

U.S. Charm Offensive Greet Dr. Mahathir

by Michael Billington

Malaysian Prime Minister Sri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad was given a royal welcome in Washington between May 14-16. With smiles on all sides, the U.S. charm offensive to portray Malaysia as “one of ours” in the war on terrorism was in high gear. President Bush praised Dr. Mahathir for his cooperation on terrorism, and held up the Malaysian economy as a model for success, while ducking questions on human rights, and ignoring Dr. Mahathir’s attacks on U.S. and Israeli war policies.

Congress, for its part, formed a new “Malaysia Caucus,” inviting Dr. Mahathir to address them. The Caucus is co-chaired by an unusual pair, Texas conservative Republican Pete Sessions and New York Democrat and Black Caucus member Greg Meeks. There was no apparent opposition to the pro-Malaysia grouping within the Congress.

There were a few reminders of the former denunciations of Dr. Mahathir, which dominated the Western press in the years following his open break with the International Monetary Fund in 1998, and his simultaneous dumping of IMF-darling Anwar Ibrahim from his Cabinet. CNN’s Zain Verjee, for example, subjected the Prime Minister to a series of questions along the lines of “Why do you still torture your political opponents?”

Even worse was former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who outdid herself by comparing Dr. Mahathir to Fidel Castro in a May 20 commencement speech at Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Diplomacy. Albright described the Bush Administration as suffering from a bipolar disorder, for (among other things) “criticizing Cuba’s lack of democracy, while praising autocrats from Malaysia and other lands.”

But by and large, the anti-Mahathir tirades of years past were gone. In particular, the Zionist Lobby and their spokesmen in the press uttered nary a word of the earlier denunciations of Dr. Mahathir as an anti-Semite, which were considered a necessary part of any public coverage in the West after the Prime Minister exposed speculator George Soros as the primary swindler and pirate who stole billions across Asia in 1997-98.

Has Dr. Mahathir “mended his ways” in the eyes of the Western elite, who so recently tried to demonize him, and especially his staunch defense of national sovereignty against the IMF-centered destruction of most of the developing world? No—in fact, just three weeks earlier, he had again

demonstrated his willingness to speak truthfully about those responsible for the threat of religious war facing the world today, after he returned from a visit to the Middle East. He told the press that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s attack on the Palestinian refugee camp at Jenin was “an atrocity committed by people who once pleaded for world sympathy for what the German Nazis did to them; but the atrocities committed by them now are far worse.”

Mahathir identified the fact that these fascist operations were impossible without a green light from the United States: “Israel’s aggression was due to the support it received,” he said. “The Jewish lobby in the United States is very united and powerful, whereas the Muslims are broken up and they never act together. As a result, they cannot determine who wins the election, but the Jews can do so.”

Divide and Conquer

The question must be asked, then, as to why those who would normally be expected to denounce Dr. Mahathir have been silent, and why they have not pressured Bush against establishing these new friendly relations with Malaysia. One indication came from an Asian insider with an ear to elite policy circles in the United States, who told *EIR* that there is an effort afoot to play the non-Arabs against the Arabs within the Muslim world, with the intention of winning acceptance of a U.S. war against Iraq and other Arab states, as proposed by the Clash of Civilizations fanatics within the administration and the Congress.

This coheres with the role played by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who has been the most vociferous advocate of war on Iraq and other Arab states, while also taking the lead in Bush policy towards Southeast Asia. Wolfowitz has consistently portrayed Indonesia (where he was once ambassador, back in the days when the United States was freely spreading hot money around the Suharto regime) and Malaysia as “good” Muslims, as opposed to the “bad” Muslims in the Arab world.

A State Department official, speaking to the Singapore *Straits Times* on May 18, expressed this view precisely: “The image of Islam painted by suicide bombers and hijackers is not an accurate picture of Islam,” he said. “Dr. Mahathir is from a modern, moderate, secular country which is successful. He helps to prove a bigger point we are trying to make, that the war is not against Muslims.”

The implication, of course, is that the Middle Eastern Islamic nations are “archaic, extremist, and dictatorial,” and that war against them is legitimate—precisely the argument of Wolfowitz and his utopian associates, including especially Senators Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.).

Whether Dr. Mahathir, or Indonesia’s leadership, will play the role intended by these utopians is far from certain, but the Western press is busy creating the *image* that they



Malaysia's Prime Minister got the red carpet in Washington in late May, in marked contrast to the days of vicious denunciations by the likes of Al Gore and George Soros.

will. The most extreme effort came from the *Washington Times*, the voice of the neo-conservative utopians calling for perpetual warfare by a new American imperium. The *Times* ran a front page story on May 16 with the headline, "Malaysia Backs Saddam Ouster."

The story based this wild distortion on a statement by Dr. Mahathir, in a press interview at the Malaysian Embassy in Washington, made in an ironic style quite typical of the Prime Minister: "If you can overthrow Saddam, by all means do it—just don't make the Iraqi people pay for it." In the course of that interview, he went on to make very clear that he opposes the sanctions and the threats against Iraq, and that his primary concern is to warn the United States against the horrible consequences of the war it is planning.

A similar effort was launched after the meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Kuala Lumpur in early April. Dr. Mahathir, in an effort to counter the use of the "war on terrorism" to justify a war on Islam, proposed that a definition of terrorism be adopted which included any attack on innocent civilians, be it the suicide bombers, or those sanctioned by a state—naming the U.S. war on Afghanistan and the ongoing Israeli invasion of the West Bank as cases in point. The OIC decided not to adopt any official definition of terrorism until a later time, since the situation had become so horrendous in Palestine, that they wanted to say nothing that could be construed as an attack on the resistance by the Palestinians against the fascist Israeli onslaught.

At that time, Dr. Mahathir acknowledged this problem. In a long meeting with Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Farouq al-Kaddoumi, he described the Israeli assault as a "new holocaust" being imposed on the Palestinian people. He asserted that "the whole world must put pressure on Israel to stop its acts of terror. Until they stop it, they cannot blame the

Palestinians for the suicide bombings of Israelis, including their civilians." He pledged to convey this message to President Bush on behalf of all nations of the OIC.

And yet, the Western press has falsely portrayed Dr. Mahathir as having split the OIC by "denouncing the suicide bombers," and thus antagonizing the Arabs—precisely the intent of the Wolfowitz cabal.

The Economic Dimension

The euphoria surrounding the U.S./Malaysia talks on terrorism extended into the economic realm as well. Malaysian and U.S. representatives held extensive discussions on expanding economic cooperation, including U.S. investments in Malaysia, barter trade of palm oil for locomotives, and the possible purchase of a fleet of FA-18 Super Hornet fighter jets, among other things.

Such trade and investment is beneficial for both sides, but comes in the context of a deafening silence in regard to the economic crash now sweeping through the Western economies. The false presumption of a U.S. recovery, driving an export-led recovery in Asia, precluded any discussion of the urgent necessity of a new global financial architecture to replace the bankrupt, IMF-centered institutions. Perhaps Dr. Mahathir brought up these issues in his private meetings—they are part of his normal intellectual armament in international diplomacy—but they were kept out of public discussion. Putting off the necessary confrontation with the reality of the crash can only set economic relations on a course doomed to fail.

The Malaysian Prime Minister was less reserved on the question of the expanding U.S. military deployments into Asia—characterized by *EIR*'s Lyndon LaRouche as a policy aimed at surrounding and confronting China, in keeping with the Clash of Civilizations' policy of Samuel Huntington. An exchange on CNN's "Q&A" program went as follows:

CNN: "How concerned are you about the rise of China as a potential superpower in the region?"

Mahathir: "Not at all concerned. We are very good friends of China."

CNN: "Do you think the United States should maintain a military presence in the region?"

Mahathir: "I don't believe that having a military presence there is going to help. You are merely going to make the Chinese nervous. You are going to make them feel that they are the future enemy. And when you treat people as your future enemy, they will become your present enemy."

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