



**Borne of the Cold War:
Malaya/Malaysia from a Historical Perspective,
c. 1950's-c.1990's**



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[*Abstract*]

Malaya attained independence on August 31, 1957 from Britain. However this new nation faced a communist insurgency known today as the “Malayan Emergency” (1948-1960). Then in 1961, Tunku announced a wider federation of “Malaysia”, viz. Malaya, British Crown Colonies of Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo, and the protectorate of Brunei. Countering communism was a principal motive for “Malaysia”. Sarawak’s leftist elements were rejected with an armed opposition. Malaysia was formed excluding Brunei. Amidst its birth pangs, Malaysia faced hostile neighbors Indonesia and the Philippines; the former objected by way of *Konfrontasi* (1963-1967) while the latter laid claim to Sabah (formerly North Borneo). Malaya/ Malaysia was borne in the midst of the Cold War (1947–1991), a bipolar world between the US and the USSR. Malaya/Malaysia is utilized as a case of analysis and evaluation in the context of the twin trends of continuities and transformations in tracing the historical developments from the 1950’s to the 1990’s. The risks, motives, and challenges that prompted the shift in foreign relations reveal as much of the personality of the political

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leadership, the prevailing situations, and conditions from within and circumstances from without.

Keywords: Malaya/Malaysia, Cold War, non-alignment, foreign relations, political leadership

I . Introduction

Malaya attained independence on August 31, 1957, finally unshackling the peninsular Malay states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor, and the crown colonies of Penang and Melaka from British colonial rule. Despite the joys of achievement, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman¹⁾ and his deputy Tun Abdul Razak remained troubled as the communist insurgency (“Malayan Emergency”) continued unabated in the tropical jungle since 1948. There was literally a “hide and seek” situation between the Malay Regiment and Commonwealth forces (UK, Australia, and New Zealand) and the guerrillas of the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party (MCP). It was not until 1960 that the Emergency was lifted. Fresh from this victory, Tunku announced in 1961 the proposed wider federation of “Malaysia” comprising Malaya, the three British Crown Colonies of Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo, and the British protected Malay Muslim Sultanate of Brunei. Countering communism was a principal contributor, if not the exclusive, motive behind “Malaysia.” Leftist elements in Sarawak vehemently rejected “Malaysia,” and subsequently launched an armed opposition. Nonetheless, on September 16 , 1963, Malaysia was inaugurated, excluding Brunei from its boundaries. Inauspiciously, amidst its birth pangs, Malaysia faced hostile neighbors Indonesia and the Philippines; the former objected with military force in launching *Konfrontasi* (1963-1967) while the latter laid claim to Sabah (formerly North Borneo). Within two years Singapore seceded owing to ideological incompatibility and economic issues.

1) Prime minister of Malaya, 1957-63, and of Malaysia, 1963-70.

Malaya/Malaysia was borne in the midst of the Cold War (1947 - 1991), a bipolar world between the US allying with the democracies of Western Europe and the USSR with its East European socialist satellite states. Understandably, colonial Malaya was allied to Washington. Post-independent Malaya remained steadfastly pro-Anglo-American, as exemplified by the staunchly anti-communist Tunku. But a shift in foreign relations was initiated by Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak (t. 1971-6) in embracing non-alignment and neutrality from 1969, notwithstanding that only two years prior to that, Malaysia together with anti-communist Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia formed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). By 1971, ASEAN also adopted a stance of non-alignment and neutrality working towards the realization of a Zone of Peace, Friendship and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). As prime minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (t. 1981-2003) further shifted Kuala Lumpur's stance away from the Washington-London axis. In the later part of 1981, he launched his "Buy Britain Last" campaign; the following year (1982), the "Look East" policy, emulating Japan, was adopted. The 1990's saw Malaysia emerging as a "leader" of the South, especially of African nations, and the annual Langkawi International Dialogue was inaugurated in 1995, aimed at nurturing Malaysia-Africa relations. Meanwhile Malaysia was instrumental in securing ASEAN membership for the communist-governed Vietnam (1995) and Laos (1997), and the military-ruled Myanmar (1997), and later on, Cambodia (1999).

Malaya/Malaysia is utilized as a case of analysis and evaluation in the context of the twin trends of continuities and transformations in tracing the historical developments from the 1950's to the 1990's in the midst of the five-decade Cold War period. It shall be argued that the risks, motives, and challenges that prompted the shift in its foreign relations reveal as much of the personality of the political leadership, the prevailing situations and conditions from within as well as circumstances from without.

II . *Merdeka and Darurat (1945-1960)*

Between 1945 and 1960, British Malaya underwent developments that portrayed continuities and transformations. It was a tumultuous period for Malaya, then under British colonial rule that had emerged from the brief but significant period of Japanese occupation (1941-5) into unprecedented political developments, a full-blown insurgency aimed at toppling the government of the day, and constitutional steps towards eventual independence (*merdeka*). The advent of the Cold War figured in Malaya's post-war developments. Since the establishment and consolidation of British colonial administration in the last quarter of the nineteenth century over the peninsular Malay states and earlier over the Crown Colonies of Penang (1786), Singapore (1819), and Melaka (1824), Malaya had not faced dramatic political and military upheavals, economic dislocations, and social distress than the decades of the 1940's and 1950's (Andaya and Andaya 2001).

The outbreak of the Pacific War (1941-1945) that witnessed the invasion and military occupation of Malaya by Imperial Japan was the first sampling of modern warfare to most of the multi-ethnic inhabitants (Malay, Chinese, and Indians) (Kratoska 1998). The one-sidedness and swift invasion and occupation impressed significantly on the minds of the peoples who witnessed what was first thought as impossible: Japanese (Asian) superiority over British (Western/European) military might. Moreover, the three years and eight months of Japanese military administration was a rude and horrific period compared to the pre-war era of salubrious and peaceful times. The myth of British superiority was forever shattered, an irreparable damage to the image of respectability and quiet cleverness of the "Tuan" and the ever-fastidious "Mem." Inside internment camps, British military personnel and European civilian internees appeared no more human than the commoner Malay, Chinese, or Indian; the fair-skinned British colonials too also appeared dishevelled, jostled over food, indeed very vulnerable, weak, and frightened in the presence of the harsh Japanese military. It was not uncommon for local peoples to witness the inhumane and humiliating treatment of a Tommy (British soldier) at the hands

of a Japanese private. Japanese cruelty, harshness, and brutality did not endear them to either Malays, Chinese, or Indians. Wartime shortages of practically everything from matches to rice, soap and cooking oil and a host of daily consumables made life for everybody difficult. But much more than the physical deprivation was the mental anguish of enduring uncertainties, the all-enveloping fear, and the shudder and missed heartbeat whenever there was a knock on the door or the ringing of the telephone. The *sook ching* (cleansing, purification) campaigns to weed out anti-Japanese elements within the Chinese community literally consumed many lives (Hara 2004b). While male Chinese feared being impressed into labor gangs, females cut their locks, dirtied their face, donned baggy clothing, and hid in attics to avoid the military brothels. Failure to bow to a Japanese earned the recalcitrant a slap or two. Real, perceived, or suspected anti-Japanese elements faced the wrath of the Kempeitai (military police) which adopted the modus operandi of torture-first-questioned-later procedure (Hara 2004a). Few “guests” survived Kempeitai “hospitality.”

The end of the war and the British return were undoubtedly celebrated by the multi-ethnic inhabitants of Malaya. But the fortnight interregnum (between the Japanese surrender in mid-August and the arrival of Allied re-occupation forces in early September) witnessed guerrillas of the Chinese-dominated Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) emerging from jungles and claiming victory over the Japanese. The Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was the backbone of the MPAJA. Sino-Malay armed clashes hitherto unheard of broke out, sparked by MPAJA personnel and/or instigating punishing Malay wartime collaborators resulting in scores of fatalities in rural bazaars and *kampung* (village) (Cheah 2012). No doubt there were collaborators among the Malays, and likewise within Chinese and Indian communities, but the overall Chinese perception was that the Malays appeared to not have suffered much under Japanese rule as shown by their continuation as civil servants and police personnel. It simply meant that they worked with the enemy and deserved to be punished. Malay retaliation exacerbated inter-ethnic clashes. Communal leaders rushed to temper the situation, and their

respected status, mediating abilities, and courage arrested further escalation.

Following the brief British Military Administration, British colonial civil authorities put in place a new administrative framework known as the Malayan Union (1946) (Harper 1999; Lau 1991). The new Union was to replace the cumbersome Straits Settlements (SS, since 1826), the protectorates of the Federated Malay States (FMS, since 1895) and the Unfederated Malay States (UMS, since 1909, 1914) that collectively referred to as British Malaya, a politico-administrative entity that formally did not exist. The pre-war arrangements of protectorates and crown colonies to some extent contributed to the failure in defense measures in the last war. The post-war geopolitical situation of a bi-polar world undoubtedly had an impact on Malaya. The proposed Union comprised all the Malay states (FMS and UMS), and Penang and Melaka, two of three SS. For strategic priority, Singapore, with its naval base, was retained as a crown colony. For the Union to be realized, new treaty agreements needed to be negotiated with the respective Malay sultans who hitherto remained the sovereign ruler of their respective domains to transfer their sovereignty (*kedaulatan*) to the British Crown. A British officer carried out this task in a whirlwind visit to secure the signature of all the Malay rulers. Applying various degrees of persuasion, practical arguments, threats, and coercion, Sir Harold MacMichael succeeded in his mission (Harper 1999: 84-5). Hence on June 1, 1946 the Malayan Union was formally inaugurated with a British Governor and a bureaucracy at Kuala Lumpur overseeing its administration.

Conspicuously absent in the installation ceremony of the Malayan Union Governor were the Malay sultans. Unanticipated by the Colonial Office (CO) mandarins, stripping off the sovereignty of the Malay rulers was tantamount to eliminating these royals altogether. The sultan, from the Malay viewpoint encompassed the *negeri* (state) and *bangsa* (people), hence without the sultan, there is likewise no *negeri* and no *bangsa* (Mohamad Noordin Sopiee 2013). Was it not that the Malay legendary heroic figure of Hang Tuah had forewarned: *Tak Melayu hilang dari bumi* [Forbid that Malays are extinct from the world]. Hence the slogan *Hidup Melayu*

[Malay Survive] reverberated at anti-Union gatherings of Malays. Having realized the implications of their signing over their sovereignty to the British monarch, the nine Malay sultans lent their royal ascent to the peaceful but vociferous protests. Under the leadership of Dato' Onn bin Jafaar, the chief minister of Johor, the various Malay organizations and associations gathered in Johor Bahru in 1946 to establish the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in order to spearhead the anti-Union protest (Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail 2004: 1365).

The British were caught off-guard in not anticipating such widespread Malay opposition, both from the sultans and the *rakyat* (masses). It was an unprecedented show of unity, organization, and single-mindedness of a hitherto mild-mannered community fighting for its very survival. Although in the pre-war period, the sultan had in fact lost all semblance of political and administrative powers that had been passed to the hands of his British Resident/Advisor, in the eyes of the *rakyat*, the sultan remained the sovereign ruler where all legislations were enacted, sanctioned, and implemented in his august name, *Seri Paduka Baginda* (His Majesty).

Within two years following negotiations among the British colonial authorities, the Malay rulers, and UMNO, another governance framework was proposed as an alternative, namely the Federation of Malaya (1948) (Stockwell 1984). The territorial components remained, the sovereignty of the nine sultans were untouched, and the citizenship of the Federation was extended to Chinese and Indians on the principle of *jus soli* and other liberal requirements. The Federation, inaugurated on February 1, 1948 was much more amiable to all quarters, and there was much compromise on the part of the Malay rulers in sanctioning thousands of immigrant Chinese and Indians to be recognized as full-fledged citizens. But before celebrations could commence, tragic news of the murder of several British planters in Perak by jungle terrorists forced the colonial government to declare a state of Emergency (*Darurat*) in June 1948.

Constitutional steps like the Federation of Malaya (1948) were considered long drawn out and hinder full independence as alleged

by the MCP; armed revolution appeared to be the only means to rid the country of British colonialism. The increasing victorious advances of the Communists in the Chinese mainland in pushing back Nationalist forces inspired the MCP. MCP's strategy was to cripple the commodities-based economy of Malaya (rubber and tin), and in the dislocated chaos, to seize the rein of power through military means (Stockwell 1993). Rubber trees were savagely slashed, the Tamil Indian estate workers intimidated, tin mines and machinery were destroyed, and Chinese coolies threatened and beaten. Utilizing the carrot-and-stick approach the communist terrorists (CTs) were persuaded to surrender (with leaflets dropped in the jungle) and at the same time troops were poured into the jungle to seek out and destroy CTs (Stubbs 1989).

Meanwhile, apart from the psychological warfare and direct military operations against the jungle guerrillas, the colonial government launched an ambitious plan to resettle thousands of squatter communities to the jungle fringes. The bulk of these settlements were created by refugee Chinese fleeing to remote areas bordering the jungle to escape perceived Japanese oppression. The wartime MCP-MPAJA jungle guerrillas relied on these squatter Chinese farming communities for recruits, supplies (medical and food), and intelligence through a combination of coercion and persuasion that drew on ethnic affinity (Chapman 2014). Therefore, in the post-war period, when the MCP launched its armed revolution to seek independence and establish a communist state, it turned to its former supply line. By relocating these squatter Chinese farming communities into "New Villages" with all amenities (electricity, piped water, schools, clinics, etc.), it severed the CTs supply line, cutting off their survival chain and in turn forced them to retreat further into the jungle interior narrowing their survival rate and influence on the wider society (Hack 2015). An alternative to the MCP for the Chinese community was the Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) established in 1949 to assist the "New Villages" in settling in and overcoming teething problems. Commencing as a welfare organization, the MCA assumed political roles to promote Chinese interests thereby undermining MCP propaganda that the Chinese were neglected and marginalized

(Heng 1988).

By 1960, the MCP appeared to be a wasted force; a handful of hard-core members had moved into the deep jungle striding the Thai-Malaysian borderlands. Five years earlier, the Baling Talks (1955) sought to find a solution to the impasse as the MCP tried to convince the political leadership of the then self-ruled Malaya under Chief Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman to recognize the MCP as a legitimate political organization free to participate in local and federal elections, as they in turn would lay down arms. The staunchly anti-communist Tunku outrightly rejected this proposition, and reiterated his offer to MCP Secretary General Chin Peng and his comrades to give up communism and return to society (Anuar Nik Mahmud 1998).

Some might argue that the Emergency hastened Britain's granting independence for Malaya on August 31, 1957 (Barber 2013). The British undoubtedly wanted to prevent the communists from gaining any more popularity, and thus sought to hasten the speed to decolonization to win over the masses. In the absence of the Emergency, there was the possibility that the British might slow down the decolonization process. Whitehall would only consider handing over independence to a political leadership that could not only defeat the MCP insurgency but could also be able to crucially unite the multi-ethnic inhabitants. The inter-ethnic clashes of the immediate post-war period provided the tragic scenario of such racial strife if independence was to be handed over to a weak Malayan government. Tunku's ability to oversee an UMNO-MCA alliance won the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Elections in February 1952. The Alliance Party (UMNO-MCA-MIC) repeated this electoral triumph in the First Federal General Elections in July 1955. It won all but a single seat, a convincingly concrete demonstration of a united front of multi-ethnic political partnership (Khong 2003). In the Cold War context, Britain would want to be convinced that its successor in Malaya was a pro-Western democratic government and not a socialist or communist state that would have serious implications for the geopolitical situation in the region. The Anglophile anti-communist Tunku was the appropriate candidate to head independent Malaya.

Continuities and transformations could be discerned in the post-war historical developments. The brief Japanese interregnum could be seen as merely a rude interruption for once the war was concluded, Malaya resumed its position as a British colonial territory. The Malayan Union that wanted to transform the peninsular Malay states into British colonies was rejected. Its replacement, the Federation of Malaya, was a continuity of British colonial rule with preparations towards self-rule and subsequently full independence. The MCP's armed revolution, a radical departure from the constitutional path towards independence proved to be a transformation. If the MCP had succeeded to overthrow the colonial regime of Malaya, it would establish in its place a communist state, quite likely a satellite state of the People's Republic of China (PRC) considering the support (mainly moral and some material) that the MCP received from Beijing throughout its armed campaign.

III. "Malaysia" and *Konfrontasi* (1961-1967)

When Tunku made his announcement of the establishment of "Malaysia" to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Southeast Asia in Singapore on May 27, 1961, it was a lull between Dien Bien Phu (1954) that ended French colonialism over Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin incident in early August of 1964 that subsequently sparked the Vietnam War (1964-75). It was a time of uncertainties where the communist threat from North Vietnam appeared to be "intruding" into Southeast Asia.

Tunku's suggestion of an expanded federation in combining Malaya, Singapore, and British Borneo, viz. Crown Colonies of Sarawak and North Borneo, and the protectorate of the sultanate of Brunei, would be an anti-communist bulwark. While the capitalist sector of the Chinese community of Sarawak and North Borneo was partial to the proposed wider federation, considering the expanded trade and commerce hitherto a Chinese preserve, the majority of the indigenous peoples were to a large extent oblivious of developments and scant inkling of "Malaysia." The low literacy among the native population of Iban, Malay, Orang Hulu, Melanau, Kadazandusun,

Murut, and Bajau made people unable to grasp the consequences and implications of the formation of “Malaysia.”. However, British colonial officials, including Governor General Malcolm MacDonald (1946-1955), successfully persuaded native leaders to accept “Malaysia”.

Hurriedly native leaders constituted political parties in order to safeguard the interests of their respective communities vis-à-vis others (Faisal S. Hazis 2011; Chin 1996; Luping 1994). Subsequently, North Borneo’s Tun Datu Haji Mustapha bin Datu Harun (1918-1995) established the United Sabah National Organization (USNO), and Tun Muhammad Fuad Stephens (1920-1976) the United National Kadazan Organization (UNKO). Tan Sri Datuk Amar Ong Kee Hui (1914-2000) and Tan Sri Datuk Amar Stephen Yong Kuet Tze (1921-2001) constituted the Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP) while Datu Patinggi Abang Haji Mustapha and Tan Sri Datuk Amar Stephen Kalong Ningkan (1920-1997) initiated the Parti Negara Sarawak (PANAS; Sarawak National Party).

Meanwhile Tunku’s “Malaysia” plan faced a fast-emerging and anti-Western Indonesia under President Sukarno (Tan 2008). By the early 1960’s internal developments were pointing towards the increasing powers of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesia Communist Party) that actively sought the president’s support. On the other end of the scale was the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, Indonesian National Armed Forces), likewise jockeying for Sukarno’s favor. The consummate Javanese *dalang* president was playing a balancing game, and deftly trying to play one off another. Both the PKI and the TNI were formidable forces. Any misstep by Sukarno would be disastrous for himself, Indonesia, and the wider region of Southeast Asia.

Destabilizing forces were actively at work in the Malaya-Indonesia region. Leftist elements created much havoc with numerous labor actions and strikes in Singapore. Also, anti-colonial agitation was increasingly gaining grassroots support. A worrying situation developed across the South China Sea in the British crown colony of Sarawak. Recruiting from the Sarawak Chinese vernacular schools, the Clandestine Communist Organization (CCO), later, as the

Sarawak Communist Organization (SCO), was gaining influence among Chinese youths where many with unrecognized Middle school certificates were seeking new avenues to channel their frustrations towards the British colonial government (Ooi 2012). These Chinese youth were used by Communist agitators seeking recruits, sympathizers, and supporters. Emphasizing the ethnic and patriotic preference, the PRC attracted Sarawak Chinese youth and other members of the community by making them feel the filial obligation to the fatherland, initially introduced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Illiterate parents of peasant stock had little influence over their Middle school graduate sons and daughters who looked towards a “New China” that needed them to further rise. Consequently scores of Sarawak Chinese youths joined the SCO.

Not unlike other communist organizations then, the SCO adopted the united front strategy that called for infiltrating bona fide labor unions and political parties (Porritt 2004.). Such infiltration was primarily aimed at ultimately seizing control over the legitimate organization, and thereafter to pursue the SCO agenda of establishing a communist state. SCO failed in infiltrating neither peasant/farmer organizations nor labor unions in Sarawak. Some semblance of success was achieved on the part of the Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP), a predominantly Chinese-based moderate political party (Ooi 2012). The moderate leadership of President Ong Kee Hui (t. 1959-82), a respected entrepreneur, and Secretary-General Stephen Yong Kuet Tze (t. 1959-82), a highly regarded solicitor of the underdog, underestimated SCO elements in seizing control over key positions within SUPP.

SUPP opposed “Malaysia,” and instead preferred independence first for Sarawak, en route to joining this wider federation (Ooi 2012). The extent SCO elements influenced SUPP’s stance is hard to ascertain but this anti-Malaysia position played into SCO’s plan. It was SCO’s intention to urge for Sarawak’s independence from Britain, and having unshackled it from colonial grasp, a communist seizure of power through SUPP with Chinese backing would be a coup to savor. In the event that Sarawak opted for directly joining “Malaysia,” SUPP’s Chinese support would be defeated by the predominantly Malay federal government in Kuala Lumpur.

Understandably, SCO, through SUPP, at all cost opposed any attempts of Sarawak participating in “Malaysia” (ibid.).

In line with other anti-Malaysia groups, SUPP joined forces with the Partai Rakyat Brunei (PRB, Brunei People’s Party) and the United National Kadazan Organization (UNKO) of North Borneo. Sheikh Azahari bin Sheikh Mahmud (t. 1947-62), founder-president of PRB harbored other designs, viz. setting up a Negarabagian Kesatuan Kalimantan Utara (NKKU, Unitary State of North Kalimantan) comprising Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo. Expecting the blessings of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III (1950-67) to act as the head of state, and Azahari as prime minister (Tan 2008; Ooi 2012). Azahari possessed grandiose visions of resurrecting Brunei’s past glory; this Malay Muslim kingdom of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries held sway over an empire that extended as far north as Manila, much of the Philippine archipelago, and most of the island of Borneo (Ooi 2016).

Although PRB won the majority of contested seats—all 16 elected seats in the State Legislative Council, and 54 out of 55 seats in the district councils, thereby dominating all four local councils—the palace refused to hand over power.

The inaugural meeting of the State Legislative Council was scheduled for December 5, 1962 where the PRB submitted three written motions for the agenda:

- (1) a motion rejecting the concepts of the Federation of Malaysia;
- (2) a motion asking the British Government to restore the sovereignty of the Sultanate of Brunei over the former territories of Sarawak and North Borneo; and
- (3) a motion urging the British Government to federate the three territories of Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo under the Unitary State of Kalimantan Utara with Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin [III] as its constitutional and parliamentary Head of State and the granting of complete and absolute Independence to this new State not later than 1963 (Haji Zaini Haji Ahmad n.d.: 198).

The Speaker of the State Legislative Council declined to

address all three motions citing that it was beyond its jurisdiction. A disillusioned Azahari who invested on a constitutional approach to gain political power in the kingdom turned to revolutionary means of armed rebellion to achieve his ends.

The chance discovery in Sarawak's Lawas district of two military training camps and 35 uniforms of the Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara (TNKU, National Army of North Kalimantan), and the detention of ten people disrupted PRB's plan. As a pre-emptive measure, the uprising initially planned for December 24 was moved earlier to December 8, 1962.

SUPP's collusion in PRB's revolt was but a whisker. Secretary-General Yong led a delegation to travel together with Azahari to the United Nations Decolonization Committee in New York to present their joint opposition to "Malaysia." Owing to the delayed arrival of the Miri delegate, the SUPP delegation was held up at Kuching Airport on December 7, which delayed their arrival in Manila the following day when the revolt broke out. Meanwhile in Manila, Azahari was denied a visa to enter the United States. Consequently, the PRB-SUPP joint opposition to Malaysia failed to be voiced at the UN.

On December 8, 1962, armed PRB members managed to seize the greater part of the sultanate as well as some adjacent territories of North Borneo and Sarawak. But PRB gains were brief. British forces flown in from Singapore swiftly re-took the main urban areas with minimal casualties. Neither the sultan nor the all-important oil installations were harmed. The PRB rebellion had clearly failed (Bijl 2012).

In the aftermath, British authorities in neighboring Sarawak came hard on subversive elements. Suspected SCO members within SUPP were expelled and deported; others escaped across the border to Kalimantan. Likewise, many TNKU personnel crossed into Kalimantan. These ragtag political refugees were received by the TNI and given military training. Expulsion from SUPP turned the SCO to move into its revolutionary phase of its struggle (Ooi 2012). Hence, scores of Chinese youths, including young women who staunchly believed in the SCO cause, endured the hardships of the jungle and

rough treatment of TNI instructors.

On September 16, 1963, Tunku once again achieved another feather to his cap in inaugurating the birth of Malaysia. This realized vision of Tunku comprised Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah (formerly North Borneo). Brunei stayed out. But Malaysia was not well received by its southern neighbors. Indonesia's President Sukarno labelled this new federation a "neo-colony" of Britain. Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal (t. 1961-5) laid claims to Sabah, alleging that it was part of the Sulu sultanate that has been an integral part of the Republic of the Philippines (Amer 2004). Kuala Lumpur and Singapore later on engaged in daily wordwars that made the headlines on both sides of the causeway (Tan 2008; Kadir Mohamad 2015).

While the war of words raged between Kuala Lumpur and Manila, and Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, Jakarta launched military actions across the Sarawak-Kalimantan border in what Sukarno called the *Konfrontasi*, or confrontation, an undeclared war characterized by violent military clashes between 1963 and 1966. Sukarno, the consummate orator, called on the Indonesian military and people to "Ganyang Malaysia," literally, to "Crush Malaysia" (Poulgrain 1997).

Notwithstanding the public brinkmanship and bravado of Sukarno, internally he was struggling to stave off the PKI and the TNI, both increasingly pressuring him for more power and influence. The PKI demanded that a people's militia be formed, in other words, an army of the masses whom the PKI could call upon for support. *Konfrontasi* was supported by the TNI as it could demand more public funds to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the PKI (Daves 2013). Sukarno thought that he could play one off the other. As the consummate *dalang*-orator, he thought he could still control all parties as well as the *republik* (Hughes 2015).

In sensing that Sukarno was increasingly being partial towards the PKI, mid-rank military officers decided to take the initiative. Still clouded in mystery, the Thirtieth of September Movement or Gerakan 30 September (acronym Gestapu for "Gerakan September Tiga Puluh") witnessed the brutal killings of six Indonesian Army

generals in an abortive *coup d'état* in the early dawn of October 1, 1965 (Cribb 2004). President Sukarno was alleged to be under the organization's custodial protection. But by the day's end in Jakarta, it was apparent that the coup had failed.

This Gestapu Affair saw the TNI putting the blame on the PKI that sanctioned the wholesale slaughter of communists and their sympathizers:

Suharto's forces ... quickly claimed that the coup had been masterminded by the PKI, and on this basis, he launched a campaign of extermination against the party (Cribb 2004: 545).

Annihilation campaigns and pogroms were carried out; East Java suffered the worse where entire villages were wiped out; Bali too suffered. The Chinese community were singled out and many became victims of mass killings. General Suharto emerged as the benefactor of all the developments-overcoming the coup, blaming the PKI on the mass purging, and side-lining President Sukarno. Suharto subsequently became president (1967), terminated Konfrontasi (1966), and normalized relations with Malaysia (1967).

Singapore's brief stay within the wider federation of Malaysia was troubled by ideological differences and economic issues (Lau 1998). The UMNO-led Alliance, the coalition party in power in the Federal Government at Kuala Lumpur, favored a pro-Malay affirmative program to narrow the economic disparity amongst the ethnic groups. The People's Action Party (PAP), the socialist-based ruling party of Singapore subscribed to the concept of "Malaysian Malaysia" that demanded equal treatment of all citizens regardless of ethnicity, and that the nation and state should "not [be] defined with the supremacy, well-being and the interests of any one particular community or race" (Malaysian Solidarity Convention 1982). In the economic sphere, Singapore faced trading restrictions despite prior agreement for a common market. As a result, Singapore reneged on agreed on loans to Sabah and Sarawak for economic development. Seeing no avenue for manoeuvre, Prime Minister Tunku succeeded in a vote to the Federal Parliament for Singapore's expulsion on August 7, 1965.

Meanwhile, in late July 1963, Manila hosted a meeting among Indonesian President Sukarno, Philippines President Diosdado Macapagal, and Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. The result of the meet, the Manila Accord, stipulated that the inclusion of North Borneo as part of Malaysia would not prejudice either the claim or any right thereunder by the Philippines to the territory. Three days prior to the inauguration of Malaysia on September 16, 1963, President Macapagal claimed the territory of North Borneo, and the full sovereignty, title and dominion over it were “ceded” by the heirs of Sultan of Sulu, Muhammad Esmail E. Kiram I, to the Philippines (Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila 1962). Malaysia’s inauguration proceeded accordingly, with the Philippines breaking off diplomatic relations.

Furthermore Republic Act 5446, effective September 18, 1968, declared:

Section 2. The definition of the baselines of the territorial sea of the Philippine Archipelago as provided in this Act is without prejudice to the delineation of the baselines of the territorial sea around *the territory of Sabah*, situated in North Borneo, over which the *Republic of the Philippines has acquired dominion and sovereignty* (Republic Act No. 5446 1968. Emphasis added.).

Nonetheless Kuala Lumpur appears to regard the Sabah claim by Manila as a non-issue, and accordingly rejected any calls by any quarter to settle the matter in the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Continuities could be discerned in “Malaysia” while transformations were seen in Leftist activities of the SCO in Sarawak and the PRB in Brunei. The latter two elements attempted to effect major transformations. The SCO’s main agenda was to ultimately create a communist state out of Sarawak, perhaps to be a satellite of the PRC. PRB had more traditionalist tendencies in trying to resurrect Brunei’s “Golden Age” of the sixteenth century. “Malaysia” was the combining of two former British colonial possessions, British Malaya and British Borneo, which further strengthens Britain’s influence in the region through the pro-British Tunku. Britain,

however, regretted to witness Singapore's ejection from this wider federation. But Lee Kuan Yew's anti-communist stance, his strategy of outmaneuvering Leftist elements within the PAP, and the defeat of the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front) no doubt convinced London that there was continuity in post-Malaysia Singapore in the Western camp. The regime change in Indonesia following the Gestapu Affair and the end to Konfrontasi brought some stability in the geopolitical landscape of the region. Sukarno was obviously a loose cannon, and his anti-Western rhetoric, Bandung (1955) notwithstanding, at times made him appear to lean towards the PKI and the communist camp. Manila's protest over Sabah had so far, been a war of words.²⁾

IV. Non-Alignment and Neutrality

Throughout his premiership, the anti-communist Tunku maintained a pro-Western, Anglo-American stance, hence independent Malaya and thereafter Malaysia was solidly in Washington's camp. It was an understandable position considering that much of Malaya/Malaysia's commodities (tin and rubber) were exported to the Western allies of the United States, United Kingdom, and Western Europe. The Malayan Emergency, that compelled much military support from Britain and Commonwealth countries, notably Australia and New Zealand, strengthened the anti-communist stance. Nonetheless Malaya did not relate the insurgency to international communism, although it was apparent that the MCP did receive tacit support from Beijing.³⁾ Kuala Lumpur then did not have any diplomatic ties with Moscow, the Eastern European states, or Beijing.

Notwithstanding its explicit pro-Western stance, Malaya did

2) But recent developments led to a series of kidnappings for ransom and military intrusion into Sabah. By far, the most serious was that of the 2013 Lahad Datu standoff, which brought much instability to the region. In response, Malaysia created the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) and Eastern Sabah Security Zone (ESSZONE), and had deployed more assets to the state.

3) American direct involvement in Vietnam was believed to be based on the notion that international communism (Moscow and/or Beijing) were supporting communist North Vietnam. This resulted in Washington aiding non-communist South Vietnam to allay the Domino Theory. It was a fallacy. See Zimmer (2011).

not participate in any United States-dominated military organizations. For instance, when the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was set-up in 1954, Malaya, then under British colonial rule, was not inducted as a member despite Britain's participation alongside Australia, France, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. But having attained independence, Malaya participated in the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA) in 1957 and accommodated the military presence of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. AMDA allowed the dispatch of ground troops from these countries in combating the insurgency (Pham 2010; Chin 1983).

Malaysia was one of the founding-members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Convened on August 8, 1967, ASEAN initially comprised Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. ASEAN's focus was regional cooperation in economic, social, cultural, technical, and educational aspects, as well as the promotion of regional peace and stability (Haacke 2003: 16-31).

Following the May 13, 1969 tragedy, when Malaysia was engulfed in Sino-Malay racial clashes, then Deputy Premier Tun Abdul Razak assumed control of the government (Badriyah Haji Salleh 2004). Parliament was suspended and Tun Razak as chairman of the National Operations Council (NOC) acted as Director of Operations and ruled through decrees. Amid these trying times, Tunku retired, and Tun Razak assumed the premiership in September 1970. After five months, parliamentary rule was re-established on February 1971.

Unlike Tunku, Tun Razak harbored pragmatic views of Malaysia's place in the world. Rather than be identified with Washington or London, he preferred a neutral stance for Malaysia. Even during Tunku's premiership, as deputy holding the foreign affairs portfolio, Tun Razak strived to position Malaysia as a non-aligned state despite AMDA. When the Bandung Conference (1955) was underway in championing the cause of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Malaya then was still a colonial state. During the 1960s independent Malaysia under Tun Razak's direction, Wisma

Putra (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) sent diplomatic missions to various newly-independent Asian and African nations to win over friends and promote influence (Saravanamuttu 2010). Malaysia's efforts paid off when in 1970, it was granted a seat at the NAM Conference in Lusaka, Zambia.

Tun Razak championed the guiding principles of Malaysia's foreign relations by establishing friendship with all nations irrespective of their ideological orientation, maintaining neutrality with regards to superpower rivalry, and promoting regional cooperation (Saravanamuttu 2010). Participation in NAM enabled Malaysia to successfully re-negotiate AMDA in 1968-9; subsequently, in 1971, it signed the Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) involving United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. Consequently, British and Australian military forces withdrew from Malaysian territory (Chin 1983).

Both NAM and ASEAN enabled Malaysia to promote one of its pivotal foreign policy agenda, namely the pursuit of a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) (Hamzah 1992; Hanggi 1991). The Indochina conflict, however, was a major obstacle to realizing ZOPFAN. Unperturbed, Malaysia persistently pushed the ZOPFAN vision. Malaysia utilized ASEAN to ensure peace and stability in the region, thereby also ensuring that its domestic economic development could progress without threats and hindrance from destabilizing forces from without. Always weary of the Indochina conflict, Malaysia, to some extent, took solace with the end of the Vietnam War (1975), notwithstanding the reality of the emergence of communist regimes in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Burma had since 1962 been ruled by a military dictatorship (Taylor 2015). Despite these developments, Malaysia and ASEAN welcomed the peace that reigned over mainland Southeast Asia.

Besides the global superpowers of the United States and Soviet Union, China and Japan were major players in East and Southeast Asia. Malaysia advocated the position that big powers, instead of attempting to establish hegemony over nations and regions, should play a stabilizing role and thereby ensuring peace and stability. In line with this expectation, Tun Razak journeyed to Beijing in 1974,

a first by a Southeast Asian non-communist leader.

This visit to China was a coup for Malaysia. Apart from establishing diplomatic relations with a communist state, Tun Razak resolved the issue of 200,000 stateless Chinese inhabitants in Malaysia. China relinquished its claims on the overseas Chinese population in Malaysia, and they subsequently acquired residential status. Moreover, he secured Beijing's commitment in dropping its tacit support for the MCP.

Following his predecessor's pragmatism and openness, Prime Minister Dato' Hussein Onn (1976-81) raised Malaysia's presence overseas in expanding its diplomatic network over a broad range of countries. Forging friendly relations across the globe proved advantageous to Malaysia in the long run. For instance, South Pacific islands such as Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and Micronesia helped Malaysia at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1973 that led to the enactment of the Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982 (Henningham and Kovac 1995: 103-5). With support from the South Pacific islands, Malaysia managed to secure rights to its rich undersea oil reserves vis-à-vis Indonesia that also wanted to claim all waters separating its 13,000 islands' archipelagic realm.

The shift to neutrality as well as rapprochement with communist countries, notably China, transformed Malaysia's pro-West stance to one of non-alignment. At the same time, it also cultivated friendly relations with all nations irrespective of ideological stance. This transformation benefited Malaysia after it extended a hand of friendship to all countries. Further changes were to follow in the next decades.

V. The Mahathir Era (1981-2003)

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's premiership which spanned 22 years, between 1981 and 2003, took Malaysia to unprecedented levels and unorthodox realms (Wain 2009: 85-123). Economically Dr. Mahathir transformed the country with a series of policy initiatives that

created a model of capitalism that had a two-prong push of wealth creation as well as wealth distribution (Jomo 2003). In fostering an entrepreneurial mind-set, particularly among the majority of the *bumiputera* (lit. “sons of the soil”, indigenous), he nurtured the growth of an urban Malay middle-class. His “Vision 2020” propounded in 1990 envisioned the country to attain a developed nation status by the year 2020. It became a rallying call to further energize strategic economic policies and programs that were underway, viz. “Malaysia Inc.” (1983), National Agricultural Policy (1984), the Industrial Mater Plan (1985), Promotions of Investment Act 1986, the National Development Policy (1990), and the National Vision Policy (2001). As part of his vision of a modern industrialized nation, infrastructure development was carried out in earnest with the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), and the new administrative center of Putrajaya, among others. The Multimedia Super Corridor launched in 1996 aimed at creating an information and communications technology hub with Cyberjaya being linked to KLIA and Putrajaya (Bunnell 2004).

On the international arena, Dr. Mahathir was far removed from his predecessors and in a class of his own (Dhillon 2009). Outspoken and critical, he openly criticized the political and economic domination of the Western democracies, notably the United States and Western Europe. He also disapproved of the United Nations that upheld the veto powers of its permanent members of the Security Council, and argued for a more equitable system of representation. He was widely regarded as the champion of the South, poor and less developing nations, particularly in Asia and Africa. He was instrumental in establishing a South-South Commission at the Non-Aligned Movement conference in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1986. The following decade saw Malaysia emerging as a “leader” of the South notably among African nations (Hamidin Abdul Hamid 2003; Ahmad Faiz Hamid 2005). In nurturing Malaysia-Africa relations, Dr. Mahathir convened the annual Langkawi International Dialogue in 1995.

Despite Tunku’s pro-Western orientation, he was party to the 1969 formation of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and

held its inaugural secretary generalship (1971-1974).⁴⁾ Owing to domestic priorities, Tun Razak and Dato' Hussein Onn did not play significant roles in the OIC. Dr. Mahathir, however, possessed a higher profile within the OIC. He stood up for Islamic causes and Muslim nations, viz. the plight of the Palestinians, the Bosnian tragedy of ethnic cleansing (mid-1990s), and opposition to the American invasion of Iraq (2003). Moreover, his stature was enhanced when Malaysia held the tenth chairmanship in 2003, where Dr. Mahathir played host to OIC delegates in Putrajaya. One of his most prominent contributions was introducing the common trade area (Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen 2013). At the same time, Malaysia's contribution in terms of political stance, economic assistance, and trade within the OIC were commendable (Shahidah bt Abdul Razak 2008). The OIC was only second to ASEAN in Malaysia's foreign policy priorities. Following the September 11, 2001 incident, Dr. Mahathir played an active part in the restructuring of the OIC, to improve its manner of facing the challenges of an increasingly globalized twenty-first century.

Complementing his international stance on Islam and the Muslim world, Dr. Mahathir's domestic Islamization program that aimed at infusing Islamic principles in the administration sought to strengthen Malaysia's credentials and identity as a moderate Islamic nation championing humanitarian principles (Mahathir bin Mohamad 1993, 1995). The Islamization program that began in earnest from the mid-1980's introduced Islamic banking, strengthened the *syariah* judicial system, encouraged modest dressing among Muslims, and stepped up moral policing by religious authorities. More importantly, Malaysia emphasized a moderate brand of Islam that fought for social justice, struggled against all forms of discrimination, promoted peaceful co-existence among people in a multicultural country, political stability, equity in the sharing of the economic pie, and uplifting morality among Muslims.

Dr. Mahathir was innovative in proposing the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) (1990), aimed at fostering closer ties

4) On 28 June 2011 during the 38th Council of Foreign Ministers meeting (CFM) in Astana, Kazakhstan the organisation changed its name from Organization of the Islamic Conference to the current Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

between ASEAN and Northeast Asia. Opposition from Washington subsequently led to the ASEAN + Three, the latter being China, Japan, and South Korea in 1997. That same year witnessed another of his innovative ideas by way of the creation of the Commonwealth Business Council to encourage greater private participation in the promotion of trade and investment.

In an unprecedented move, shortly after he assumed office as prime minister in October 1981, Dr. Mahathir launched the “Buy Britain Last” campaign. Apparently, a disagreement between Kuala Lumpur and London over differences on aircraft landing rights and British university tuition prompted Dr. Mahathir to overreact and insist on a boycott of British goods. Because of this spat, as well as his stance alleging that the West practices double standards towards less developed nations, he literally turned to the East for worthwhile development models. The following year, in another unparalleled move, he launched the “Look East” policy that focused on Japan’s economic model as a sterling example for Malaysia (Jomo 1985). Japanese work ethics and management styles were encouraged to be guiding principles in both the public and private sectors (Furuoka 2007). From the mid-1980’s, Malaysia sent droves of students to Japan for technical training as well as for tertiary education.

The end of the Cold War (1947-91) witnessed a shift in the balance of power that increasingly leaned towards the United States as the sole superpower. Tactfully, Kuala Lumpur maintained friendly relations with both Moscow (economic ties) and Washington (economic and educational relations).

Dr. Mahathir was vocal in warning of the phenomenon of neo-colonialism where big powers, the Western developed nations, exert undue influence through the mass media and international institutions, imposing their values, way of life, and ideology (brand of democracy and capitalism) on less developed countries. The unilateral actions of the United States in dealing with other sovereign states like Panama (1989-90), Afghanistan (2001-14), and Iraq (2003) were seen as a response to threats to its interests. These actions worried and were roundly criticised by Malaysia.

Closer to home, Dr. Mahathir was instrumental in securing

ASEAN membership for the socialist states of Vietnam (1995) and Laos (1997), as well as the military-ruled Myanmar (1997). Two years later, in 1999, Cambodia too became a part of the ASEAN fold. During his tenure as Malaysia's premier, ASEAN launched several initiatives, viz. ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (1994), Asian-European Meeting (ASEM) (1995), and the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (SEANWFZ) (1995). ARF offered a platform for addressing conflicts, initiating dialogues, and encouraging collaboration with the major global powers. ASEM formalized dialogue between ASEAN and the European Union (EU). SEANWFZ was the culmination of Malaysia's tireless efforts over the years to realize ZOPFAN within the Southeast Asian realm. In all the aforementioned ASEAN initiatives, Dr. Mahathir had a hand, if not a significant role, in the conceptualization, formulation, and implementation phases.

Rounding up the Mahathir years, transformation was the key factor in Malaysia's development from within and without. The Petronas Twin Towers in central Kuala Lumpur showcased Malaysia's economic transformation in pursuit of its Vision 2020 as a developed nation. On the global stage, Malaysia, once a quiet nation state, was literally transformed, through Dr. Mahathir's brave positions on major issues of concerns. He became a voice for Third World nations, a champion of Islamic causes. He also initiated the revamping of the Commonwealth in 1990, called for reforms in the United Nations, and consolidated the voice of the Third World and Islamic nations in protest over the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Dr. Mahathir transformed Malaysia and in turn changed the perception of the world towards this once relatively unknown and small nation state of some 28.3 million (2010). His "Buy Britain Last" campaign and "Look East" policy literally broke away with past practices. Mahathir's Malaysia bravely ventured on uncharted paths and in unorthodox ways, and succeeded to be one of the most progressive and wealthiest nations in the region.

VI. Conclusion

Malaya (1957), and later Malaysia (1963), were indeed borne amidst the Cold War environment. Britain's decision to decolonize, firstly, through Malaya, and later on through Malaysia, considered the Leftist movement, as well as other factors like the Brunei Rebellion. Against this backdrop, the thread of continuities and transformations were intact, with regards to Malaya/Malaysia's international stance.

The personality of the political leadership was pivotal in fashioning Malaya/Malaysia's positioning vis-à-vis the situations from within and from without. Tunku, owing to his background, assumed a pro-West stance, an Anglophile Malay prince favoring Britain at all levels. It was Tunku the British colonial authorities trusted to hand over the reins of political leadership of an independent Malaya after having witnessed his proven capability of being steadfastly anti-communist and establishing an inter-ethnic political partnership, namely the UMNO-MCA alliance that was favored in the elections (1952 and 1955). Tunku stayed on the Anglo-American camp throughout his tenure as Malayan (1957-63) and Malaysian (1963-70) prime minister. Tunku settled for continuity with Britain and the Western democracies.

Tun Razak, although sharing similar background as Tunku in being trained in Britain in law and from a Malay nobility background, was a pragmatist that rightly read the global scenario of choosing neutrality for Malaysia's survival in the bipolar world of big power struggles. While heeding the traditional Malay saying, "Gajah sama gajah berjuang; pelanduk mati di tengah-tengah" ("While elephants fought; the mousedeer dies in between"), Tun Razak steered away from either Washington or Moscow to increasingly seek non-alignment and neutrality. Malaysia's admittance into the NAM family of nations in 1970 was a milestone. Realizing that "Red China", the third power in the Cold War equation, traditionally played a significant role over the Southeast Asia region, Tun Razak took the unprecedented step in initiating rapprochement with Beijing in 1974. Symbolically, the portrait of the historic handshake between Tun Razak and Mao Zedong was "worth [more than] a thousand words", projecting Malaysia's stance in being

friendly with all nations irrespective of ideological differences.

During the premierships of Tun Razak and Dato' Hussein Onn, Malaysia shifted from a pro-West position to non-alignment and neutrality, which promoted friendly relations with a wide spectrum of countries regardless of ideological orientation, economic level of development, geographical stature and location, religion, and creed. It proved a worthwhile policy change.

Further transformations could be discerned during the long era of Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. There was the thread of continuity with his predecessor in nurturing ties with Asian and African nations, but he took it to another level. Establishing a South-South Commission in 1986, he offered a platform and a voice for poor, less and/or undeveloped countries on the African continent. Furthermore, the Langkawi International Dialogue, inaugurated in 1995, added another forum for Malaysia-Africa interactions and cooperation.

While Tunku once held the office of inaugural secretary general of the OIC in 1969 and made Malaysia partly instrumental in the organization's establishment, Dr. Mahathir again took the country's participation in the organization to another level. He became the voice of Islamic causes criticizing the United States and Western democracies of being biased against Islamic countries. He spoke against the suffering of Bosnian Muslims because of ethnic cleansing. He also made sure that Malaysia sent personnel to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) peacekeeping operations in 1995. He led Third World and Islamic countries in protest against the United States for its invasion of Iraq. It criticized its "war on terror" campaign, which was carried out without any specific jurisdiction of a United Nation's resolution.

But Dr. Mahathir broke with Malayan/Malaysian tradition in his "Buy British Last" campaign despite the long ties with this past colonial power, the Commonwealth, and trade and educational relations in the post-independent period. In the same vein his "Look East" policy radically contrasted with past practices that turned to the West for guidance and assistance.

Dr. Mahathir's public censure of the United States and the Western European democracies broke new ground, as well as his sharp criticism of the United Nations. No leader from the developing world ever pronounced such critical remarks against the aid-giving Western nations. He was indeed a maverick, and Malaysia stood out on the global stage. Photoshoots of Dr. Mahathir shaking hands with world leaders against the backdrop of a giant image of the Kuala Lumpur city view speaks volumes of how far Malaysia has advanced and progressed towards his Vision 2020.

Therefore it was as much of the personality, background, and character of the political leadership, as well as the prevailing environment from within and from without, that determine continuities and transformations in a country's historical development. Malaysia had shown, from Tun Razak's premiership to Dr. Mahathir's tenure, that going beyond a nation's self-interest was indeed commendable as well as profitable to other countries through articulating matters and issues of mutual concern and striving for a better world that is equitable for big and small nations.

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