

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Tengku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1963-70.* By Dato Abdullah Ahmad. Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1985. 185 pp.

Informed writing about Malaysia's foreign policy is to be welcomed, given the relative dearth of serious studies on the subject. The author has been a long-standing direct observer of that policy, including the period under review. There is a strong element of irony, however, in this undertaking which was submitted originally as a Master's thesis in Cambridge. Abdullah Ahmad was one of the so-called "Young Turks" who challenged the political leadership of Tengku Abdul Rahman during the later 1960s. In addition, he was directly identified with the political fortunes and policies of the late Tun Abdul Razak who succeeded Tengku Abdul Rahman as Malaysia's Prime Minister in September 1970. Indeed, Tun Razak is represented as the man who made "Malaysia a pace-setter and instituted several political developments which would shape South-East Asian history for many years to come" (p. 140). The Tengku is represented as being responsible for the half-joking description of Malaysia as a country somewhere between Bangkok and Singapore "because it had a bland, although a practical foreign policy which sustained peace and its flourishing prosperity" (p. 140).

In the light of the strong impression conveyed that the Tengku was out of touch with Malaysia's true priorities, it is difficult to accept at face value the introductory claim that the author "can approach the subject from a neutral and unbiased point of view" (p. iv). Indeed, the reader is left also with the suspicion that the dominant role of the Tengku in making Malaysia's foreign policy has been portrayed in such a way as to diminish and denigrate any part played by the Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Ministry, Ghazali Shafie. In the Conclusion, Ghazali is represented as merely the secretary to the Tengku, who is quoted as saying that "he never initiated any foreign policy, nor provided me with any original idea" (p. 139).

In making foreign policy, Tengku Abdul Rahman is depicted as an exponent of a Gaullist-style of decision-making without consultation; as the master of the political *fait accompli*. It is suggested that his style and priorities were a product of Malay patrician origins and Western education. The result was undue dependence on the British, an obsessive anti-communism attitude and a neglect of the Third World. The actual portrait of the personality of the Tengku is not consistent. He is described as less than clever but also as astute. He is represented as easy-going and affable, yet also decisive and ruthless. He is said to be a simple man, yet not above political scheming and intrigue. The net result is to portray an enigma of a man determined to have his own way.

The major part of the book deals with the contentious advent of Malaysia, giving rise to Indonesia's Confrontation and the Philippine claim to Sabah. The treatment is competent, if unexceptional. The opportunity is missed to present the episodes primarily from Malaysia's point of view. Indeed, limited attention is given to an examination of Malaysia's calculations from the outset, perhaps because foreign policy in this phase was so much of a

reactive process. The foreign policy of making Malaysia is possibly neglected also because of the compulsion to give separate attention to the eviction of Singapore, not quite a foreign policy matter. There is much of considerable interest in this section, especially the claim by the Tengku that he had feigned political weakness in the months leading up to separation and that he had never been in any danger of being forced by Malay extremists to take repressive measures against Singapore's leaders. It is maintained that he never wanted Singapore in the first place, only accepting it to get the British to surrender Sabah and Sarawak. "Once Sabah and Sarawak were in, the Prince was looking for the proper time and pretext for evicting Singapore" (p. 94). This astounding conclusion is not pursued further. For example, it would have been of interest to know whether the Tengku had looked beyond separation and had expected Singapore to crumble with no alternative but to crawl back to Malaysia on its knees.

Subsequent sections deal briefly with relations with Thailand, the United States, Japan and the Soviet Union but no attempt is made to discuss Vietnam. This omission is surprising because South Vietnam was the first country to be visited by the Tengku on an official basis after Malaya's independence in 1957. His support for the Saigon government reflected the anti-communist strain which Abdullah identifies in the Tengku's international outlook; it served also as the nexus for the viable relationship with the America of Lyndon Johnson. Much more enlightening is the consideration given to the Islamic connection which arose from personal predilection. Abdullah points to the significance of the results of the elections in May 1969 in revising foreign policy to take much greater account of the co-religionist factor. Concerning Islam, he remarks advisedly, "Since it is such a potent force in domestic politics, the country's foreign policy had, it would seem, to serve the domestic political requirement of the government of the day" (p. 110).

The final topic considered is the decline in Anglo-Malaysian relations which the Tengku had made the initial corner-stone of foreign policy. The author explains well here and earlier how the experience of Confrontation brought home the necessity of reorienting foreign policy away from a "British apron-string complex", a trend pursued with a vengeance by Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Of significance in the process of change was the resentment of Britain's apparent preference for Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore after separation.

The overall impression given of the Tengku's conduct of foreign policy is that of limited vision arising from the conditioning of Western experience and an inflexibility of mind. He was a man for his time but that time was limited and required a greater adjustment to post-colonial circumstances than the Tengku was capable of, especially in domestic politics. In the event, he had to be discarded in order that Malaysia's foreign policy could follow its more logical course under Tun Razak. The judgement between the lines is harsh but the view conveyed is authentic, reflecting the perspective of the politically-dominant Malay élite.

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