as foreign policy is concerned, were instrumental in a slight change in favour of Islam and the Muslim nations. The May riots, later described by Tunku as the 'darkest period in our national history', were, doubtless, a serious blow to the government's image, and especially to UMNO. Tunku's government was, therefore, encouraged to enhance its participation and strengthen its association with the International Islamic community in order to boost their image and regain the confidence of the Malay-Muslim population in particular. Prior to 1969, the Islamic consideration had apparent insignificant 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 Palestinian cause has become more supportive and vigorous. In one of its statements on the problem, the Malaysian government pledged Malaysia's support for the Arab cause "until justice has been done for the Arabs."<sup>13</sup> 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,

<sup>13</sup> *The Straits Times*, 8 June 1970.

Islam has increasingly influenced the foreign policies of the Malaysian government which, since 1969, has acted in concert with fellow Muslim countries within the OIC over the Palestinian issue. Tunku 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 Muslims 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."<sup>14</sup>

Malaysia's 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).<sup>15</sup> The headquarters of this organization and a training center were subsequently established in Kuala Lumpur to

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> *New Straits Times*, 11 November 1981.