

# **DR. ISMAIL ABDUL RAHMAN**

Minister of External Affairs  
February 1959 - August 1960



Chandran Jeshurun



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*(By courtesy of the New Straits Times)*

## FOREWORD

This is the third of the publication in the IDFR Diplomatic Profile Series, the first having been published in 2008 on the first Minister of Foreign Affairs (who was then known as the Minister of External Affairs), Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, and the second on Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, another former Foreign Minister. I have no doubt that these brief accounts of our former Foreign Ministers and their individual styles of managing the country's policies towards all the different issues in international affairs are a timely addition to the available literature on Malaysian foreign policy over the years. It is my intention that this Diplomatic Profiles Series should not focus only on those who have held that portfolio in Government but also all those political leaders, as well as distinguished senior diplomats, who have contributed significantly to the successful evolution and promotion of Malaysia's international image since 1957.

Just as many of our readers were rather surprised to have found out that our first Prime Minister had also held on to the responsibility of running Malaysia's foreign policy when the first Profile in the series was published. I am certain that this latest publication will also resurrect the hitherto not very well-known role of the late Tun Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman in the shaping of Malaysian foreign policy. Even though he helmed the Ministry itself for a period of only eighteen months from February 1959 to August 1960, he was to leave his mark on Malaysia's external relations in many important ways.

His stewardship of the newly-established Malayan Embassy in Washington, D.C. from 1957 to 1959 when he also made the country known to the rest of world by being its active Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York is well worth recording for the sake of posterity. The IDFR would like to acknowledge with gratitude the access to the Tun Dr. Ismail Papers which was granted by the Library of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. We also wish to record our thanks to Mr Tawfik Ismail for having kindly granted us permission to cite from the papers in his father's private collection.

The sole responsibility for the contents of this publication is that of author, the late Dr. Chandran Jeshurun, my dear friend and colleague at IDFR, who completed the work in good time but, unfortunately, was not able to see the finished product due to his sad and untimely passing away, to whose memory I would like to pay my highest tribute for a work well done in respect of this, as well as the other Profiles in the series.

**Hasmy Agam**  
*Executive Chairman*

December 2009

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## ***Explanatory Note***

*IDFR has elected to name the former Ministers of Foreign Affairs by their first names without the honorific titles that were subsequently bestowed on them by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong with the exception of those who had inherited theirs by birth such as Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. Thus, Tun Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman, who was already the holder of the Johor honorific title of Dato' before he left for the United States and was later conferred the 1st Class Order of the title of Seri Setia Makhota by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the first to be so honoured, in 1966, is given in the title of this publication as Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman.*





## THE GROOMING OF THE SECOND FOREIGN MINISTER

Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman's tenure as Minister of External Affairs lasted only eighteen months and it may be rightly asked if it is possible to construct a credible and meaningful profile of what he probably contributed to the evolution of Malaysian foreign policy in that short space of time. Being a medical practitioner, people have often wondered how he even became so involved in pre-independence politics at the national level together with his contemporaries such as Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak. The latter two founding fathers of the new nation had, after all, come from an illustrious background of student activism since their days as aspiring lawyers in England where they had been both sent as a prelude to becoming civil servants. Indeed, their affinity with world affairs was largely due to their interaction with fellow students from other parts of the British Empire who were themselves embroiled in the struggle for self-rule and ultimate independence for their countries. It must be said, therefore, that not only was Dr. Ismail a reluctant politician but an even more unlikely choice to be responsible for the foreign policy of an independent Malaya.<sup>1</sup>

To better appreciate the route that eventually led Ismail to the Ministry of External Affairs one must, first of all, admit that there has not been sufficient work done on some of the vitally strategic appointments that were made by the Alliance Party Government in the days immediately before the declaration of independence on 31 August 1957. The composition of the new Cabinet was more or

less predictable as its members had all been actively participating in the self-governing Federation of Malaya Government after the first elections to the Federal Legislative Council in 1955.<sup>2</sup> However, the Federation's external relations had remained a preserve of the British Government and none of the writings of this period has been able to explain how much the Alliance Party leaders had been concerned about foreign policy priorities once independence was achieved. Nevertheless, the inner core of the leadership obviously realised that it had to face this new challenge of having to formulate and implement the new nation's foreign policy. As none of them was known to be a specialist in foreign affairs, the mantle of responsibility for this portfolio fell upon the shoulders of the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, himself. It has been shown that he had a certain flair for dealing with international diplomacy that had been demonstrated from an early age probably due to his Thai background and his status as the scion of a Malay royal house under the British.<sup>3</sup>

Even if the question of someone to head the Ministry of External Affairs seemed to have been a fairly straight-forward one for the Alliance Party leaders, they were faced with a much greater challenge when it came to finding suitable ambassadors to represent the fledgling nation overseas. Limiting itself to opening only the most important diplomatic Missions for a start, the decision was taken to have a Permanent Representative at the United Nations headquarters in New York and Ambassadors or High Commissioners in Australia, India, Indonesia, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Heads of these Missions were drawn from a hand-picked group of trusted Party leaders as well as those who had a professional background and were close friends of the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. Two of them were from Kedah: Senu Abdul Rahman, the UMNO Secretary-General, who was sent to Jakarta and Syed Sheh Shahabudin, a senior member of the Kedah Civil Service who was married to the Tunku's youngest sister, Tunku Habsah, being posted to Bangkok. The important posting to the Court of St. James was entrusted in the hands of the tried and

tested Kelantan aristocrat, Dato' Nik Ahmad Kamil. As a reflection of the multi-ethnic character of the Alliance Party, a prominent Chinese ex-Government servant and corporate figure, Gunn Lay Teik, was sent to Canberra while another of Tunku's political allies, S. Chelvasingham MacIntyre, a Ceylon Tamil lawyer from Johore, was appointed as High Commissioner to India.<sup>4</sup>

Even more than the post of High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, the top echelons of the Alliance Party Government regarded the nation's diplomatic representation in Washington and New York as a fundamentally strategic appointment in projecting its image internationally. Dr. Ismail wrote in his incomplete and unpublished memoirs that "shortly before Merdeka was declared, the Tunku spoke to me about going to Washington as our country's first ambassador to the United States of America and at the same time, accredit myself to the United Nations as Malaya's first permanent representative". The Tunku told him that "the choice was between Razak and me and honestly, he said, he could not spare Razak as he wanted him in Malaya to assist him".<sup>5</sup> For Ismail himself, it was a personal sacrifice in political terms and he accepted the Tunku's offer on condition that "it was for a period of one year" only.<sup>6</sup> But his appointment apparently led to his "relatives and friends" to suspect that "I had been banished" although he admitted, in his typically self-effacing style, that it "satisfied me to be offered a position which would enable our newly independent country to be known abroad".<sup>7</sup>

In hindsight, it seems obvious that the decision to prevail upon Dr. Ismail to serve as Malaya's top diplomat in Washington and New York was undoubtedly based on the Alliance Party leadership's conviction that it was vitally important for them to be able to manage its relations with the Cold War superpower that mattered the most to them — the United States of America. At the same time, as a small, vulnerable nation in a highly unstable and volatile region without any powerful friend to turn to for diplomatic and material support should the need arise, the Government was anxious to demonstrate



its utmost seriousness in acceding to the United Nations Charter. In the absence of archival sources, it is not possible to fully understand how the core group among the Alliance Party leaders planned their diplomatic strategies. However, an examination of the personal correspondence that Dr. Ismail maintained with his close colleagues in Government reveals without any doubt that the Government had some expectation of obtaining financial aid (including military assistance) from the Americans primarily to implement its ambitious socio-economic Development Plan. Although the Party had done remarkably well in the 1955 elections, its leaders did not delude themselves about their future success in view of the significant victories notched up by the Opposition parties, both socialist and Islamic. They fully realised that, unless tangible and rapid progress was made in the lives of its electorate, the Party would be faced with stiffer opposition in the next general elections which would have to be held by late 1959. Its dilemma was to ensure that any improvement in the standard of living and the general welfare of its people would have to be in tandem with its capacity to maintain internal order and simultaneously build up its external defence capabilities.

The extraordinary value that was placed on the potential American aid as well as financial assistance from international funding bodies such as the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is well reflected by the appointment of another senior civil servant, the economist Ismail Mohd Ali, as the one who would negotiate with these agencies for loans.<sup>8</sup> He was to be Dr. Ismail's deputy with the rank of Minister at the Washington Embassy and, by all accounts, performed admirably in managing the economic aspects of Malaya's relations with international organisations. There is evidence now to support the proposition that the Alliance Government also regarded the US as a provider of military aid in the form of material assistance to build up its nascent defence capabilities. It appears that both the Tunku and Abdul Razak, who was also Minister of Defence, realised that they could not rely entirely on the Anglo-Malayan Defence



Agreement (AMDA) of October 1957 for the country's long-term national defence needs.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it was the Development Plan and external defence considerations that were at the root of the decision to have none other than one of their ablest leaders in Washington even though the Government had quite consciously opted to stay out of the expressly anti-Communist South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) led by the USA.

The undoubted and exceptional talent that he was to display in his brief stint both in Washington and in New York was one of the reasons why the Tunku decided unhesitatingly that "when you return I will pass over to you the portfolio of the Ministry of External Affairs as well as some of the subjects now in Suleiman's portfolio". On top of all this, the Prime Minister made it clear that "we need you very much at home because of the amount of work that has got to be done in connection with the Government as well as the Party".<sup>10</sup> The predicament that the Tunku and Razak faced as the date of Ismail's return to Malaya approached towards the end of 1958 was to find a suitable successor. In fact, Razak wrote to Ismail that "there appears to be nobody of any standing here that we can send to Washington" other than the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, Nik Ahmad Kamil, but "we cannot spare him at the moment". In the same letter, he heaped his praises on Ismail: "You have done extremely good work for us, Doc, and we are proud of you. Everyone who comes from America spoke highly of the work that you are doing there."<sup>11</sup> In the end, it was the Tunku himself who had to use his personal powers of persuasion to get Nik Ahmad Kamil to agree to take up the appointment as Ismail's successor. All three of them, that is, the Tunku, Ismail and Razak, were convinced that the Mission could not be left in the hands of a *Chargé d'Affaires*. As the Tunku stated, the appointment of the new Ambassador should "meet with the wishes of the American people as I think they would consider...[it] as a gesture of our regard for them, i.e. to have an Ambassador rather than a *Chargé d'Affaires*."<sup>12</sup>



As it was almost universally believed that Ismail would make an ideal Foreign Minister, it is useful to have some understanding of his personality, more especially his instinctive affinity with the diplomatic world and international affairs in general. Fortunately for posterity, he has left behind quite detailed and sometimes very revealing written accounts of his life in the United States from September 1957 until his departure from New York by boat in January 1959. These documents provide intimate glimpses of both his firm and convincing views about the conduct of foreign relations by a unique new state such as Malaya then, as well as his perceptive analyses of the likely trends in international politics. Beginning with the more mundane aspect of his overseas service, that is, how he managed his Missions in two of the foremost cities in the US, he began on quite an uncomfortable note as far as the administrative and personal aspects of an Ambassador's life were concerned.<sup>13</sup>

As he confessed to a British expatriate officer friend of his in Kuala Lumpur, he had to literally work “seven days a week on an average of 15 hours a day... to start our Embassy in Washington from scratch and at the same time attend to our affairs at the UN”. Finally, as things were beginning to fall into place and a more organised and sedate life seemed possible in their newly-renovated Chancery building, he still had to worry about the possible objections from the Treasury at home for his expenditure as he was “expecting fireworks”.<sup>14</sup> After diplomatic receptions at the Embassies of Mexico and the United Arab Republic [present day Egypt] in April 1958, he noted that they were both “big, imposing and lavishly furnished”. He felt that the “Treasury officials at home should see these embassies, before they think that ours is expensive”.<sup>15</sup> His innate pragmatism and sober-mindedness is well reflected by his view that the buildings for the Chancery in Washington and the Permanent Mission in New York, should “conform to our status — noticeable without ostentation”.<sup>16</sup>

His working style was very much dictated by his attention to details and propriety as, for example, his decision to write a diary of his activities

concerning official work. His Minister, Ismail, was to send them “regularly” to Ghazali Shafie (who was Deputy Permanent Secretary then), their contact point at the Ministry, but the Ambassador’s own diaries of events that he was personally involved in were sent directly to the Tunku himself.<sup>17</sup> As far as his staff was concerned he was quite strict about observing administrative procedures especially where they concerned communications with the Ministry regarding official matters. He was quite annoyed when Tunku Ja’afar, the most senior officer at the Permanent Representative’s office in New York, habitually dealt directly with Kuala Lumpur without so much as keeping the Ambassador in Washington informed.<sup>18</sup> Later, when he was replaced by a new man, Ismail came to know of the extent of Tunku Ja’afar’s self-asserted independence in New York and wrote that he “was not at all surprised, because since he had been in the New York Office” he had “always acted as if he was the Permanent Representative”.<sup>19</sup> As a result of the difficulties that Ismail had encountered with Tunku Ja’afar, Tunku Abdul Rahman tried to pacify him by promising that “from now on we are going to have more say in the choice of members of [the] Foreign Service”.<sup>20</sup>

By the middle of 1958, Ismail’s main task was to somehow persuade the Americans to favourably consider the Federal Government’s application for a loan to fund the Development Plan. In the discussions between the Ambassador in Washington and the Government in Kuala Lumpur as to the appropriate strategy that should be adopted, the Tunku told Ismail in early May that “it would not be correct” for the Prime Minister (even though he was also the Minister of External Affairs) to make the application to the US Secretary of State. The fear was that such a procedure would place the latter “in an embarrassing position” while a possible rejection by the Americans “may well indeed change my future attitude towards the United States as a whole”.<sup>21</sup> The Tunku, therefore, decided that Ismail should instead meet with the Secretary of State with the full authority of the Government to explain the need for the loan and leave with him an *aide memoire*.<sup>22</sup>



If there were any further requests for clarification or queries regarding the loan application, these could be handled either by Ismail at the Washington end or through direct communication between the Government and the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Ismail did call on Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, on 26 May 1958 and explained to him that the loan was needed in view of the expected Budget deficits of the Federal Government of M\$150 and M\$160 million for 1958 and 1959. Although Dulles was apparently “flabbergasted” by the amount of \$450 million that was being requested, he did indicate that “his Government would sympathetically consider our application” and delegated Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, C. Douglas Dillon,<sup>23</sup> to continue the discussions. Although the Secretary of State did express “his appreciation of our Government’s firm stand against Communism”, Ismail emphasised that the interview with Dulles had been arranged “after a great deal of difficulty”. This was because the Secretary of State would not normally meet with Ambassadors who would have to deal, in the first instance, with the Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the region.<sup>24</sup>

It is of some interest to briefly examine the case that the Federation Government made out in its *aide memoire* in support of its loan application as the details had been worked out through telegraphic and postal exchanges between the Washington Embassy and Kuala Lumpur. The fundamental argument was that the “campaign against the Communists is fought on two fronts — the economic and the military”. Its main assertion was that the Communists had realised that they could only overthrow the Government by “resorting to a new tactic, that of pinning down the Government” to a huge military expenditure so that “it cannot continue its Development Plan”. Interestingly, the paper admitted that there was no chance of raising the necessary funding in London and with the next General Elections due by the end of 1959, there “certainly will be pressure for recognition of the Communist Party... as a condition for giving up the fight”.<sup>25</sup>



The document also shrewdly alluded to the offers of financial assistance that had been made by the Soviet Union at the recent ECAFE meeting in Kuala Lumpur but these had been “promptly turned down by our Prime Minister”. In fairly blunt terms, it was stated that without the US aid in terms of loans, “the present Government cannot be certain that it will be returned to power with an effective majority in Parliament at the 1959 elections”. From the perspective of the state of politics in Malaysia then, one cannot but be somewhat appreciative of Ismail’s frank admission that because of the Alliance Party leaders’ “belief in democracy and the democratic process, they know they cannot cling to power forever”. But, the Alliance Government leaders hoped that before they went out of office, the Communists would be defeated, and the country’s economy put on a firm basis, capable of withstanding Communist subversion”. It ended on a cautionary note: “Help by the United States Government at this crucial time in the history of Malaya is urgent and imperative.”<sup>26</sup>

This was followed up on 11 June by a meeting with Dillon who was accompanied by three other senior State Department staff, one of whom, Eric Kocher, Ismail had got to know personally on a social basis.<sup>27</sup> It was stressed that whatever financial “help, if given, would be once and for all” and Dillon was favourably disposed to the idea “although not to the full extent asked for” and it was decided that the matter would be sorted out between the Federal Government and the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. It is important to note that Ismail, in his report to the home office advocated the inclusion of “specific projects on [the] police and military” in the talks.<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, the little-known discussions between Ismail and Razak, who was also Minister of Defence, were to bear fruit in the first-ever agreement to be signed between Malaya and the United States for the purchase of military equipment and services in July 1958.<sup>29</sup> In the light of the complete trust and confidence that both the Tunku and Razak obviously had in Ismail’s advice, as in the case of the military factor, it is incorrect to suggest that the Tunku might have wanted to delay his return

after a year in the US.<sup>30</sup> In fact, it was none other than Razak himself who assured Ismail that “the Tunku does not have such a thought in his mind.”<sup>31</sup>

At the United Nations, Ismail took a keen interest in the developments within the Afro-Asian group and played an active part in some of its critical initiatives although he was most cautious not to commit the Federal Government to any new course of action on sensitive issues without specific instructions from home. When he agreed to co-sponsor the application by India to have the problem of *apartheid* in South Africa included in the agenda of the forthcoming General Assembly, he told the Indian Permanent Representative, Lall, that it “would not imply that we would be committed to future steps on the subject”.<sup>32</sup> It is questionable if he was sometimes too meticulous in adopting a strong stand as, for instance, when he told his new officer at the Mission in New York, Mohd Sopiee Sheikh Ibrahim,<sup>33</sup> that he would not accept the candidacy for one of the posts of Vice-President among the Afro-Asian bloc. He felt that as “a new nation... it is presumptuous to aspire for such a prestige-bearing post” especially when “our association with the Afro-Asian [bloc], until recently, was marked with hesitancy, and this had not escaped the attention of the Group”. “Therefore, all in all, it would be better to await (*sic*) at least another year.”<sup>34</sup>

There were times when Ismail found himself in strong disagreement with a particular policy line laid down by the Ministry. The Anglo-American invasion of Jordan and Lebanon in July 1958 created a full-blown crisis at the United Nations when the Security Council had to hold an emergency session. The Ministry's instructions to Ismail were to lobby actively for an immediate meeting of the General Assembly so that a motion could be adopted asking the Security Council to act urgently in finding a satisfactory solution to the crisis. Ismail objected to this course of action because “it is impossible to carry it out” as he had already been attending the Security Council meetings as an observer.

He concluded that the result of carrying out the instruction “would be to bring ridicule to the Government” although it was unclear why this would have been so.<sup>35</sup> Despite such a rigid view, it is assumed that he did as he was told, no doubt, under protest.

He also had some reservations about “the Federal Government’s policy of neutralism and her (*sic*) belief in the United Nations as an organ for the settlement of international dispute[s] must take account of the intricacies of [the] international situation”. Implementing such a policy “is not easy”, according to him, as it “requires constant vigilance and fine judgement”. “Otherwise she would be accused of neutralism partial to certain countries” and “India has already been dubbed ‘neutral as far as Russia is concerned’.”<sup>36</sup> To give credit where it is due, the Malaysians did well in lobbying for some of the wording of the final resolution adopted by the Emergency Session of the General Assembly following the Middle East crisis of 1958. Despite being a relatively new and small member nation, Ismail, Ismail Ali and, especially Sopiee, had been “hawking” around for support of the resolution and they must have made an impression on other Afro-Asian delegations. It is interesting to note that the Arab delegation “vehemently denounced” it, although in the wording of the final resolution that was passed, “the substance was very much like ours”. “Unfortunately, the Press unwittingly gave the credit to the Indonesians, who, as far as I know, did not try to sponsor a resolution”. However, “to be fair to the Indonesians, it must be admitted that members of their delegation did tell Sopiee that they were getting credit, which was not theirs”.<sup>37</sup>

By September 1958, Ismail was quite engrossed with his plans to return to Malaya in early 1959 as had been agreed upon between himself and the Tunku when the offer of the diplomatic assignment in the United States had been made. He did not directly involve himself in the decision as to who was best suited to succeed him although, as shown above, both the Tunku and Razak had

he put it, “if you don’t mind, to give you my advice based on my experience here”. Not only did “practically all countries send their best men to represent them either in Washington or at the UN”, but “some countries like Australia, Burma and Pakistan send men who have been Cabinet Ministers to fill these posts”. However, in Ismail’s mind “one qualification is very essential”: “he must be very loyal to the party in power and must be trusted to carry [out] fully the policy of the government, and not [any] variation of that policy”. It is quite intriguing that he believed that “it is preferable at this stage of the history of our country to have a Malay as our Ambassador to Washington and Permanent Representative to the UN”. As he explained, he had “fought tooth and nail for adequate cost of living and thanks to you and the other Ministers of the Cabinet the recently approved cost of living is sufficient for a person without private means to be our country’s Ambassador to Washington”.<sup>38</sup>

## THE MATURING OF DR. ISMAIL AS FOREIGN MINISTER

Dato' Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman was appointed Minister of External Affairs as soon as he returned to Malaya in February 1959 and, no one at that time, including himself, would have suspected that it would be an unexpectedly short tenure. On the contrary, most observers in Kuala Lumpur no doubt believed that he was the best man for the job given the first-hand experience that he had just gained in both Washington and New York where he would have been imbued with some definite views about the country's foreign policy options. His own private papers are rather silent about the eighteen months that he presided over the highly talented and dedicated staff that had been nurtured over a period of less than three years. The Permanent Secretary at that time was Dato' Ghazali Shafie (later Tun) and he, too, has not left any account of Ismail's tenure especially with regard to policy issues. However, many of those who had served in the Ministry during those early days of Malaysia's independence share the feeling that the Tunku had had an almost domineering influence on the new nation's stand with regard to various regional and international issues.

Indeed, Ghazali's close personal relations with the Tunku, in particular, embodied the central role of the Prime Minister in shaping foreign policy. Ghazali, while being the Tunku's chief policy planner and implementer of the various diplomatic initiatives during those early days, still remembers that, once the Tunku had made up his mind about something, he could be quite obstinate about the matter. As Ghazali has revealed, there were occasions

when he was overruled by the Tunku because the advice that he sought to give ran counter to what the Tunku had already decided he wanted to do about some foreign policy issue.<sup>39</sup> Even after Ismail had taken over the Ministry of Internal Security, it has been recorded by Ghazali that the Tunku would ask him to convey to Ismail his concerns for closer intelligence sharing with the Singapore Special Branch in the build-up to the merger of Singapore with Malaya.<sup>40</sup> All this suggests that the Tunku's management style would hardly have endeared him to those among his colleagues who believed in sticking to proper procedures of communication among Cabinet members.

Given these circumstances, it was inevitable that Ismail found himself in a very uncomfortable situation as to his freedom of action in matters of foreign policy. Although there is no solid evidence to attest to it, it is quite reasonable to believe that the looming overview of the Ministry by the Tunku's personality and his tendency to comment at will on international politics were a severe constraint on Ismail's own management style. Being extremely punctilious about the principle of adhering to the proper chain of command, Ismail must have also found Ghazali's close rapport with the Tunku, for example, something of an anomaly vis-à-vis his position as the Minister of External Affairs. Somehow, though, he has left nothing on record as to his feelings in his new job after returning from the US, at least among his private papers, and one can only assume that he did not have the heart to put down his inner thoughts on paper especially about someone like the Tunku whom he genuinely liked.

These are all, admittedly, suppositions without factual evidence and they are, at best, only deductions based on perceptions in snippets of information regarding the inter-personal relations among the governing elite. However, Tun Dr. Mahathir stated as long ago as in 1971 that "although suppressed, there is no doubt that Tunku Abdul Rahman did not quite see eye to eye with Tun Ismail and Tun Abdul Razak [on] certain matters" and foreign policy was "certainly one of them".<sup>41</sup> One of Malaysia's very well-informed

journalists, the late M.G.G. Pillai, in his obituary on Tun Ismail's passing away, did state that Tun Razak, during his premiership, came to rely more and more on Ismail to the point where the latter was being referred to as " 'Razak's Razak' — a reference to Razak's role since independence as the Tunku's strong, reliable deputy". He too believed that Ismail's stepping down from the Cabinet in 1967 was "officially on health grounds, but many believe also because of disagreements with both the Tunku and Razak".<sup>42</sup> However, if written evidence can be accepted as to the genuine feelings of personal friendship between the Tunku and Ismail, then the exchange of letters between the two men over the decision of Ismail to step down from the Cabinet in view of his failing health during September-October 1966 is quite convincing. Going through the correspondence, one cannot but appreciate how much the Tunku valued Ismail's sterling service to the nation and was clearly overcome by a deeply-felt sense of personal loss in having to part with his steadfast friend and colleague.<sup>43</sup>

In any case, soon after taking over the External Affairs portfolio upon his return to Kuala Lumpur in early 1959, Dr. Ismail laid out the basic premise of Malaysian foreign policy as one that "should pursue an independent line, by which I mean that our stand on international problems should not be influenced by the policies of other countries, big or small". He openly admitted that he had learned at the UN — where Malaya was a member of both the Commonwealth and Afro-Asian groups — "that the surest way to get into trouble was not to have a definite policy of our own on foreign issues because then we would be at the mercy of others". He realised that Malaya's "policy of moderation in the UN did not get the approval of many members of the Afro-Asian group, [but] we were respected because our policy was definite, logical and consistent".<sup>44</sup>

As for the management of the Ministry itself, Ismail's private papers do not suggest that he had any strong opinions about official procedures that had to be strictly observed. However, it

can be safely concluded that, even though he had a reputation for being a stickler as far as the Government's General Orders or administrative rules were concerned, there had to be some degree of flexibility. His own writings reveal that there were many occasions when Ambassadors (including himself) would make policy decisions unilaterally on their own volition and only subsequently inform the Ministry. He described this process as one in which the Ambassador concerned would let the Ministry know beforehand that if he did not hear from Kuala Lumpur within a decent interval, it could be assumed that there were no objections to the course of action being proposed. As Ismail himself has recorded in his recollections of those years: "In this way our Embassy and Mission made quite a lot of decisions on the spot regarding foreign affairs".<sup>45</sup>

One of the first political acts that he had to undertake once he was back in the country was, of course, to prepare for the forthcoming General Elections in 1959 both at his own Parliamentary constituency level and, more importantly, within the Alliance Party. The Party decided, for the first time, to devote some space to the question of foreign policy and its Party Manifesto spelt out its "cardinal principles", the first of which was "to uphold the Charter of the United Nations" and one is led to wonder if Ismail had any part in drafting it.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, the records of the Alliance Party do not contain anything much on how such a document had been conceived or, even, the committee or individuals who had been tasked to draw it up. One is, thus, left to speculate if, other than the Tunku himself, senior leaders with the appropriate experience and background of service like Dr. Ismail had realised the need to highlight the importance of foreign policy in announcing the platform of the Alliance Party for the elections.

It was in Parliament that Dr. Ismail was able to articulate his views on international relations and Malaya's approach to specific issues. As he explained in the *Dewan Rakyat* in November 1959, Malaya



had its own “attitudes towards specific international problems... [such as]...disarmament, colonialism, Afro-Asian Group, apartheid, Algeria, Middle East, Hungary, Tibet, South-East Asia, [and] Indonesia”.<sup>47</sup> He was obviously quite at ease in talking about such questions as Tibet as it was he who had instructed the Permanent Representative at the United Nations General Assembly to table a resolution in condemnation of the Chinese suppression of the revolt by the Tibetans.<sup>48</sup> Thus, when Dato’ Onn Jaafar,<sup>49</sup> who was in the Opposition then, openly questioned the value of taking such a stand on the question of Tibet in terms of its effectiveness, Dr. Ismail jumped at the opportunity to clarify Malaysia’s foreign policy. He described Onn’s logic, that since the country most affected by the turn of events in Tibet — namely, India — had not raised it at the United Nations, why should such a small nation like Malaya bother about it, as “a very dangerous argument”.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, one of the primary reasons for the decision was to make it abundantly clear to the rest of the world that “our foreign policy..., I repeat, is independent and entirely our own”. He also pointed out that, although many members of the Afro-Asian group did not openly vote for the resolution, they indirectly helped to carry it by a two-thirds majority with their abstentions, which Dr. Ismail described as a form of expressing sympathy with the supporters.<sup>51</sup> During the same Parliamentary session, the Opposition MPs had been demanding that the People’s Republic of China should be considered for admission into the United Nations. Dr. Ismail, on the other hand, took the position that the proposal for its admission had “been defeated in the United Nations because the arguments against the entry of the said Government have been more forcefully put and had appealed to the free nations than those advocated by the others”.<sup>52</sup>

Much has been made of the policy misunderstanding that occurred between Ismail and the Tunku when the latter, on arrival in Kuala Lumpur after a European visit, blurted out to waiting newspaper reporters that perhaps it would be necessary to recognise China. Such

a crucial announcement, without so much as having been discussed with the his External Affairs Minister or raised in Cabinet, naturally resulted in the strong-willed Dr. Ismail immediately threatening to resign. His Cabinet colleagues arranged for Dr. Ismail to be sent off on a four-month tour of England, ostensibly to study the situation of Malayan students there but in reality to let him “cool down”.<sup>53</sup> In hindsight, one has acknowledge that it was another of the Tunku’s political *faux pas* when he was in the company of eager news reporters but it was, nevertheless, quite odd that, many years later, he considered his unprecedented statement about China as nothing more than “a slight departure from policy”.<sup>54</sup> Ismail, on the other hand, has explained that he “could not accept the new policy towards communist China” because he strongly believed that “a time would come when the communists would split...[and]...we should then take advantage of it to change our policy towards communism as a whole and not before”. But, as he wrote, “the Tunku was convinced that the day would never come”.<sup>55</sup>

In some ways this 1960 incident goes to substantiate the undeniable fact that Malaysian Prime Ministers have always had, even when they were not concurrently holding the Foreign Affairs portfolio, the final say in policy matters.<sup>56</sup> Some old-timers in the Ministry suspect that the row with the Tunku was most probably the opportune moment that Ismail himself had been waiting for to take leave of the External Affairs Ministry which had not lived up to his expectations in more ways than one. In fact, it was in his new appointments in Internal Security and Home Affairs that he was to make a name for himself as an astute, impartial and no-nonsense sort of Minister. Nonetheless, the private papers of Dr. Ismail contain only very cordial exchanges between himself and the Tunku and, even in the post-1969 turmoil within UMNO, Ismail was one of the staunchest allies of the Tunku.<sup>57</sup>

Looking at the general tone of Malaya’s foreign policy from 1957 and judging by the personal recollections of some who had served in the Ministry of External Affairs from its formation, there is

little evidence that Dr. Ismail attempted any major revision of the Ministry's role during the eighteen months that he held the portfolio. For one thing, his private papers provide few revealing glimpses into how the Malaysians dealt with their immediate neighbours at the time. They did fall foul of Indonesia's touchy sensitivities early on at the UN when, during the debate over its dispute with the Netherlands regarding West Irian, the Malayan delegate abstained in the vote. But later, when he was Minister of External Affairs, he called on the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Dr. Subandrio, during a Colombo Plan meeting in Jogjakarta in 1960, and recorded in his reminiscences how unimpressed he was with Subandrio's attempt to lecture him on the revolutionary path to progress rather than economic development.<sup>58</sup> Ismail was also "adamant that we stick to our policy of strict neutrality" when the PRRI-Permesta rebellion broke out in the outer islands of Indonesia because "we would be in a serious position internally" due to the large number of Indonesians living in Malaya and the ongoing communist insurgency. He was acutely aware that any further domestic security problems would be a strain on the national budget and "if the economy were to sag — especially in an election year [1959] — we would find ourselves in difficulties when the electorate cast their votes".<sup>59</sup>

As Minister of External Affairs in the new Cabinet of 1959, Dr. Ismail quite often crossed swords with MPs from left-wing parties such as the Socialist Front when they criticised Malaya's apparent anti-China policy over the Tibet question at the UN. Among the most vociferous among them were Lim Kean Siew of the Labour Party and D.R. Seenivasagam of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), although others such as Ahmad Boestamam, the leftist MP for Setapak, also took up anti-colonial issues like the independence movement in Algeria.<sup>60</sup> The External Affairs Minister concluded his reply to the Opposition criticism by saying: "...so long as I remain the Foreign Minister (*sic*) of this Government I will appreciate and I will take any constructive criticism of our foreign policy, but I will not be made an instrument for implementing the foreign policies of other parties in this House who happen not to be the Government

of this country”.<sup>61</sup> Later, when presenting the Ministry’s budget, Dr. Ismail explained that the Government had been so prudent in its approach that while there were already 21 foreign missions in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya itself had set up a total of only 10 foreign missions, including Paris and Manila, which had just opened, but not including Cairo, which was to be established soon.<sup>62</sup>

Some of the more vocal socialist MPs argued, for example, that the Government’s claim to be pursuing an independent foreign policy should “not mean that we are pursuing a policy which is completely without direction ...like a sailing boat without a rudder”.<sup>63</sup> The Opposition MP concerned, Lim Kean Siew, pointed out that there was a clear contradiction between the Tunku’s stand that the so-called “White Australia” policy was an internal matter for Australia and Malaya’s open attack of the *apartheid* policy in South Africa, which he regarded as interference in the domestic affairs of that country.<sup>64</sup> The Government’s response to this was equally unbending; Dr. Ismail maintained that there was no inconsistency in its policy on the *apartheid* issue because “where the action of any Government in its domestic affairs affect (*sic*) international peace, then the United Nations as an instrument for the harmonising of human actions must voice its opinion”. A similar stand was taken regarding the question of Tibet and China as well as the case of Algeria’s own independence movement.<sup>65</sup> For the first time, questions were raised about Malaysia’s overseas missions spending excessively on what was euphemistically called “Majlis Keraian” in Malay (translated into English as “entertainment”).<sup>66</sup> But Dr. Ismail replied that unlike many foreign missions which spent lavishly on their diplomatic functions, the Malayan missions did only enough to maintain the country’s name and dignity as an independent nation.<sup>67</sup>

Even after his move to the Ministry of Internal Security (to be renamed Ministry of Home Affairs later), Ismail continued to defend Malaysia’s foreign policy in the *Dewan Rakyat*. The Lower House of the Malaysian Parliament in those days was certainly a rather august body that observed Parliamentary decorum of a very high standard.

After the Opposition MP, D.R. Seenivasagam, had spoken at length in December 1960 on various issues in regional and international politics, it was Ismail who was entrusted with the task of explaining the Government's stand on them. Seenivasagam had questioned the policy on *apartheid* within the context of the Commonwealth, on the urgency of admitting the People's Republic of China to the UN, on respecting the rights of self-determination of the people of West Irian, and on the need to reconsider the role of the Malayan military contingent in the Congo under the auspices of the UN due to the chaotic political situation there.<sup>68</sup> Such was the nature of politics in those days that Dr. Ismail, replying on behalf of the Tunku, began by candidly congratulating the Opposition MP: "in my considered opinion, that is one of his best and [most] constructive speeches in this House" even though, as he put it politely, "I do not agree with all the points and the arguments that he has put forward".<sup>69</sup>

Ismail whole-heartedly shared in the nation's mood of a long-awaited euphoria following the political changes in Indonesia after *Gestapu* in September-October 1965. This is well reflected in his categorical admission at a dinner talk to the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Singapore in Johore Bahru on 23 June 1966 that the future of Southeast Asia depended on Indonesia's recovery from the excesses of the Sukarno period. As he put it, "it is in our enlightened self-interest that Malaysia should go forward with Indonesia towards greater freedom and prosperity for both our peoples". Indeed, Tun Dr. Ismail was prescient enough to propose that the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) that the Tunku had forged between Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand in 1963 should be expanded at the earliest possible moment. According to him, such a step would turn it into "a regional association embracing Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam".<sup>70</sup> His years in active diplomatic life at the highest levels had obviously imbued in him a strong affinity for regional and international politics as an inherent aspect of a national leader's pro-active thinking.

## ISMAIL THE REGIONAL STATESMAN

One of Ismail's enduring contributions to the shaping of Malaysian foreign policy during the post-1969 years was his proposal for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia in the face of the impending withdrawal of British military forces from East of Suez as announced by the Labour Government in early 1968.<sup>71</sup> Speaking as a backbencher in the *Dewan Rakyat* then on 23 January 1968, Ismail began with a stirring quotation from Shakespeare: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries". He then launched into the purpose of his intervention by questioning the wisdom of the Government relying entirely on the proposed Five-Power Conference of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore as a means to meet the future security of the two latter countries. While he did not "oppose this proposal" he felt that "we should also consider other alternatives in case this conference... fails to bear satisfactory fruits". He argued that "the alternative to neutralisation is an open invitation to the big powers to make it [Southeast Asia] a pawn in big power politics" while "the alternative to the signing of non-aggression treaties [among the regional states] is a costly arms race in the region."<sup>72</sup> It seemed odd, at that time, that the only other MP who spontaneously supported his proposal was the President of the PMIP [later PAS], Dato' Haji Mohamad Asri bin Haji Muda, who also felt that it was unbecoming of the Government to rely solely on AMDA for its external security.<sup>73</sup>

Neither the Tunku nor Wisma Putra was too enthusiastic about the prospects for regional neutralisation and non-aggression pacts among the neighbouring states largely due to the realization that great power rivalry was very much alive at that time. Even more pertinent was the fact that, as Ismail himself had pointed out earlier in his speech, “SEATO is now no longer an effective force”. However, in response to Ismail’s proposal, the Tunku admitted in the *Dewan Rakyat* on 27 January 1968 that it was “something which is worth giving thought to, but at the same time it is something which is difficult of achieving...without making the right approach at the right time”. He further added that “while we bear the suggestion in mind, we will try and put it across to the countries with which we come into contact”. But, he warned that most of them are “very sensitive about this”, that is the neutralisation of Southeast Asia, and it was up to the Government to convince them of “the soundness of the scheme proposed by the Honourable Member”.<sup>74</sup> Ismail himself later admitted that, although he regarded neutralisation as a worthy goal and foreign diplomats in Kuala Lumpur were “interested in it”, his initiative was “not making much headway” with the Government. Consequently, he had “made up my mind not to press the proposals (*sic*) further in case it may embarrass the Alliance Government”.<sup>75</sup>

Ismail’s return to the Cabinet in 1970 offered an ideal opportunity for him to revive his earlier interest in the concept of the neutralisation of Southeast Asia. But within Wisma Putra itself there continued to be some skepticism about its practicability in the context of the existing balance of power and the regional strategic architecture of the time. Nevertheless, the Razak administration decided to espouse the cause for some form of understanding among the regional states to distance themselves from outside forces and it gave birth to the ASEAN-sponsored Kuala Lumpur Declaration of 1971 for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Not satisfied with the progress thus made, Ismail argued strongly for the eventual expansion of ASEAN itself to include Brunei, Burma (now known as Myanmar) and the Indochina states. During a visit to Australia and New Zealand in early 1973, he conceded that neutralisation would

be meaningful only if the regional body was expanded to include all ten states.<sup>76</sup> The sad truth was that, with the exception of China which showed some tepid interest in the idea, neither the US nor the Soviet Union would contemplate such a formal restriction on their freedom of action, particularly in a military sense, in a region of great geo-strategic importance to them.

As the phasing out of foreign military bases was undoubtedly a prerequisite for any possible realization of ZOPFAN, the Government was under some pressure to state its own stand regarding its participation in the Five-Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) with Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK. Thus, Razak informed the *Dewan Rakyat* that once ZOPFAN had been accepted by all concerned, “the Five-Power Defence Arrangement[s] will be phased out” so that “once it comes fully into being there will be no foreign military forces in the region”.<sup>77</sup> There is, however, a need to understand that, however much the Government of Tun Razak campaigned for the neutralisation of the region as an ASEAN initiative, it should not be confused with the leadership’s larger strategic perceptions of bilateral relations with the major powers.

Thus, the recent attempt to link Tun Dr. Ismail’s idealistic proposal of 1968 with the pioneering move by Malaysia under Razak to be the first Southeast nation to establish diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in May 1974 is quite untenable.<sup>78</sup> Ismail’s original proposal had been primarily triggered by the British decision to accelerate their military withdrawal by 1971 and it was mainly concerned with Malaysia’s security during the post-AMDA years. Malaysia’s deliberate move on China, on the other hand, was based on a much broader understanding of the regional strategic balance particularly in a scenario when the US would have ended or substantially reduced its military commitments in the region. The neutralization proposal was, thus, adroitly turned into an ASEAN regional security project by Wisma Putra as a partial, and more substantive, counter to the somewhat amorphous Indonesian doctrine of “national resilience”.



Be that as it may, one should not forget that, at the height of *Konfrontasi* (*Confrontation*), it was on Ismail's shoulders that the burden of making Malaysia's case in the UN Security Council against Sukarno's Indonesia fell. This was a duty that he performed with the utmost brilliance, supported by a small but highly professional band of Wisma Putra notables at the Permanent Mission. They were led by men such as Zakaria Mohd Ali, besides Zain Azraai and the brilliant legal mind, R. Ramani, while the indefatigable Jack de Silva from the Ministry accompanied Ismail.<sup>79</sup> As a matter of fact, the Australian Government, which had been following the *Konfrontasi* crisis very closely due to its military commitment to Malaysia, felt "that a senior minister should go to New York for the purpose of presenting the Malaysian case". It informed the Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, T.K. Critchley, that "Ismail, in view of his seniority in the Cabinet and his experience in the United Nations, seems the obvious man".<sup>80</sup>

The publication of these official documents by the Australian Government has made it possible to better understand Ismail's pivotal role in determining Malaysia's policy decisions during this period. It is now known, for instance, that, soon after the Indonesian armed intervention in Peninsular Malaysia in September 1964, Ismail had "argued strongly" against making a mere appeal to the UN Security Council without any "retaliatory military operations against [the] Indonesians". This was because he fully understood that at the UN "Malaysia would be likely to have its hands tied by a Good Offices Committee and by interference from the Afro-Asians" whom the Indonesians had been courting since 1961.<sup>81</sup> Later on in 1965, when news was received from the Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, that Indonesia had proposed a ministerial meeting in Bangkok, the Tunku had called for consultations with top Alliance Party leaders and the High Commissioners of the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada as to the appropriate response.

The British High Commissioner, Lord Head, had apparently suggested some form of plebiscite in the Borneo states for a “reaffirmation of Malaysia” as a sort of face-saving concession to the Indonesians. “Ismail strongly rejected this suggestion and he was supported by the Tunku who thought that the political situation in the Borneo states was too difficult to permit this complication.”<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Ismail appears to have been seen by outsiders as being among the most moderate of the Peninsular Malaysian leaders in their attitude towards the local population in Sabah and Sarawak. The Australians noted, for example, that Ismail was more “sympathetic” to the anxieties of the people of Sabah and Sarawak as he “acknowledges the need to go slow on the language problem”.<sup>83</sup>

Ismail’s own private papers contain much evidence that indicates his early conversion to the cause of equidistance and peaceful co-existence in international relations despite the pressures of the Cold War. While he stood firm on matters of principle such as Malaysia’s stand on the Communist threat, he did not rule out altogether the need for a non-confrontational approach in international relations. He was, undoubtedly, among the first of the Malaysian political leadership to have started thinking about the policy options that faced a vulnerable new nation like Malaysia in the post-*Konfrontasi* years, something that the Tunku, for example, did not appear to be too earnest about. Perhaps his eighteen months at the Ministry of External Affairs did not quite coincide with a period of regional politics when he might, conceivably, have had the opportunity to embark on new directions in Malaysian foreign policy jointly with the Tunku as Prime Minister. The irony of his tenure of office as Minister of External Affairs was that he probably played a more direct role in determining the course of Malaysian foreign policy before and after he held the portfolio.

However, by the time Ismail decided to leave the Cabinet in 1967, there were growing signs that the Vietnam War and its aftermath would confront the Government with new challenges to regional security. His understanding of international politics drove him to

be always anticipating potential changes in the regional strategic balance that might adversely affect Malaysian interests. In fact, he is regarded as having been most successful in the conduct of Malaysia's bilateral relations with Thailand "concerning the security of our common border" which he described as "a story of oriental politeness, patience and understanding". During his negotiations with the Thais, "my policy was never to press the Thais for more than what they are willing to agree to" and he credited himself as being "the first Malaysian Minister ever to get a Thai Minister to sign an agreement giving effective direction to our commanders on the ground to take definite action against the communists". On the other hand, he has recorded that his "dealings with Singapore on security problems was an experience which I would not have liked to miss and also one which I would not like to go through again".<sup>84</sup>

It is quite apparent in going through the correspondence that he maintained with a wide range of individuals from all over the world that he was highly regarded as a moderate and very principled person. His personal character of conviviality in his relations with those he met during the course of his official duties, particularly those from outside Malaysia, ensured that he was treated with much respect and admiration by them. Reading these personal letters from people like a former Burmese ambassador who had served a lengthy stint in Malaysia does give one the sense of how well Tun Dr. Ismail had cultivated these friendships. In fact, he maintained close contacts with many of them whom he had met when he had served in the United States and also got to know as friends among the diplomatic circle of Kuala Lumpur, especially on the golf course. Ismail was an avid golfer and he "initiated the practice of playing a game of golf whenever I had to go to Singapore to attend a meeting of the Internal Security Council." "Besides making Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr Goh Keng Swee good golfers, these games of golf proved productive in our deliberations on the security of Singapore." Ismail noted that "one of the reasons why I am so fond of golf is that it reveals much of a player's character".<sup>85</sup>

## HIS CONTINUING INTEREST IN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

In spite of having thrown in the towel when confronted with the reality of the foreign policy-making process under the Government of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Ismail seems to have been much more in his own mettle when he was entrusted with the extremely sensitive responsibility of the country's internal security. During his years in this portfolio, especially after the separation of Singapore from the Federation in 1965, there was a whole range of bilateral security issues to be settled between the two sovereign nations and Ismail's undoubted diplomatic skills came in very useful in dealing with Singapore. The trickiest ones were those that were related to the winding down of *Konfrontasi* and the somewhat different approaches of the two countries to the question of normalising relations with Indonesia under the new military-dominated Government of President Suharto. The Tunku took a particularly tough line over the question of the resumption of barter trading between Singapore and the regime in Jakarta and there is nothing to suggest that Ismail had any major disagreement with the official Malaysian stand.<sup>86</sup> There were also niggling little issues such as Singapore's early puritanical policies about the personal appearance of young people, whether it was in dress or hair styles. It had resulted in an uproar when some young Malaysians with long hair were forcibly made to have haircuts upon entering the island city state and Ismail personally regretted that such petty matters were allowed to jeopardise more positive bilateral projects.<sup>87</sup>

As is well known now, Ismail decided to leave active politics in 1967 due to his poor health and embarked on a new career as a corporate figure after being made, among other important appointments, chairman of the British conglomerate, Guthries. Nevertheless, he retained his seat as an MP, albeit as a backbencher, and this enabled him to participate actively in debates about regional politics in the rapidly changing strategic balance after the announcement of the Nixon (or Guam) Doctrine in 1969. As always, he was a forerunner of new visions about the future of Southeast Asia and it was this aspect of his strategic thinking that led him to come up with the proposal for the neutralisation of the region from big power rivalries. Many outside observers might have thought that he was merely flying a kite for the official side in pushing for this idea but there is no evidence to suggest that anyone in the top leadership of the Alliance Party Government was orchestrating the move. However, some veterans of Wisma Putra do suspect that Razak and his closest advisers might indeed have approached Ismail to say something about the need to become more self-reliant with the impending British military withdrawal.

Looking back at his record of having been one of the most senior UMNO men to have served as Foreign Minister, one is confronted with a number of critical questions with regard to his formal relations with the Tunku. While all the evidence found in his regular correspondence with the Minister of External Affairs during his sojourn in the United States point unquestionably to the cordial personal relations that they enjoyed, it seems to be the case that Ismail had not read the Tunku's line of thinking too accurately. In the first place, the latter's spontaneous offer of the Ministry to Ismail on his return to Malaya could not have been deemed to be a special recognition of his seniority in the Party hierarchy as it was common knowledge that the Tunku had not abdicated his custodianship of the nation's external policies. There is little doubt that Ismail became aware of this fact once he experienced, at first hand, how Ghazali Shafie liaised intimately with the Prime Minister on fundamental foreign policy matters. One cannot help but conclude that, being

the forward-looking and high-minded nationalist that he was, it was apparent to him that he had to move to a more politically strategic portfolio in Cabinet that had real power. Thus, his threat to resign in 1960 had already been more or less predetermined and the Tunku's *gaffe* at Sungei Besi airport about the China issue served as a convenient peg on which to hang his eighteen-month long frustration at the Ministry of External Affairs.

Much as the Tunku and Ismail enjoyed a common feeling about the newly independent Malaya's future and its success in bringing about a significant improvement in the lives of its citizens, they apparently did not share similar views about Party and Government matters. Whatever else may be held against the Tunku, he had an extraordinary understanding of the personal traits of his political colleagues and, much as he respected Ismail's integrity and zeal, there were some doubts about his political astuteness. This is clearly revealed in his assessment that, although Razak would naturally succeed him as Prime Minister, there was some worry about who the other "reserves" would be, in typical football parlance. Ismail's name was one of the first to come to the Tunku's mind but he considered him to be "temperamentally unsuitable" to be Prime Minister.<sup>88</sup> The Tunku was apparently more favourably disposed towards Ismail's elder brother, Sulieman, but he was ruled out because he "was a sickly man". As an alternative, the Tunku favoured another senior UMNO man, Ghafar Baba, and he asked Ghazali to send him on a London posting so that he could pick up on his English language skills.<sup>89</sup>

Ghazali also noted in his memoirs that, during the difficult negotiations with the Sultan of Brunei over the Malaysia proposal, there was one occasion when Ismail led the Malayan side and it was reported that he "had been very patient, which, to those who had known him, would regard that [*sic*] as out of character".<sup>90</sup> It is also telling that, despite Ismail's emphatic advice that the Malayan Ambassador to the United States of America should be a Malay for the time being, the Tunku selected Ong Yoke Lin of the MCA as

the third appointee to the post with full Cabinet rank when Nik Ahmad Kamil returned in 1962.<sup>91</sup> In his own writings, Ismail has admitted that he had somewhat “mellowed” in his ways by the early 1960s so much so that, even though he had agreed to the formation of Malaysia, he “had many reservations about the way it was formed and the conditions which Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak imposed for joining the new Federation”. As he further explained, while he had been “uncompromising in what I believed in” in the old days prior to and immediately after independence, “my convictions in politics have changed since [then].”<sup>92</sup> Be that as it may, his relations with the Tunku never wavered and, during those uncertain and worrying days after the 13 May race riots and prior to the formal handing over of the Premiership to Tun Abdul Razak in September 1970, it was Ismail who was unflinchingly opposed to any sort of internal *putsch* against the old man.<sup>93</sup>

## FINAL ROLE IN MALAYSIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNTIL 1973

In reviewing Tun Razak's immediate strategic moves after he took office in September 1970, it was clear that he had no hesitation in elevating Ismail to the position of Deputy Prime Minister as well as Minister of Home Affairs largely based on the excellent job he had done after his return to the National Operations Council. There is also strong evidence to suggest that Razak was quite disposed to entrust Ismail with important diplomatic missions whenever the Prime Minister himself, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, could not undertake them personally. Apart from his intimate coverage of the UN's numerous meetings when he was the Permanent Representative from 1957 to 1959, Ismail led the Malaysian delegation to the General Assembly on three occasions — in 1959, 1962 and 1970.<sup>94</sup> By the same token, it was Ismail too who took charge when questions about Malaysia's foreign policy cropped up in Parliament and his blunt and forthright style ensured that the Government was not under any undue pressure from the Opposition. Ismail was an erudite and well-read man as is obvious when he delivered a talk to the Singapore Press Club in 1972 on the theme of "Changes and Challenges in South East Asia". His focus, as would have been expected, was on the neutralisation of Southeast Asia proposal but he showed a remarkable understanding of the past when he cited the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 and the Anglo-French Declaration of 1896 as successful examples in the creation of neutral zones in insular Southeast Asia and the Kingdom of Siam respectively.<sup>95</sup> Not many other politicians of the time or even serious scholars in the



region, for that matter, would have had such an inspired and precise perspective of the past.



As for the changing of the guards, so to speak, in the leadership of the country and the handing over of power from the Tunku to Tun Abdul Razak, Ismail had no illusions about the inevitable changes in foreign policy that would come into effect. Thus, in delivering a speech to Alliance Party members in Johore on 15 January 1971, Ismail declared publicly that “we have a new foreign policy and a new defence policy” and this meant that the Government was trying to achieve a “new identity” for the nation.<sup>96</sup> Tun Razak was utterly devastated at the tragic passing away of his trusted lieutenant in August 1973 and, almost instinctively, turned to another of his loyal and much-respected UMNO colleagues, Tengku Ahmad Rithaudeen, to play the supportive role as the Prime Minister’s *alter ego* before he was formally appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1975. Tengku Rithaudeen was the second leader to assume that portfolio after Tun Dr. Ismail who was not the incumbent Prime Minister then, surely a rare distinction in that tradition that Tunku Abdul Rahman had set in 1957. Thus, one can safely conclude that Malaysia has never had a Foreign Minister who could dictate the nation’s foreign policy without the specific oversight and sanction of the Prime Minister — so much for the persistent attempts by recent students of Malaysian foreign policy to assert that any other leader was, in fact, the “main architect” of that policy.<sup>97</sup>

Tun Dr. Ismail’s passing brought forth much public mourning and personal testimonies of his immeasurable contributions to the nation since the earliest days of the movement for independence. Most people would undoubtedly agree that it was his seminal and steadfast role as Tun Abdul Razak’s trusted lieutenant after the May 1969 racial riots that stood head and shoulders above all else. One of the leading Malay language journalists at the time wrote in his obituary as follows: “It is clear that during this critical period, apart from the dynamism of Tun Abdul Razak, he [Tun Dr. Ismail] became the main force that moved the nation and the society

forward to a new beginning. His success and his greatness were founded on the nature of his struggle and the principle that there should be justice for all. In carrying out his responsibilities, he was totally convinced about the situation of the people of this country who were multi-ethnic and, even though he was himself in UMNO, Tun Dr. Ismail was always opposed to any group that “acted and behaved as if we were the only ones who enjoyed the rights of this land, Malaysia.” According to the writer, Tun Dr. Ismail had addressed a joint meeting of UMNO Youth and Wanita [Women] UMNO on 23 June 1973 and told his audience in point-blank terms that “we cannot ignore the fact that this nation does not belong to the Malays only, but to all groups among the people of Malaysia which have given their loyalty and made their contributions to the nation.”<sup>98</sup>

It was somewhat poignant that only in his death was his role as Malaysia’s foremost diplomat fully organised as is evident in the same obituary above: “In Malaysia’s relations with other countries too, the impact of Tun Dr. Ismail’s services is incomparably valuable. His relations with them and his visits to our neighbours in the furtherance of our national security interests have contributed to regional stability...The success and significance of the unity and cooperation found among the members of ASEAN are a demonstration of the superlative diplomacy of Tun Dr. Ismail...In furtherance of his aim of achieving complete regional cooperation, he advocated the broadening of ASEAN membership to all the states in Southeast Asia that subscribed to ASEAN’s policies; that is, regional cooperation and neutralisation.”<sup>99</sup> Another of the top civil servants of the time, Tan Sri Sheikh Abdullah bin Sheikh Mohamed, in his recollections of Ismail provided a rare insight into the man’s character with several hitherto unknown anecdotes. In his words, “behind the unsmiling face beat a warm and sympathetic heart” as he “had on many occasions exercised his ministerial discretion on matters for his consideration purely on humanitarian and compassionate grounds”.<sup>100</sup> Thus, one can confidently conclude that, in more ways than one, Tun Dr. Ismail Dato’ Abdul Rahman’s all-too-brief tenure

as Malaysia's second Minister of Foreign Affairs was nothing more than a continuation of his outstanding services to King and country until the very end of his days.





*Dato' Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman, Minister of External Affairs, Federation of Malaya (right) and Mr A. Byington, US Ambassador to the Federation of Malaya (left) signing the Investment Guarantee Agreement between the two Governments in Kuala Lumpur on 21 April 1959.*

*(By courtesy of the Malaysian Embassy, Washington D.C.)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail handing over a gift from Thai Deputy Defence Minister, Air Chief Marshall Tan Sri Dawee Chullasapya, to Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj on his return from Bangkok on 22 August 1966.*

*(By courtesy of the National Archives, Malaysia)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail and Tun Tan Siew Sin accompanying the Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, before his departure for London on 3 April 1971 at the Sungai Besi airport to attend Five Power Defence Talks on 3 April 1971.*

*(By courtesy of the National Archives, Malaysia)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail being welcomed by Indonesian Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, in Jakarta on 9 March 1972.*

*(By courtesy of the Department of Information, Malaysia)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail receiving a souvenir gift from President Suharto in Jakarta on 9 March 1972. On the right is Tan Sri Zaiton Ibrahim, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

*(By courtesy of the Department of Information, Malaysia)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail and General Maraden Pengabean signing the Joint Malaysia-Indonesia Border Security Agreement at the Treaty Room of Wisma Putra, Kuala Lumpur on 6 April 1972.*

*(By courtesy of the Department of Information, Malaysia)*





*Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak introducing the President of India, H. E. Shri V. V. Giri, to Tun Dr. Ismail at a luncheon at Sri Taman, Kuala Lumpur on 6 March 1973.*

*(By courtesy of the National Archives, Malaysia)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail enjoying a moment in conversation with Senator Douglas McClelland (left) and the Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia, (then) Tan Sri Fuad Stephens (right) during his seven-day official visit to Australia in March 1973.*

*(By courtesy of the National Archives, Malaysia)*



*Tun Dr. Ismail being sent off by (then) Tan Sri Haji Sardon bin Haji Jubir, Minister of Transport and Communications, and other senior officials to attend the 6th ASEAN Minister Level Meeting in Thailand at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Subang on 15 April 1973.*

*(By courtesy of the National Archives, Malaysia)*



## Notes

1. For the biographies of the Tunku, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Dr. Ismail, respectively, see Mubin Sheppard, *Tunku: His Life and Times*, (Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications, 1995); *Tun Abdul Razak: A Personal Portrait* by Yayasan Tun Abdul Razak, (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, 2005); and Ooi Kee Beng, *The Reluctant Politician — Tun Dr. Ismail and His Time*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006).
2. Joseph M. Fernando, *The Alliance Road to Independence*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2009), p. 107.
3. Jeshurun, Chandran, *Tunku Abdul Rahman Al-Haj*, Diplomatic Profile Series, Profiles of Malaysia's Foreign Ministers, (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, 2008).
4. Santhanaban, M., "Malaysia's First Ambassadors" in Fauziah Mohamad Taib (ed.), *Number One Wisma Putra*, (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations, 2006), pp. 21-38. See also Jeshurun, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.
5. *IAR/12(2)*, "My Memoirs", p. 48. [Private Papers of Tun Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman kept at the Library of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore as the *Ismail Abdul Rahman (IAR)* collection.] Courtesy of ISEAS Library, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: Tun Dr. Ismail A. Rahman Papers I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the ISEAS Library and the kind permission of Tawfik Ismail Abdul Rahman for having been able to use the papers as well as to cite from them.
6. See private letter from Ismail to the Tunku, undated (but undoubtedly written in August 1958), *IAR/3/2/60*. All these letters are type-written copies of the originals.
7. *IAR/12(2)*, "My Memoirs", p. 48. He wrote that he "threw my heart and soul into the job" although "it was a tough assignment".

8. Tun Ismail Mohd Ali (1918-1998) had an illustrious career as the first Malaysian Governor of Bank Negara (the Central Bank) from 1962 to 1980. He came from a noted Malay family in Kuala Lumpur and had been a Queen's Scholar at Cambridge before reading law in London. Details of his education and career can be found in <http://www.viweb.freehosting.net/QSchol.htm> the website of the alumni of his old school in Kuala Lumpur, the Victoria Institution.
9. Mr Ilango Karuppannan, the current Chargé d'Affaires at the Malaysian Embassy in Washington, has informed me that the records in the Chancery contain correspondence between Ismail and the Tunku and Razak in which the subject of new naval craft for the fledgling Navy, for example, was discussed in detail. See also Entry for 10 July 1958 in *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations As Reflected in Dr. Ismail's Reports Home to Tunku Abdul Rahman* compiled by Tawfik Ismail & Ooi Kee Beng, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), pp. 82-83. This is a compilation of his record of diplomatic life in the United States of America entitled "American Diary: Notes by the Ambassador: CONFIDENTIAL", Folio 5 (1) and (2), *IAR*, Library of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
10. Private letter from the Tunku to Ismail, 24 November 1958, *IAR/3/2/66*. Dato' Suleiman was Ismail's elder brother and Minister of Interior and Justice.
11. Private letter from Razak to Ismail, 19 November 1958, *IAR/3/2/65*.
12. Private letter from the Tunku to Ismail, 24 November 1958, *IAR/3/2/66*. Dato' Nik Ahmad Kamil had been Malaya's first High Commissioner to the United Kingdom before returning to assume the post of Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs.
13. His record of diplomatic life entitled "Notes by the Ambassador: CONFIDENTIAL" have recently been compiled and published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore. See *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations As Reflected in Dr. Ismail's Reports Home to Tunku Abdul Rahman* compiled by Tawfik Ismail & Ooi Kee Beng, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).
14. Private letter from Ismail to O.A. Spencer, Economic Adviser, Prime Minister's Department, 18 December 1957, *IAR/3/2/52*.
15. Entry for 21 April 1958, *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations*, p. 61.
16. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12(a)/48*.

17. Private letter from Ismail to the Tunku, 27 January 1958, *IAR/3/2/53*.
18. Entry for 14 February 1958, *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations*, p. 28. Tunku Ja'afar was the son of the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Abdul Rahman of Negeri Sembilan, and was himself to succeed his half-brother, Tuanku Munawir, as the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of that state in 1960. As Tuanku Ja'afar he served as the 10<sup>th</sup> Yang di-Pertuan Agong from 1994 to 1999. He passed away in December 2008 aged 86.
19. Entry for 2 June 1958, *Ibid*, p. 78.
20. Private letter from the Tunku to Ismail, 8 June 1958, *IAR/3/2/58*.
21. Private letter from the Tunku to Ismail, 2 May 1958, *IAR/3/20/54*.
22. An *aide memoire* is a diplomatic instrument in the context of discussions between two parties which each side is entitled to record in writing as the main subjects that were discussed by both parties.
23. Clarence Douglas Dillon (1909-2003) later served as Secretary of the Treasury under President John F. Kennedy and had a distinguished career in later life as chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation, president of the Harvard Board of Overseers, chairman of the Brookings Institution and vice-chairman of the US Council on Foreign Relations.
24. Entry for 26 May 1958, *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations*, pp. 75-76.
25. *Aide Memoire* to Secretary of State Dulles, *Ibid*, pp. 113-115.
26. *Ibid*.
27. Kocher had served as US Consul-General in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore in 1953-1955 and was, therefore, able to socialize well with Ismail and the other Malaysians.
28. Entry for 11 June 1958, *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations*, pp. 79-80.
29. "Agreement relating to the purchase by Malaya of military equipment, materials, and services from the United States. Exchange of notes at Washington, June 30 and July 9, 1958; entered into force July 9, 1958". See [http:// www.state.gov/documents/treaties/38528.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/treaties/38528.pdf) I am much indebted to Mr Ilango Karuppannan, the current Charge d'Affaires at the Malaysian Embassy in Washington, for drawing my attention to this source.
30. Footnote 57, page 79, in *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations*.

31. Private letter from Razak to Ismail, 28 May 1958, *IAR/3/2/57*. A perusal of the Chancery records in Washington confirm the close relationship between Ismail and both the Tunku and Razak especially when it came to vital advice that the former gave in dealing with the United States on several important matters. Personal information from Mr Ilango Karuppannan, currently Chargé d’Affaires at the Malaysian Embassy in Washington.
32. Entry for 10 July 1958, *Malaya’s First Year at the United Nations*, pp. 82-83.
33. Tan Sri Dato’ Mohd Sopiee Sheikh Ibrahim began his Government service in the Information Department, later at the Ministry of External Affairs and then went on to play an active role in politics at home.
34. Entry for 11 July 1958, *Malaya’s First Year at the United Nations*, pp. 83-84.
35. Entry for 21 July 1958, *op.cit*, p. 87.
36. *Ibid*.
37. Entry for 14 August 1958, *Ibid*, pp. 93-94.
38. Private letter from Ismail to the Tunku, undated, *IAR/3/2/60*. This was apparently an allusion to the fact that Chinese Malaysians who were appointed as Heads of Mission such as Gunn Lay Teik (Canberra) and Dr. Lee Tiang Keng (Tokyo) were known to be people of independent means who were not wholly dependent on their Government allowances.
39. Personal interview with Tun Muhd Ghazali Shafie at his residence in Subang Jaya, Selangor on 23 August 2006. As a matter of fact, the Tunku did go on record during a 1965 Parliamentary debate in saying that “even if someone else was the Minister in charge of foreign policy, ‘whatever I say is the most important thing’.” Jeshurun, Chandran, *Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj*, Diplomatic Profile Series: Profiles of Malaysia’s Foreign Ministers, (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, 2008), p. 34.
40. *Ghazali Shafie’s Memoir on the Formation of Malaysia* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998), p. 191.
41. Mahathir bin Mohamad, “Trends in Foreign Policy and Regionalism” in Patrick Low (ed.), *Proceedings and Background Paper of Seminar on Trends in Malaysia*, Trends in Southeast Asia, No. 2, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1971), pp. 33-34.
42. “Tun Dr. Ismail (1915-1973) by M.G.G. Pillai”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 August 1973.

43. See private letter from Ismail to the Tunku, 30 September 1966, *IAR/3/2/77* and private letter from the Tunku to Ismail, 5 October 1966, *IAR/3/2/78*.
44. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12a/51*.
45. *Op.cit*, *IAR/12a/49*.
46. See "Peace, Justice & Prosperity: What the Alliance Offers YOU — Greater National Wealth, More Individual Earnings", 1959 Parliamentary Election Manifesto, [Kuala Lumpur: Alliance Party Headquarters, August 1959], pp. 17-19.
47. *PD/DR*, 30 November 1959, cols. 668-680.
48. [www.savetibet.org/advocacy/un/resolutions/resolution1353.php](http://www.savetibet.org/advocacy/un/resolutions/resolution1353.php) accessed on 29 March 2007.
49. Dato' Onn Jaafar (1895-1962), also an aristocratic Johorean, had been the founding President of UMNO but had left it when his proposal to open its membership to other races was rejected by the Party. He went on to lead the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) before setting up a radical Malay *Parti Negara* which he represented as its sole MP after the 1959 General Elections. As Leader of the Opposition, he persistently attacked the Alliance Party Government and was invariably involved in arguments with Dato' Dr. Ismail. It was Dato' Onn, too, who had criticized the Government for not having said anything about the country's foreign policy in the Royal Address.
50. *PD/DR*, 30th November 1959, cols. 671-673. The USA voted in favour of the resolution whereas both the United Kingdom and India abstained.
51. *Ibid*.
52. *PD/DR*, 3 December 1959, col. 956.
53. See "My Memoirs", *IAR/12a/53*.
54. Tunku, *Looking Back*, p. 170.
55. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12/2/53-54*.
56. Both the Tunku and Tun Abdul Razak were also their own Foreign Ministers and, while their three successors did not formally hold the portfolio, it was common knowledge in Wisma Putra that nothing could move forward on policy matters without the personal endorsement of the Prime Minister.
57. See Ooi Kee Beng, *The Reluctant Politician: Tun Dr. Ismail and His Time*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), pp. 208-209.
58. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12(2)/50*.
59. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12(2)/52*.

60. *PD/DR*, 3 November 1959, cols. 668-681.
61. *Op. cit.*, cols. 680-681.
62. *PD/DR*, 3 December 1959, col. 936.
63. Lim Kean Siew, the Socialist Front MP for Dato' Keramat in Penang. *PD/DR*, 3 December 1959, col. 940. The allusion to a sailing boat was due to the fact that the political party symbol of the Alliance Party was also a sailing boat. Opposition MPs, thus, took special pleasure in making fun of the analogy of a ship without a captain and so on much to the chagrin of the Tunku and his Ministers.
64. *PD/DR*, 3 December 1959, cols. 942-943.
65. *Op. cit.*, cols. 955-957.
66. This was raised by the Partai Islam Se Malaysia or PAS (then known as PMIP) MP for Bachok, Kelantan, Encik Zulkiflee bin Muhammad. *Op. cit.*, col. 954.
67. *Op. cit.*, col. 963.
68. *Op. cit.*, 16 December 1960, cols. 4281-4287.
69. *Op. cit.*, cols. 4291-4295.
70. "Tun Ismail's speech to Foreign Correspondents' Association", *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, quarterly publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vol. I, No 3, 1966 (hereafter referred to as *FAM*), pp. 62-70.
71. See Philip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
72. *PD/DR*, 23 January 1968, cols. 3612-3616.
73. *op.cit.*, cols. 3616-3617.
74. *PD/DR*, 27 January 1968, col. 4307.
75. Private letter from Ismail to Philip Kuok (Ambassador to Holland), 15 July 1968, *IAR/3(2)/85*.
76. "Current scene in Southeast Asia and Malaysia's perspective", Address by Tun Dr. Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister, at the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs in Wellington, March 22", *FAM*, 5/3, March 1973, pp. 20-27.
77. *PD/DR*, 31 January 1973, cols. 6326-6327.
78. See *Malaya's First Year at the United Nations*, p. xix. The compilers of this volume also claim that the opening of diplomatic relations with China "formed the basis of what became known as 'The Razak Doctrine'" but such as term was never used among senior Wisma Putra veterans of that time so far as it is known.

79. Tan Sri Zakaria Haji Mohd Ali was to become the Malaysian Permanent Representative at the UN from 1970 to 1974 before his return to Kuala Lumpur as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1976-1987). Tan Sri Zain Azraai (1936-1996) was himself to become Malaysia's Permanent Representative at the UN from 1984 to 1986. Radakrishna Ramani (1901-1970), a leading legal brain in Kuala Lumpur, was inducted into the service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as Permanent Representative at the United Nations from 1964 to 1968. They were the ones who drafted and re-wrote Tun Dr. Ismail's speeches during the UN Security Council sittings on the Malaysia-Indonesia conflict as he was a stickler for the most effective and appropriate language in his speeches. Personal information from Tan Sri Zakaria Haji Mohd Ali. Jack de Silva (1926-2007), who was staunchly anti-communist, is remembered by a colleague, Dato' Albert Talalla, for his vigorous campaign against Indonesia during *Konfrontasi*. See "Former diplomat Jack de Silva cremated", *New Straits Times*, 7 March 2007.
80. "199 Cablegram to Kuala Lumpur, Canberra, 3 September 1964, 827. Top Secret Immediate", in Moreen Dee (ed.), *Australia and the Formation of Malaysia, 1961-1966*, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, (Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005), p. 317.
81. "198 Cablegram from Critchley to Canberra, Kuala Lumpur, 3 September 1964" in *op.cit.*, p. 314.
82. "250 Cablegram from Critchley to Canberra, Kuala Lumpur, 23 February 1965, 474. SECRET" in *op.cit.*, p. 385.
83. "327 Cablegram from Critchley to Hasluck, Kuala Lumpur, 31 August 1965, 1906 Secret Priority" in *op. cit.*, pp. 507-508. This was a reference to the acceptance of Malay as the national language of Malaysia, a subject that was highly sensitive in both Sarawak and Sabah where English was the official language. Critchley noted that "Razak, Ismail and Ghazali are much more aware of the need for re-assurances and a more sympathetic approach to the present transitional arrangements".
84. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12/2/56*.
85. "My Memoirs", *IAR/12/2/57*. Of Lee Kuan Yew, he wrote: "I believe that if he could be less calculating, less suspicious of people, and more tolerant and more patient of human feelings, he would do not only himself but Singapore and the whole of South East Asia much good."



86. Jeshurun, Chandran, *Malaysia: Fifty Years of Diplomacy, 1957-2007*, (Singapore: Talisman Press, 2008), p. 86.
87. *Ibid*, pp. 98-99. Ismail had met with Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Prime Minister, and they had apparently agreed on concrete measures for closer cooperation but the “hair-cutting” incident caused Lee to postpone his visit to Kuala Lumpur.
88. *Ghazali Shafie’s Memoir*, p. 140. This was discussed in a conversation after a game of golf with the Tunku at the Royal Selangor Golf Club in Kuala Lumpur on the morning of 9 November 1961. Regarding Suleiman Abdul Rahman, it was the Tunku who had persuaded him to leave the Cabinet and take on the less taxing duties of being the Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia in 1961 but he hardly served two years there before he collapsed suddenly at a diplomatic function and died of a heart attack in 1963. The Tunku was very cut up by this tragic end of an old and dear friend.
89. *Ibid*, p. 292. The meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur on 10 June 1963. Interestingly, Ismail himself seems to have been aware of the talk among UMNO leaders that he was destined to higher office when Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak invited him to be his Deputy in 1970. As he told a confidante at that time, “Sheikh, as God above is my witness, I have no political ambition beyond the one that’s now thrust upon me by Tun Razak. I have returned to the Cabinet at the request of Tun Razak in order to serve the country and the people. In the same way that I have come back, so shall I go, the moment Tun Razak feels that my services to the country are no longer necessary. *I say this to you because some people might have misunderstood the purpose of my return.*” Quoted in “The Tun I knew” by Tan Sri Sheikh Abdullah, *Sunday Times*, 5 August 1973. (Emphasis is mine.) Tan Sri Sheikh Abdullah was himself a remarkable man of the “old school” of Malaysian civil servants and he established an intimate bond with Tun Dr. Ismail during his service as Secretary-General of the Ministry of Home Affairs during the years when Tun Dr. Ismail was in charge.
90. *Ghazali Shafie’s Memoir*, p. 292.
91. See Chandran Jeshurun, “An Ambassador *Par Excellence*: Tun Omar Yoke-Lin’s Years in Washington, 1962-1973”, *The Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2007, pp. 29-46.
92. “My Memoirs”, *IAR*/12(2)/58.



93. Abdullah Ahmad, *Tengku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy, 1963-1970*, (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1985), p. 105. Abdullah, as Tun Razak's political secretary, was working hand in glove with the so-called "Young Turks" comprising Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Musa Hitam and others to depose the Tunku at the earliest opportunity.
94. *Biographical Note of Tun Dr. Ismail bin Dato Haji Abdul Rahman*, (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 1971).
95. "Changes and Challenges in Southeast Asia", Speech by the Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Ismail Al-Haj bin Dato' Haji Abdul Rahman, at the Singapore Press Club Dinner at the Gardenia Room, Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1972, (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 1972).
96. "Speech to Alliance Members, Johore", *LAR/3/107(2)*.
97. See, for example, Saravanamuttu, Johan, "Tun Ismail — Early Architect of Malaysian Foreign Policy", *The Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations* (Kuala Lumpur), Vol. 9, No. 1. 2007, pp. 7-16.
98. "Tun Dr. Ismail patriot bangsa — seorang humanis dan pasifis tanpa tandingan" [Tun Dr. Ismail the national patriot — an incomparable humanist and pacifist] oleh Ahmad Sebi, *Berita Minggu*, 5 August 1973.
99. *Ibid.* See also "Pemimpin yang tegas dan penuh perhitungan" [A leader who was firm and fully considerate] oleh Kadir Ahmad, *Mingguan Malaysia*, 5 August 1973.
100. "The Tun I knew" by Tan Sri Sheikh Abdullah, *Sunday Times*, 5 August 1973.



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