

Foreign policies for the malaysian systems



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Malaysia's foreign policy is premised on establishing close and friendly relations with countries in the community of nations. Tun Razak had embarked on a series of dazzling initiatives in foreign policy largely to move Malaysia from its pro-western, anti communist stance, which had been adopted since independence under the tunku's leadership. This is achieved through upholding the country's sovereignty and promoting universal peace; fostering friendly relations with foreign countries and protecting Malaysia's interests in the regional and international arena. In other words, Malaysia will continue to consolidate its relations with other countries and international organisations, both at the regional and international level. Tunku razak felt this was necessitated by its national security needs, which required Malaysia to live in peaceful co existence with all countries, communist or non communist. In 1971, the year he took over as Prime Minister, he had to face the problem of britain's withdrawal of its armed forces in Malaysia.

Even earlier Britain had given similar commitments to Malaya since 1957 and both Sarawak and Sabah, its former colonies, until they joined Malaysia in 1963. In the superpower race, Britain was no longer capable of maintaining itself as a global power due to the dismantling of its colonial empire, and a slow-down in its economy. Although Britain indicated it might participate in a five power commonwealth defence force, it would not provide anything like its former number of troops.

In line with our objectives of promoting and protecting Malaysian national interest abroad, the Ministry has established a total of 105 missions in 83 countries and appointed 53 Honorary Consuls who provide support and assistance in promoting Malaysia's interest abroad. Since the independence

of Malaya in 1957, the nation's foreign policy has gone through several phases of significant transition with different emphases under five previous premierships. The policy has been largely determined by the established national characteristics and succession of political leadership as well as by the dynamic regional and international environment.

A period of consolidation ensued under Tun Hussein Onn with ASEAN becoming the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy following the collapse of Saigon, the withdrawal of the US military presence from Southeast Asia and the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam. During the premiership of Tun Dr. Mahathir in 1981, Malaysia began relations with more nations and became a symbol of a rising developing country. Under Tun Mahathir's tenure, the nation's foreign policy began adopting a much greater economic orientation in the country's external relations while championing the rights, interests and aspirations of developing countries. Malaysia became the voice of the developing world and was a role model for many developing countries as it became well known for its active stance at the UN and other international conferences. Malaysia's participation in peacekeeping missions under the UN is also a testimony of the nation's seriousness in instilling the will of the international community.

The fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi continued to ensure that Malaysia was active in the international arena. During his tenure, Malaysia played an instrumental role in the formulation and adoption of the ASEAN Charter which has been ratified by all ASEAN member states and subsequently entered into force on 15th December 2008. During this period, Malaysia was also active in expanding the focus of OIC from being an

<https://assignbuster.com/foreign-policies-for-the-malaysian-systems/>

organisation focused solely on political issues into one which focuses on the socio-economic development of Islamic countries. Among the key elements of the 1Malaysia concept is in realising the strength of Malaysia lies in its diversity. This concept bodes well with the main vision of Malaysia's Foreign Policy that is to protect and promote interests abroad and at the same time responsibly and effectively contribute towards the building of a fair and just world. Dato' Sri Najib believes that the interconnectedness of nations in the world means that Malaysia would benefit in applying 1Malaysia in its efforts in diplomacy and foreign relations. Malaysia will maintain close relations with all countries in the world and will work with like-minded nations in pursuing national interest.

Malaysia's foreign policy is structured upon a framework of bilateralism, regionalism and multilateralism where. ASEAN forms the core priority of Malaysia's current foreign policy. Looking further a field, as a country with a strong Muslim majority, Malaysia also gives importance to the solidarity of the Ummah and the spirit of cooperation among the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Malaysia's status as a developing nation makes it imperative for the country to engage actively in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Malaysia plays a significant role in the various multilateral issues that affect our interests. These issues include disarmament, counter terrorism, trafficking in persons, climate change and environmental issues. As a member of the UN, Malaysia is a firm believer of international peace and security and an upholder of international law. Malaysia's election as the President of United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for 2010 and the Chairmanship of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) were a further testimony of Malaysia's positive international image. The fundamental principles of sovereign equality, mutual respect for territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes as well as mutual benefit in relations are the guiding principles that would continue to guide Malaysia's relations with other countries. These principles have stood the test of time. Indeed, our steadfast adherence to these principles, supported by a consistent foreign policy, has established for Malaysia a credible image in the eyes of the international community.

REVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION OF MALAYSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The domestic challenge of religious extremism is however importantly shaped by the perception that, as one manifestation of contemporary global religious revivalism, it is also a product of international muslim contact and exchange. The threat of religious radicalism is thus perceived as being determined, to some extent at least, by an impinging Islamic world which in some instances provides moral and inspirational support and in others, active influence over UMNO's political competitors specifically, and its malay muslim population generally. The expression of extremism has, however, been shaped less by inter state relations than through channels which lend themselves less easily to conventional state regulation.

As such, the Malaysian governments efforts at countering wrong islam have involved an intense interaction between domestic and foreign policy. The determination of wrong islam and its easy association with extremism is also increasingly linked to the federal governments attempt to institute an orthodoxy of belief if not of ortho- practic behavior as a means of

rationalizing islam towards a particular socio-economic but also political agenda. As attempts at curbing extremism have gradually involved questions of religious authority and the toleration of divergent interpretation, they have ultimately also had a significant bearing on intra-malay rivalry. Frequently then, foreign policy has been employed precisely towards the management of domestic politics.

The diversity of views regarding the perception and explanation of foreign policy, no foreign policy can be formulated in a vacuum. It must serve to function in a dynamic environment. Throughout its tenure, the Mahathir Administration has not always enjoyed even relations with those states in the Islamic world which have displayed a more distinctively radical character and approach to international relations. Various geographical, historical, social and political determinants contributed to shaping the nature of Malaysia's foreign policy and the conduct of the country's international relations. Our foreign policy seeks to promote mutual tolerance and cooperation amongst all countries that make up the fabric of international community.

Government has frequently publicized its long standing relationships with more conservative regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, its relations with countries like Iran and Libya have been less well documented. Overall, Malaysia's diplomatic exchange with these countries since the 1980's has tended to remain cautious, explained in part by their expression of a more radical political agenda frequently channelled through religion. While Malaysia has often supported the official foreign policy attitudes expressed by these states toward the needs for fundamental change within the international system, alarm and objection have also been articulated over <https://assignbuster.com/foreign-policies-for-the-malaysian-systems/>

the chosen methods of their capacity to directly influence the domestic political process in Malaysia has necessitated the employment of less conventional strategies in foreign policy by the administration.

The Iranian revolution clearly helped intensify debate in Malaysia over the revival of islam and the viability of an Islamic state in Malaysia. A more worrying domestic repercussion for the government was the revolution's indirect promotion of islam's legitimacy in political contestation and the boost that its success provided to parties and organizations claiming islam as their base. The government's initial non-commitment on the subject, however, contrasted dramatically with the clear and early articulation of support for the revolution by ABIM and PAS.

Nevertheless, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the emergent Islamic republic of Iran in 1981, came within the new administration general strategy of publicizing its foreign Islamic friendships. Iranian officials had in fact made some attempt to explain the Islamic revolution and to express its non opposition to moderate intellectuals in muslim countries. The Mahathir administration was therefore at pains to stress the pragmatic aspects of relations with the new Iranian government, even while locating them within the spirit of a shared religion. Indeed the government received some acknowledgement for its pro-islam efforts from the Iranians.

Malaysia pursues an independent, principled and pragmatic foreign policy which rests on the values of peace, humanity, justice, and equality.

Malaysia's foreign policy is also premised on the principles of respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the

affairs of other nations, peaceful settlement of disputes, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit in relations. Official relations were also important towards neutralizing what was perceived as real or potential revolutionary Iranian influence over Islamic movements. Intra and inter party dynamics were to underline the continuing threat that UMNO and the administration perceived from the revolution's impact on Malay politics and on the role of Islam in Malaysian society.

Foreign policy is not static. Its formulation is essentially a dynamic process. Hence, over the years, our foreign policy has evolved, taking account of the change in leadership as well as developments in the ever-changing global political and economic landscapes. Moreover, the advent of globalization and the transformation of interstate relations brought about by new and rapid changes in information technologies necessarily means that our foreign policy has to be adjusted and fine tuned to meet new challenges in a globalised world. The evolution of the country's foreign policy under successive prime ministers reflects a pragmatic response to the geopolitical and economic changes of their times. To be continually relevant to the country's needs, foreign policy cannot remain static. But whilst changes in emphasis have become a general feature of Malaysian foreign policy, continuity has also been evident. Both the change and continuity mark a higher level of confidence and maturing of the country in the conduct of its international affairs. Indeed, in many ways Malaysia's leadership role has been recognised on several issues of deep interest to the developing world.

As a trading nation, we are very much dependent on a peaceful international environment for our well being. Malaysian foreign policy has to be oriented

<https://assignbuster.com/foreign-policies-for-the-malaysian-systems/>

to allow for a greater focus on economic diplomacy. In the past, when we were producing mainly raw materials for the world, Malaysia had to compete with only a handful of countries. But now, when we have become an industrialized trading nation, we have no choice but to work harder, to compete better and to find new markets for our goods and services. We must find better ways to do business with the outside world. We need to find niches in which we have a competitive edge.

ASEAN IN MALAYSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Malaysia was able through the vehicle of ASEAN diplomacy to maintain a balancing act in its relations with the indo-china states which remained in a state of conflict at the point of time of ASEAN's formation. We have already alluded to the chaos caused by the boat refugees after the end of the Vietnam war and Malaysia's pivotal role in repairing some 80, 000 persons to third countries. Through ASEAN, the geneva conference of 1979 was called to deal with the practical aspects of the Vietnamese refugees. Then came the Cambodia crisis and here again Malaysia played a pivotal role in setting up the coalition government of democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). Heng samrin regime, ASEAN diplomacy kept in check the various political players in the Cambodian conflict by securing the U. N. seat for the CGDK for the most part of the 1980s.

This arguably put all the political players of the Cambodian conflict in contention until the peace process took root in the early 1990s. here again ASEAN played a crucial role in sponsoring the Jakarta informal meetings. Throughout this period, Malaysia's stances and policies vis-a-vis the indo-

china issue followed the tempo and thrust of ASEAN diplomacy. It was clear that ASEAN had become central to Malaysian foreign policy for its regional and global relations, even under the feisty tenure of Mahathir.

The Abdullah government had also followed through the motions of its predecessors in placing ASEAN at the centre of regional politics and foreign relations. The ASEAN push for the construction of three forms of communities- security, economic, and socio-cultural- has also been wholeheartedly taken on board by the Malaysian government along with the ASEAN charter signed in November 2007 at the 13th ASEAN in Singapore. It is important to see ASEAN as a crucial instrumental of Malaysia's attempt to use a countervailing and counterpoising foreign policy to handle new issues that have surfaced regionally and globally. Not less of all was the question of Myanmar or Burma, which continued to be the bugbear of the ASEAN states well into the late 2000s.

At the regional level, Malaysia will continue to push for the strengthening of ASEAN as a regional grouping. This includes support for a whole range of functional co-operation on a sub-regional or on an ASEAN-wide basis, the phasing in of AFTA and the implementation of the ASEAN investment area. ASEAN has developed and refined various mechanisms and arrangements to promote trade, investment and other collaborative activities. Much of ASEAN's attractiveness to the outside world is built on the economic success of its member states and their potential for greater growth. As ASEAN confronted the various challenges such as international terrorism, economic slowdown, in the face of current economic and financial crises, it is ASEAN's common effort that accounted for our success.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Five Power Defense Arrangement, 1971

Ministers of the government of Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and United Kingdom met in London on 15th and 16th April 1971. In order to consider matters of common interest to all five governments relating to the external defense of Malaysia and Singapore. The minister of the five governments affirmed, as the basic principles of their discussion, their continuing determination to work together for peace and stability their respect for the sovereignty political independence and territorial integrity of all countries and their belief in the settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means in accordance with the principles of the united nations charter.

In the context of their governments determination to continue to co-operate closely in defense arrangements which are based on the need to regard the defense of Malaysia and Singapore as indivisible, the ministers noted with gratification on the development of the defense capability of Malaysia and Singapore, to which the other three governments had given assistance, and the decisions of the governments of Australia, new Zealand and the united kingdom, which had been welcomed by the other two governments to continue to station forces there after the end of 1971. In discussion the contribution which each of the five governments would make defense arrangements in Malaysia and Singapore, the ministers noted the view of the united kingdom government that the nature of its commitment under the anglo-malaysian defense agreement required review and that the agreement

should be replaced by new political arrangements. They declared that their government would continue to co-operate, in accordance with their respective policies, in the field of defense after the termination of the agreement on its 1st November 1971.

The ministers also declared, in relation to external defense of Malaysia and Singapore that in the event of any form of armed attack externally organized or supported or the threat of such attack against Malaysia and Singapore, their governments would immediately consult together for the purpose of deciding what measures should be taken jointly or separately in relation to such attack or threat. The ministers reviewed the progress made regarding the establishment of the new defense arrangements. The ministers agreed that from time it might be appropriate for them to discuss their common interest. It would also be open to any of them, participating governments to request at any time, with due notice, meeting to review these defense arrangements.

METHODS AND RESPONSES TOWARDS MALAYSIAN POLICY

With its dedicated Plans of Actions and Protocols, ASEAN will move closer towards its goal of building the ASEAN Community, characterized by greater political and security interaction and engagement, a single market and production base, with free flow of goods, services, capital investment and skilled labour and a caring society, focusing on social development, education and human resources development, public health, culture and information, and environmental protection. Improvement of the invisible

trade of developing countries, particularly by reducing their payments for freight and insurance, and the burden of their debt charges.

The foreign policy of Malaysia continues to emphasise on the relevance and importance of ASEAN as the forum and catalyst for regional dialogue. ASEAN Dialogue Partnerships, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three and East Asia Summit have allowed its members to engage leading powers.

Improvement of institutional arrangements, including if necessary, the establishment of new machinery and methods for implementing the decisions made at UNCTAD. It is sometimes difficult to understand why even though the government is so generous in providing assistance to so many other developing countries, it yet seems reluctant to give forthright and substantial aid to Malaysia.

In most cases, no open tender processes were resorted to. Privatization further fed into this policy. Many of the joint ventures were achieved on a government to government basis involving tit for tat negotiation methods. An example was the case of Antah Biwater. Fifty one percent of its equity was controlled by its local malay partner while the remaining was held by a Biwater Ltd, a british water supply and treatment company with strong political connection to the thatcher government. Another example found in Indah Water Konsortium, a joint venture with british water treatment company northwest water ltd. IWK was awarded a \$6 billion sewerage contract under the regimes privatization policy.

ROLES OF POLICY MAKERS WHEN INTRODUCING CHANGES

Having policy space and flexibility is important to a developing country. The Malaysian experience also shows that if a country is able to avoid turning to the IMF, it can also avoid the straightjacket of the IMF's mainly one size fits all policies and can choose its own policies as well as change them if they are found to be unsuitable. Malaysia initially took on several elements of the IMF fiscal and monetary policies but when these damaged the real economy, the country was able to switch to a different approach.

A coherent anti-crisis strategy should be seen as an integrated package of its elements and policies. Policymakers often (even constantly) grapple with difficult policy decisions since the goals of policy are multiple. A policy instrument meant to achieve one goal may negatively affect other goals. In a situation where there are many complex trade-offs, it is useful to think outside the box and seek other policy tools.

In the Malaysian case, it is useful to analyze and appreciate the various policy elements as parts of an integrated approach and as parts of a whole policy package. Thus, each element should be considered not only on its own merits or for its own role in achieving a particular goal but also for its function of having an effect on another element or on another goal. A particular element or policy may not have the same successful intended effect, unless accompanied by or done in conjunction with some other element of policy. Thus, the interrelationship of the elements and the interaction with one another should be appreciated.

For example lowering the interest rate was important for rescuing the microeconomy and reviving the real economy but doing so would have brought down the ringgit's exchange rate. A new policy instrument, fixing the exchange rate was thus introduced.

This alone would have been insufficient. Besides fixing the exchange rate to the dollar, stabilization of the currency also required two additional policy instruments. If we start with even one major policy goal (reviving rate reduction), we end up with several other policy tools and goals.

All diplomatic missions may apply to the MFA through diplomatic note attaching the details as prescribed. For incoming visits by Head of States/Governments to Malaysia, the delegation will normally also include their country's official media. On other occasions, official media from foreign countries may also undertake assignments in Malaysia to cover specific activities such as the Malaysian Government's socio-economic programmes, general elections, etc. To this effect, the official media from the country concerned would need to be accorded with some assistance in facilitating their assignment in Malaysia. Media accreditation for official media agencies/delegations undertaking assignments in Malaysia for the purposes of Head of State/Government visits, coverage for international conferences and filming. For media agencies accompanying Head of State/Government Visits, the MFA processes and approves media accreditation requests. Applications should be made via diplomatic note attaching the prescribed details.

Under regional security matters, Policy Planning Division is involved in handling issues related to ASEAN Regional Forum as well as bilateral security dialogue between Malaysia and Australia. On political and security cooperation, Policy Planning Division is responsible among others in the implementation of the ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action, Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, broadening the support for ASEAN instruments such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and the Southeast Asia.

Financial openness poses serious dangers to developing countries and can be avoided. Too much openness in the financial sector can make a developing country vulnerable to financial speculation, to sudden or large movements of foreign capital, and to volatile movements in the exchange rate. If a country were to maintain an open financial policy, it risks losing the ability to determine its own macroeconomic policies. Thus the country may find it desirable not to have such an open financial policy.

CONCLUSION

The greatest challenge would be to extract the best from the process of globalization and to give our best to the system. And in return to contribute towards making the world a much more peaceful and equitable place to live in, to provide leadership within our region and to demonstrate exemplary and responsible membership of the international community. The economic dimension of globalization has been even more disappointing. The financial crisis that descended upon East Asia in 1997 brought about not only social misery and economic disaster but political instability as well. Massive

Unemployment, negative growth, stock market crashes and severe currency devaluation have pulled down millions of people below the poverty lines. And now, we are anxiously watching the effects of the possible economic meltdown following the global financial crisis.

Fundamental principles governing interstate relations would continue to guide Malaysia's relations with other countries. These refer to sovereign equality and mutual respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes as well as mutual benefit in relations and peaceful co-existence. The so-called "constructive intervention" policy advocated by some, involving loud criticism, adversarial posturing and grand standing would only bring more harm than good to the promotion of neighbourly relations. We do make exceptions to the policy of non-interference in certain extreme situations. The bloody cruelty, genocide and atrocities perpetrated by some struck our conscience. Such peculiar situation calls for pragmatism on our part in the interest of humanity whilst recognizing the central role of the UN in resolving the problem.

Malaysia's activism at the international front has of course attracted attention and reaction from various quarters. Malaysia had been the target for criticism for being "too vocal". But this is something that we need to take in our own stride if Malaysia is to be proactive at the global level. Our foreign policy principles have stood the test of time. Indeed, our steadfast adherence to these principles, supported by a consistent foreign policy, has established for Malaysia certain credibility in the eyes of the international community. The years ahead therefore would see our foreign policy specially

<https://assignbuster.com/foreign-policies-for-the-malaysian-systems/>

oriented towards not only ensuring Malaysia's domestic success but also internationally, as a geopolitical and economic player at the global level.