

**MALAYSIA'S POST-9/11 SECURITY STRATEGY: WINNING "HEARTS AND MINDS" OR LEGITIMISING THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO?**

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*Since the Emergency, the Malaysian government has maintained a security policy which somewhat paradoxically combines the use of coercive, repressive legislation with a "hearts and minds" ideology. Following 9/11, I argue that the government has adapted this "hearts and minds" approach to the so-called War on Terror. The Barisan Nasional governments of Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi both formulated ideological strategies designed to undermine the ideological strength of al-Qaeda and establish Malaysia as a leader of the Muslim world. Mahathir and Abdullah hinged their ideological approach on a state-constructed form of Islam and sought to portray Malaysia as a tolerant and moderate Muslim country. However, it will be shown that the use of ideology in Malaysia is often calibrated to ensure regime security rather than national security. The Malaysian government has used its ideology to promote elite interests and limit the discursive space for alternative and opposing viewpoints. Significantly, ideology has been used to justify crackdowns against genuine political opponents and to legitimise the political status quo.*

Keywords: Malaysia, terrorism, counter-terrorism, war on terror, Islam, Islam Hadhari, ideology, Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah Badawi

**INTRODUCTION**

Ideology in Malaysia is essentially a security tool, but one which focuses the terrorist attacks of September 11 (9/11), the government has increasingly used a variety of ideological tools to limit the discursive space for counter-narratives and also promote the interests of the ruling

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Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, and its most dominant member, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a Muslim-Malay Party. The regimes of Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi both embraced a similar security strategy, though each of them used different ideological approaches to pursue their political interests and dominance. In the Malaysian context since 9/11, ideological mechanisms have been used to limit the space for ideas which challenge the status quo and therefore the regime's legitimacy. Moreover, ideology has legitimated not only the application of the coercive security apparatus but the regime which has used it. The focus of ideology in these two administrations was on a state-constructed form of Islam, designed to appeal to domestic and international audiences.

Security policy in Malaysia has historically been predominantly concerned with protecting the BN regime, rather than dealing with genuine security threats. In Malaysia, the regime and the state emerged at approximately the same time and the same regime has remained in power since the Independence in 1957. This has meant that the institutions and instruments of the state have become synonymous with the regime which uses them – one reinforces the other. All state power is vested in the Executive, itself composed of members of the ruling BN regime, thus guaranteeing complete control of the apparatus of the state. Given the regime's political dominance, it essentially controls the very concept of security, with policy-makers often defining security in terms of issues that affect the BN. Malaysia's security policy has been in place since the Emergency period (1948–1960), during which Malayan forces, supported by the British, fought against Communist insurgents. In this period, the British centralised significant power in the hands of the government, notably through the creation of a number of repressive Emergency Regulations. Working hand-in-hand with the use of these regulations, somewhat paradoxically, was a 'hearts and minds' campaign launched by the government. It was designed to win the loyalty of those susceptible to Communist propaganda and was regarded as one of the most notable and successful components of the regime's anti-Communist strategy. The Emergency period thus established Malaysia's security policy as one which was operationally oppressive but ideologically focused on dealing with the root causes. To date, Malaysia continues to combine the use of coercion and a "hearts and minds" ideology as part of its security strategy.

The function and operation of the coercive and ideological apparatuses often overlap but, for the sake of clarity, this paper discusses them as separate and focuses specifically on the use of ideology. This article argues that ideology has played an increasingly important role in Malaysia's security strategy since 9/11. This paper first establishes the details of this strategy and outlines its coercive and ideological components. The ideologies of Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi are then separately assessed. It is argued that there is great continuity between the two administrations in this context as Mahathir and Abdullah each employed a security approach featuring coercive elements and ideological formulations which emphasised the specific pro-capitalist, pro-status quo vision of Islam endorsed by UMNO. Despite a broad commonality in approach, Mahathir and Abdullah both presented a unique vision of how to ideologically combat extremism at home and abroad. Mahathir's approach emphasised root causes, a return to the hearts and minds campaign of the Emergency era. Mahathir used Malaysia's position as an ally of the Muslim and Western world as a platform to attempt to salvage the image of Islam in the post-9/11 global climate. While advocating similar issues, Abdullah brought all the ideological elements together in a single package. The package—*Islam Hadhari* or "Civilisational Islam"—represented a push by Malaysia to export its security model and by extension its model of governance. This would buttress the legitimacy of the BN regime at home and abroad.

Underlying both ideologies is the use of a particular form of Islam to combat extremist thought. Islam is fused, with varying degrees of success, with the security agenda. In defining Malaysian Islam as "moderate" and "progressive", Mahathir and Abdullah have attempted to promote a state ideology which emphasises the BN's interests while continuing to exclude any radical or 'deviant' interpretations of Islamic texts. Ultimately, this ideology is used in the domestic context to ensure the continuation of the current political climate—one in which the UMNO-dominant BN is in political and economic control. At the international level, the ideology is used to emphasise Malaysia's position as a leader of the Muslim world, as well as to advance the cause of Islam in general, and thus solidify the government's Islamic credentials to the majority Malay constituency in the domestic sphere. Above all, this article will demonstrate that national security in Malaysia has become

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synonymous with regime security, with policies in this context often focused on eliminating political and ideological rivals to the BN's continued hegemony.

### **THE MALAYSIAN SECURITY MODEL: COERCION AND IDEOLOGY**

Since the Emergency, the Malaysian government's security approach has combined the use of a coercive apparatus with various ideological mechanisms. These mechanisms have been designed to promote the interests of government, limit the spread of alternative ideas, and justify not only the use of the coercive apparatus but also the continued hegemony of the BN regime itself. Although this article focuses on the use of ideology in the post-9/11 context, it is important at the outset to establish both apparatuses, as each has played an important role in the maintenance of regime, rather than simply national, security.

The coercive apparatus is comprised of a number of repressive laws enforced by an obedient police force. The laws include the Internal Security Act (ISA), the Printing Presses and Publications Act, the Emergency Ordinance, the Official Secrets Act and the Sedition Act. The legislation is preventive in nature and focuses on maintaining the political status quo and eliminating any physical or ideological challenges to the regime's legitimacy. For example, the ISA provides for preventive detention and allows the government to extend the period of detention by a period of two years, though this can continue indefinitely, with minimal judicial review. Under section 73 of the ISA, any police officer may arrest and detain without warrant any person who has "acted or is about to act or is likely to act in any manner prejudicial to the security of Malaysia or any part thereof." This provision is so vague that many legitimate activities, such as criticism of government policy, could fall within its scope. Complementing the ISA, the Sedition Act prohibits virtually all activities seen as causing disaffection towards the government or communal ill will. Given the preventive nature of such legislation, Francis Loh Kok Wah has likened the use of the coercive apparatus to internal "pre-emptive strikes."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Loh Kok Wah, 13 August 2007, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

The ideological apparatus provides a balance to the coercive apparatus, focusing less on overt coercion and more on dominating the ideological space within Malaysia. Ideology serves two functions in the specific context of security. First, it serves a security function, that being it limits the space for ideas which challenge the regime's legitimacy. General ideological constructions which have performed the security function, to varying degrees, include Vision 2020 (a broad development strategy which promoted the continuation of the political status quo and thus the exclusion of dissenting views), the New Economic Policy (an affirmative action policy which promoted Malay interests above those of other ethnic groupings and helped cement UMNO's dominance at the centre of political power), and, as this article will particularly demonstrate, Islam itself. The second function of ideology in Malaysia is that it has a legitimating function. Ideology serves to legitimate not only the application of the coercive apparatus but the regime which wields it. In this respect, the legitimating component also has a security function in that it attempts to ensure regime security, which it must be said is the overarching goal of the security apparatus as a whole. Overall, there is no single overarching ideology which dominates Malaysia's security discourse—different ideological constructs come and go according to political and societal interests. However, a key theme in all these constructs is on winning the hearts and minds of those regarded as threat to the security of the nation and, more commonly, the regime. In the post-9/11 era, Islam has been the central element of this strategy.

The definition and usage of the term ideology varies between different theoretical frameworks. Put simply and broadly by David E. Apter:

[ideology] links particular actions and mundane practices with a wider set of meanings, giving social conduct a more honorable [sic] and dignified complexion. This is, of course, a generous view. From another viewpoint, ideology is a cloak for shabby motives and appearances.<sup>2</sup>

Ideology can therefore legitimate and give meaning to social conduct but can also provide a justification or "cloak" for more dubious actions.

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<sup>2</sup> David E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 314.

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Ideology of course operates in every level of society. My focus is on the state level and how this is utilised in the security context. In this paper, I am using a definition of ideology and a view of its function which is specific to the Malaysian context, though it does feature some commonalities with previous constructs. The works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Antonio Gramsci establish the importance of consent and ideological tools to the maintenance of state power. Their work draws attention to the point that ideology is primarily deployed by governments to sustain the political power of the elite.<sup>3</sup> However, it must be noted that their accounts do not fit neatly into the Malaysian context. The issue of class dominates their formulation of ideology, which somewhat weakens their overall applicability to the Malaysian case study which is dominated primarily by ethnic interests and racial issues.

Anthony Downs' construction of ideology as a political tool is, broadly speaking, more applicable, given that ideology has been used in Malaysia primarily for political purposes. For Downs, ideology is defined as "a verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society."<sup>4</sup> Ideology is a political instrument used to define the parameters of society. Downs contends:

In modern political science, ideologies are nearly always viewed partly as means to political power employed by

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 47; Frederick Engels, 'Engels to Franz Mehring', *Marx and Engels Correspondence*, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93\\_07\\_14.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm), 1893 (accessed 29 May 2008); Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*. Volume III (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 171, and; Antonio Gramsci, *Letters from Prison. Volume II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 172. For analysis of Marx, Engels, and Gramsci's accounts of ideology, see: Helen Marshall, *Not Having Children* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15–16; Ken Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*. (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 45–46; Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982) 45–46, and; Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, "Hegemony and the Operation of Consensus and Coercion" in *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, eds. R. Howson and K. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 96.

social classes or other groups, rather than as mere representations of actual goals.<sup>5</sup>

It is the uncertainty of modern politics which has made ideology a "weapon" of political parties in their quest for office.<sup>6</sup> Ideology is thus seen predominantly as an election tool. Downs' contention that ideology is fundamentally a political tool supports my construction of the Malaysian ideological apparatus. The apparatus itself is primarily concerned with the interests of the ruling political coalition and limiting the potential for counter-narratives.

David E. Apter also applies a political perspective to ideology. He argues that, "It is the relation to authority that gives ideology its political significance." Ideology supports the elite by justifying its exercise of power.<sup>7</sup> Ideology serves as "the link between action and fundamental belief" and "helps to make more explicit the moral basis of action."<sup>8</sup> Ideology is linked to the establishment of identity and solidarity. In this regard, Apter notes ideologies can be used by political leaders to create a sense of shared feelings and understanding and communicate a common condition.<sup>9</sup> Ideology in Malaysia is linked to the creation of a shared identity, not dissimilar to the view of ideology put forward by Apter. In Malaysia, much emphasis is placed on establishing ideological frameworks which promote a specific identity within particular ethnic groupings or, on rare occasions, across multiple ethnic groupings. The government's Islamisation agenda specifically targeted the Malay community, and attempted to promote a particular vision of Islam which served the broader interests of the regime. By contrast, Mahathir's Vision 2020 agenda aimed to appeal to all Malaysia's ethnic communities, though it was likewise constructed to support the political status quo favoured by the BN and, in particular, UMNO.

Despite these similarities, my concept of ideology departs from the views put forward by Downs and Apter because I view ideology

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>7</sup> David E. Apter, "Ideology and Discontent," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. D. E. Apter (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>9</sup> Apter, *The Politics of Modernization*, *op.cit.*, 328.

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specifically within the Malaysian context. Moreover, I see the ideological apparatus as concerned primarily with security and not only with politics. Above all, it will be shown that, in Malaysia, ideology legitimises the use of coercion and, more broadly, the regime which deploys it. Ideology is also utilised to limit discourse within the country. This is fundamentally an attempt to eliminate the threat of rogue ideas which could damage the political status quo. Mahathir and Abdullah's use of Islam post-9/11 will be used to demonstrate this.

## **HEARTS AND MINDS: MAHATHIR AND THE WAR ON TERROR**

Before and after 9/11, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad resisted the trends of international politics that went against Malaysia's—and, by extension, his administration's—interests. Mahathir carved a unique place for Malaysia in the world community: that of an opinionated, often controversial, but always, at least rhetorically, independent Muslim country. Throughout his tenure, and in varying contexts, Mahathir sought to portray Malaysia as an example to be followed by other Muslim populations, be they Muslim states or Muslim minorities. The War on Terror era was no different in this respect with Mahathir formulating a "hearts and minds" ideological response to the issue of international terrorism designed for both international and domestic audiences.

### **The International Dimension**

Internationally, Mahathir's response to the changing dynamics of the post-9/11 world was to formulate a unique ideology which both supported and condemned the approach of the US. Mahathir pledged his support for America's campaign against international terrorism and quickly signed on to the War on Terror. Malaysia began to be promoted as a model Muslim country, both by foreigners and the Malaysian government itself. Mahathir has denied that Malaysia set itself up as a model, stating:

All we did was to do what we think is right according to the fundamentals of the Islamic religion. It is others who make this remark that we appear to be a model of tolerant Islam, not us. As far as we are concerned, we will do what we think is right by our religion.<sup>10</sup>

Contradicting this, however, the Mahathir government invited Westerners to Malaysia in the aftermath of 9/11 to examine what he referred to as a "model Islamic state" and to "clear confusion over Islam in the West."<sup>11</sup>

Though the coercive elements of both the US and Malaysian domestic counter-terrorism campaigns became increasingly similar (most notably with the adoption of the US PATRIOT Act), Mahathir differentiated the ideological component of his strategy from that of the US. Mahathir's immediate response to 9/11 was to urge the American government not to seek revenge. Days after 9/11, Mahathir stated, "Retaliation will lead to the deaths of many people and will be followed by more counter-strikes." The rejection of a military-only approach to counter-terrorism became a common theme in Mahathir's ideological response to War on Terror era terrorism. This was particularly prominent in his opposition to US-led invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq. In the aftermath of the first Bali bombing, Mahathir again re-emphasised this point, declaring that the attack showed the failure of America's militaristic strategy. Mahathir argued the US had failed to proceed on the basis of "reason and logic", particularly since it had made no attempt to address the root causes of terrorism. Mahathir instead emphasised an approach focused on undermining the root causes of terrorism, stating in a letter to French President Jacques Chirac:

As a doctor, I am trained to treat the disease not the symptoms. Terrorism is the symptom of the disease of injustice, discrimination and oppression of the Muslims.

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<sup>10</sup> "Ask the Malaysian Prime Minister", *BBC News*, 13 October 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/3191639.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/3191639.stm) (accessed 17 June 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Bartlett, "Government offers alternative view of Islam in wake of terror attacks", *Malaysiakini*, 18 September 2001, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/4723> (accessed 17 June 2008).

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Cure the disease, terrorism will—if not disappear completely—at least be much reduced.<sup>12</sup>

For Mahathir, "the principal cause is the Palestine issue." Mahathir argued that while Palestinian "acts of terror" are rightly condemned by the world, the "more terrifying acts of the Israelis" are not. He continued:

This blatant double standards [sic] is what infuriates Muslims, infuriates them to the extent of launching their own terror attacks. If Iraq is linked to the al-Qaeda, is it not more logical to link the expropriation of Palestinian land and the persecution and oppression of the Palestinians with September 11? It is not religious differences which angered the attackers of the World Trade Centre. It is simply sympathy and anger over the expropriation of Palestinian land, over the injustice and the oppression of the Palestinians, and Muslims everywhere. If the innocent people who died in the attack on Afghanistan, and those who have been dying from lack of food and medical care in Iraq, are considered collaterals, are not the 3,000 who died in New York and the 200 in Bali also just collaterals whose deaths are necessary for the operations to succeed?<sup>13</sup>

In Mahathir's view, resolving the Israel-Palestine issue is key to addressing the threat posed by al-Qaeda. A broader root cause identified by Mahathir is the relentless military attacks against Muslims. In a letter to George W. Bush on 4 October 2001, Mahathir stated that the "problems" of Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Libya—all geopolitical hotspots involving Islamic movements—must be solved in order to deplete the ranks of the terrorists. Mahathir argued that the bombing of Afghanistan "would actually result in the spawning of more

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<sup>12</sup> Letter dated 17 October 2001: Cited in Abdullah Ahmad, ed., *Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters to World Leaders* (Shah Alam: Marshall Cavendish [Malaysia], 2008), 32.

<sup>13</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, "Speech by Prime Minister, the Honourable Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad at the Opening Session of the XIII Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement at Putra World Trade Centre", speech, XIII Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kuala Lumpur, 24 February 2003, <http://www.nam.gov.za/media/030225na.htm> (accessed 19 February 2008).

terrorists" rather than effectively eliminate the threat.<sup>14</sup> Mahathir further claimed that the War on Terror had foolishly devolved into a war against Muslims which, in turn, would only create more violence. He noted, "While Iraq, Iran and North Korea are labelled as the axis of evil, action is concentrated only on Iraq and Iran, Muslim countries."<sup>15</sup>

To combat the "anti-Muslim hysteria", Mahathir pushed for an official definition of terrorism that removed any link to religion. Mahathir's definition was as follows:

Armed attacks or other forms of attack against civilians must be regarded as acts of terror and the perpetrator as terrorists. Whether the attackers are acting on their own or on the orders of their governments, whether they are regulars or irregulars, if the attack is against civilians, then they must be considered as terrorists. Groups or governments which support attacks on civilians must be regarded as terrorists, irrespective of the justification of the operations carried out, irrespective of the nobility of the struggle.<sup>16</sup>

It was hoped this definition would be adopted by other nations. The issue of definition was canvassed in Mahathir's opening speech to the meeting of Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur in 2002. Using this definition, Mahathir argued that Palestinian and Tamil Tiger suicide bombers, attacks against civilians by Israeli forces, and the 9/11 attacks, must all be considered as

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Loone, "Govt's 'successful' anti-terror campaign was not only about arms: PM", *Malaysiakini*, 16 November 2001, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/5528> (accessed 12 March 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Shingto Ito, "US anti-terror campaign targets Muslims: Mahathir", *Malaysiakini*, 14 December 2002, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/13951> (accessed 12 March 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Elina Noor, "Terrorism in Malaysia: Situation and Response", in *Terrorism in the Asia-Pacific: Threat and Response*, ed. Rohan Gunaratna (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 165–166.

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acts of terror and its perpetrators condemned as terrorists.<sup>17</sup> Mahathir's views failed to gain the consensus of the OIC. The OIC particularly objected to the inclusion of Palestinian suicide bombers.<sup>18</sup> Although Mahathir failed to achieve his goal at the OIC conference, he nonetheless continued in his attempt to divorce the concept of terrorism from Islam. In July 2003, Mahathir opened a global conference of Islamic scholars aimed at countering misconceptions about Islam.

These attempts to focus on root causes can be seen as part of a wider ideological strategy adopted by the Mahathir administration in response to post-9/11 terrorism. Mahathir claimed Malaysia had been successful in combating terrorism domestically because it had not relied solely on arms but had adopted an ideology aimed at eliminating the conditions which allow militancy to breed.<sup>19</sup> Defence Minister Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak summarised the approach while visiting the US in 2002:

In addition to pursuing a military/security solution, we believe that we must win over the hearts and minds of our people by ensuring higher standards of living, eliminating poverty, providing quality education and health services, and creating more jobs. In essence, we must create hope, not despair; a more promising future is the antithesis of a breeding ground for future militants.<sup>20</sup>

The often-cited historical parallel in this context is the Emergency. The success of the Malaysian state in defeating the "communist terrorists" is owed not to the military strategy alone but to winning the hearts and minds of the segments of the populace who were vulnerable to Communist propaganda. According to Mahathir, speaking in November 2001, this strategy ensured the "terrorists" lost their civilian support.

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<sup>17</sup> "OIC rejects Mahathir's labelling of Palestinians as terrorist", *Asian Political News*, 8 April 2002, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0WDQ/is\\_2002\\_April\\_8/ai\\_84640338?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_2002_April_8/ai_84640338?tag=content;col1) (accessed 17 June 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Noor, "Terrorism in Malaysia", *op. cit.*, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Loone, "Govt's 'successful' anti-terror campaign was not only about arms", *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Najib Tun Abdul Razak, "US-Malaysia Defense Cooperation: A Solid Success Story", *The Heritage Foundation*, 3 May 2002, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/HL742.cfm> (accessed 14 February 2008).

Mahathir claimed the Emergency era government studied the causes of the disaffection of the "terrorists" and their supporters and then took "remedial action", according citizenship rights to over a million non-Malays. Mahathir insists that this won the loyalty of the disaffected and helped mobilise support for the state against the Communists.<sup>21</sup> Mahathir had clearly attempted to use Malaysia as a model for the rest of the world to emulate. The promotion of the ideological component of Malaysia's counter-terrorist strategy was, at least in part, designed to further legitimise the Mahathir administration specifically, the BN regime generally, and the domestic security apparatus as a whole.

### **The Domestic Dimension**

Domestically, Defence Minister Najib emphasised the administration's ideological imperative to distance Islam from terrorism:

At the same time, of course, the proper interpretation of Islam by our people is imperative; that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and is against violence and senseless killing.<sup>22</sup>

The government saw a state-sponsored Islam, coupled with a strong coercive apparatus, as the key to combating so-called extremists or, more specifically, those who deviate too far from Malaysia's state-building, capitalist, BN-dominant framework. This creates an almost paradoxical situation, where hearts and minds are won by essentially forcing the Muslim population to adopt the state brand of Islam out of fear of being detained for any deviation. At the domestic level, ideology continues to ensure the BN's perpetual dominance, while at the international level the goal is to provide an alternative to the militarism of the US thereby appeasing Mahathir's international and domestic Muslim audience.

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<sup>21</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, "The need to identify the terrorists and remove the cause of terrorism", speech, Conference on Terrorism, Kuala Lumpur, 16 November 2001 in *Terrorism and the Real Issues: Selected Speeches of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia*, ed. Hashim Makaruddin (Subang Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 2003), 35.

<sup>22</sup> Najib, "US-Malaysia Defense Cooperation", *op. cit.*

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A key element in the promotion of official Islam was the government's strategy of limiting, if not eliminating, counter-narratives and alternative interpretations. For example, almost immediately after 9/11, the government launched a campaign aimed at curbing radicalism within the education system. Seen as part of the wider hearts and minds campaign, it attempted to deal with the "pipelines" of deviancy by placing religious education in the hands of the national government.<sup>23</sup> In October 2001 the government gave notice that kindergartens, schools and colleges run by the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) would come under closer scrutiny out of concern such institutions might prove to be a breeding ground for extremism. Mahathir stated these schools brought "no benefit to Islam" and instead "shape from a very early stage the thinking of pre-schoolers to hate the government and vote for a political party."<sup>24</sup> More broadly, there is now greater scrutiny of private religious schools and their syllabi, with the government introducing a programme (JQAF, an acronym for the teaching of *Jawi*, the Arabic alphabet system for the Malay language) designed to build a Malaysian identity in accordance with Islamic teachings for Malaysian primary school students.<sup>25</sup> This represents a clear application of the Malaysian ideological strategy in which one type of Islam (the state-sponsored version) is promoted to the exclusion of all others. While this embeds in Malaysia a non-violent form of Islam, essential for a developing and leading Muslim state in the post-9/11 world, it stifles debate and ultimately promotes a rigidity within Malaysian Islam that is the antithesis of the 'progressive' model it believes itself to be presenting to the outside world.

Overall, I argue that Mahathir's post-9/11 ideology had both international and domestic components. Internationally, Mahathir sought to establish Malaysia as a model Islamic country and a leader in the Muslim world. Mahathir pushed for an understanding of the "root causes" of the War on Terror and shunned the militarism of some of

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<sup>23</sup> Maria A. Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Brendan Pereira, "KL to keep close eye on schools run by PAS", *The Straits Times*, 16 October 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Elina Noor, "Al-Ma'unah and KMM in Malaysia", in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, ed. A. T. H. Tan (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2007), 185.

Malaysia's allies. An attempt was also made to disassociate Islam from terrorism. Domestically, Mahathir, backed by a strong coercive apparatus, enforced Malaysia's state-sponsored form of Islam as its ideology. UMNO's interpretation of Islam allowed little space for Islamic radicals to manoeuvre and was thus seen as an antidote to extremism. Mahathir's security ideology therefore contained a dualism: at the international level, Mahathir spoke out against the use of force as a response to terrorism while, domestically, his state ideology was implemented with the help of the government's coercive apparatus. Elements of Mahathir's ideology were incorporated into that of his successor, Abdullah Badawi, with the latter repackaging state Islam into a concept — and commodity — known as *Islam Hadhari*.

#### **ABDULLAH AND ISLAM HADHARI: MODERATE OR MODERATED ISLAM?**

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took the reigns of power on 31 October 2003 following a planned and orderly leadership transition from the Prime Ministership of Mahathir. Abdullah promised a kinder, gentler approach than that of his predecessor, asking the Malaysian populace to "work with me, not for me." That said, Abdullah also used a blend of coercion and ideology as part of his security strategy. Abdullah's security approach was similarly directed at eliminating threats to regime, rather than national, security. In terms of national ideology, there was also much continuity between the policies of the two Prime Ministers. Reflecting the anti-extremist emphasis of Mahathir, Abdullah noted in his maiden speech as Prime Minister the need to be firm and oppose extremism, terrorism and militancy.<sup>26</sup> Abdullah likewise regarded Israel-Palestine as a crucial causal factor for international terrorism. The difference in the rhetoric of the two is therefore somewhat minimal—what is notable is the *form* in which the rhetoric was delivered. Although Mahathir certainly saw Malaysia as a "model" Muslim country, Abdullah's *Islam Hadhari* concept took it one step further by crafting a broad philosophy designed to appeal to domestic Muslim and non-Muslim audiences as well as Muslim populations abroad. Abdullah had

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<sup>26</sup> Bakar, O. "The Impact of the American War on Terror on Malaysian Islam", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, no. 2 (2005): 122.

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embraced Malaysia's role as a leading Muslim country to the extent that he had repackaged the Malaysian brand of Islam into an exportable commodity.

*Islam Hadhari* is composed of 10 principles. The first principle is, faith in and piety to Allah. Although seemingly dismissive of the other religions in Malaysia, this principle also emphasises a belief in freedom of religion and the lack of compulsion in religion, as derived from the Quran. The fourth principle—a vigorous pursuit and mastery of knowledge—and the fifth—balanced and comprehensive economic development—illustrate *Islam Hadhari*'s economic undertones. The fourth aims are to face the challenges of globalisation, integrative knowledge, science and technological advancement through the production of human resources. The fifth seeks to combine "moral economic practices" with a "comprehensive economic development" approach. In short, these principles seek to put into practice Abdullah's notion that "Islam is a religion for development."<sup>27</sup> The eighth principle is "cultural and moral integrity." This consists of internalising "high moral values" that "ensure prosperity, harmony and peace in a multi-racial society." Moral development and economic development are seen as coinciding. The remaining principles of *Islam Hadhari* are: a just and trustworthy government; a free and independent people; a good quality of life for the people; protection of the rights of minority groups and women; safeguarding the environment, and; strong defence capabilities.

The terms used were fairly general and as such could be applied in other contexts. *Islam Hadhari* marked a shift toward understanding the contemporary era within the framework of Islam.<sup>28</sup> Liow argues what was actually innovative about *Islam Hadhari* is the form of the idea, rather than its actual content. Abdullah had succeeded in expressing the state's well-entrenched ideology in "readily identifiable and catchy

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<sup>27</sup> Sim, R. "Islam Hadhari and PM's aspirations", *New Straits Times*, 26 June 2004. See also: Abdullah Badawi, "Islam Hadhari and the Malay Agenda", speech, UMNO's 55th General Assembly, Kuala Lumpur, 23–25 September 2004 in *Islam Hadhari: A Model Approach for Development and Progress* (Kuala Lumpur, MPH Group, 2006), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Syed Ali Tawfik al-Attas and N. T. Chuan, *Abdullah Ahmad Badawi* (Subang Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 2005), 140.

Islamic terminology."<sup>29</sup> In structuring *Islam Hadhari* in these ways, Abdullah hoped to refocus Islam as a "progressive" religion which emphasised personal and societal development.<sup>30</sup> Moderation in Islam was to be restored and the "mainstream" embraced.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, it aimed at alleviating the many problems seen as plaguing the Islamic world.<sup>32</sup>

*Islam Hadhari* was an attempt by the Abdullah administration to continue Mahathir's policy of disassociating Islam from terrorism. In a speech in New Zealand in 2005, Abdullah linked *Islam Hadhari* to the anti-extremist agenda. Abdullah stated, "I can confidently say that we in Malaysia have succeeded in containing extremism and radicalism." Abdullah claimed that the elimination of poverty and the provision of good governance are "key" in the fight against radicalism and, in this context, presented *Islam Hadhari* as Malaysia's approach for achieving such a national order. Abdullah noted:

I would like you to know that this approach has also been inspired by our firm belief that good governance, healthy democratic practices, empowerment of the citizenry through education and equitable sharing of the benefits of economic growth will remove any attractiveness towards radicalism and blunt any tendencies towards extremism. We in Malaysia would like to show by example that a Muslim country can be modern, democratic, tolerant and economically competitive.<sup>33</sup>

Abdullah's Deputy, Najib Abdul Razak, shared the sentiment. In 2004, Najib likewise argued that *Islam Hadhari* was timely since Muslims had

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph Liow, "The Politics Behind Malaysia's Eleventh General Election", *Asian Survey* 45, no. 6 (2005): 920.

<sup>30</sup> Noor, "Al-Ma'unah and KMM in Malaysia", *op.cit.*, 185.

<sup>31</sup> Mohamed Sharif Bashir, "Islam Hadhari: Concept and Prospect", *Islam Online*, 3 March 2005, <http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2005/03/article01.shtml> (accessed 21 April 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Noor, "Al-Ma'unah and KMM in Malaysia", *op. cit.*, 185.

<sup>33</sup> Abdullah Badawi, "Islam Hadhari and good governance", speech, Victoria University, Wellington, 31 March 2005, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/d33361f0890dd06548256fe700190019?OpenDocument> (accessed 18 February 2008).

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been viewed with suspicion since 9/11. Najib claimed *Islam Hadhari* to be a vehicle for change, to present to the world that Islam advocated peace and progress.<sup>34</sup> The impact of *Islam Hadhari*'s anti-extremist component will be analysed in two parts: the first dealing with the domestic political landscape, the second with the attempt to export the model.

### **The Impact of *Islam Hadhari* on the Domestic Sphere**

To spread the *Islam Hadhari* philosophy, the government, *via* the Information Ministry's Special Affairs Department, launched a five-year information campaign in the wake of the elections. Led by a panel made up of religious leaders, journalists, academics, lawyers and psychologists, the campaign involved 600 speakers disseminating information on the concept to the public through various forums. Illustrating the centrality of *Islam Hadhari* to the government's ideological cache, in 2007 Abdullah gave a RM50,000 cheque to each Member of Parliament, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The funds were to be used to create awareness of the project in their constituency. Although significant capital was thus spent promoting the concept, it is evident that the government itself did not fully embrace it. As noted by *de facto* opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in 2008, four years after the concept was fully articulated:

What is so Islamic about the Hadhari model when corruption is more endemic now? You detain people without trial. The media is also not free.<sup>35</sup>

The government's commitment to practicing the *Islam Hadhari* philosophy on the operational level is therefore questionable. A question is raised as to whether the concept was always merely a strategy for winning Malay votes whilst not alienating the non-Muslim community rather than a genuine attempt at transforming Islamic thinking at home and abroad.

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<sup>34</sup> "Najib: Islam Hadhari not something new", *New Straits Times*, 14 December 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Ong, "Anwar: PM akin to a communist leader", *Malaysiakini*, 29 January 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/77599> (accessed 30 January 2008).

*Islam Hadhari* was also utilised to justify subsequent government crackdowns on "deviant" sects, as well as to provide ideological support to the existing coercive apparatus. In the weeks following the BN's success in the 2004 election, 70 members of Tarikat Samaniah Ibrahim Bonjol, a Muslim sect, were arrested in Selangor by Islamic religious authorities. It was claimed the sect had a "casual" attitude towards prayer and marriage and considered the Quran to simply be merely a historical text. Such views clearly ran counter to the *Islam Hadhari* project which used the Quran as its foundation, viewing it as a holy document. This helps account for the sect's removal from the public sphere. Subsequent to the arrests, the state Menteri Besar Khir Toyo announced that he would act against the more than 60 "deviant" sects said to be operating in Selangor.<sup>36</sup> The BN believed it had been given a mandate in the elections—a nation-wide endorsement of *Islam Hadhari*—and was using it as a new ideological justification for the continued use of the government's coercive apparatus.

The government's crackdown on Sky Kingdom represented a further attack on ideological rivals to the national brand of Islam. In 2005, the Sky Kingdom, a religious sect in Terengganu, was shut down by the state Islamic development committee on the grounds the movement possessed documents contrary to Islam. The leader of Sky Kingdom, Ayah Pin, had a large following among Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus inside and outside the country, with an estimated 5,000–10,000 Malay followers and 30,000 followers from other ethnic groups. Although the group claimed not to be militant in nature, the government alleged Ayah Pin was a threat to national security, with Abdul Hamid Othman, religious advisor to Abdullah, stating, "Of course he must be arrested because his influence will jeopardise not only religion but also political stability."<sup>37</sup> However, the sect itself posed no discernible threat to the security of the nation. The threat Sky Kingdom posed was ideological, in that its controversial views on religion and lifestyle

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<sup>36</sup> Leslie Lau, "Backed by Muslims, KL takes on extremists", *The Straits Times*, 6 April 2004.

<sup>37</sup> "21 Sky Kingdom members arrested", *Malaysiakini*, 4 July 2005, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/37573> (accessed 18 February 2008) and; 'Molotov cocktails rain down on Sky Kingdom', *Malaysiakini*, 18 July 2005, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/37997> (accessed 18 February 2008).

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offered an alternative—albeit one seemingly without mainstream support—to that provided by the government.

In terms of Malaysia's Islamic politics, *Islam Hadhari* provided the government with the opportunity to ideologically out-manoeuvre PAS. Abdullah claimed that *Islam Hadhari* was an attempt to prevent Malaysia's Muslim population falling into PAS's trap.<sup>38</sup> Abdullah set out the long-term political goal of the project in these terms:

Muslims are easily motivated by religious arguments, including what PAS is telling them. We have to tell them what it is (to correct any misunderstanding).<sup>39</sup>

*Islam Hadhari* allowed the government to more firmly define the terms, aims and parameters of the state brand of Islam. Islamic groups operating outside the state Islamic project were consequently easier to identify. PAS itself was also given increasingly little ideological space—it either agreed with the state Islam project and operated within that framework, or it rejected it and risked being cast as an outsider, essentially an enemy of the state. *Islam Hadhari* therefore can be seen as an extension of the campaign against deviancy, a campaign which began decades earlier.

While *Islam Hadhari* was said to promote a moderate form of Islam, it has inspired an increase in more rigid readings of Islam's holy texts. Since the concept's introduction, Abdullah claims that some elements in Malaysia have actually become more conservative and radical, stating:

Let me be clear—*Islam Hadhari* is not a blank cheque to bring about conservative revivalism in this country... While I will protest Islam's position and the role of the Shariah courts from being undermined, I will also ensure

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<sup>38</sup> Cited in Terence Chong, "The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*", in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*, eds. S. Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 38.

<sup>39</sup> "Non-Muslims won't be marginalised", *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 9 March 2004.

that no one tries to hijack Islam in Malaysia in order to breed intolerance and hatred.<sup>40</sup>

*Islam Hadhari*, by further institutionalising Islam and bringing the religion even more to the forefront of domestic politics, had inspired increased Islamisation of the public itself—though not in the direction desired by the government.

Indeed, Malaysian political commentator Farish A. Noor contends that the lack of a truly moderate Islam at the governmental level has seeped into the grassroots of the population. Owing to the patronage system established by the NEP and UMNO in general, Farish contends the Malay community has been rendered dependent on the goodwill of the government, economically, politically, and ideologically. The end result of this "suffocating patronage", Noor argues, is that the Malays have become "more defensive, reactionary, conservative and narrow in their worldview." This goes against the "universal" claims of the *Islam Hadhari* agenda.<sup>41</sup>

Though portrayed as moderate both domestically and internationally, the moderate profile of *Islam Hadhari* is thus highly questionable. By nullifying the appeal of PAS's brand of Islam, at least temporarily, some began to find it hard to distinguish between the Islam of UMNO and PAS.<sup>42</sup> The contradictions within the BN's domestic performance and strategy ran counter to the moderate claim. Malaysian academic and commentator Khoo Boo Teik observes that UMNO's "moderation" is not clearly defined. For example, it is not clear how the government's use of the ISA, the Sedition Act, and the Official Secrets Act *gels* with the *Islam Hadhari* philosophy.<sup>43</sup> The continued limitations on civil liberties within Malaysia contradict the progressive claim of the concept. Books

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<sup>40</sup> "Malaysia's Abdullah vows to take 'stern action' against racial troublemakers", *AFX Asia*, 15 November 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Farish A. Noor, "Islam Hadhari cannot correct itself", *Aliran*, 27 February 2008, <http://www.aliran.com/content/view/441/40/> (accessed 7 March 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Chong, "The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*", *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> Khoo Boo Teik, "The house of the rising sons: What they didn't debate at the UMNO general assembly", *Aliran Monthly*, 24, no. 9 (2004), <http://www.aliran.com/oldsite/monthly/2004b/9c.html> (accessed 7 March 2008).

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said to deviate from the teachings of Islam are routinely banned.<sup>44</sup> The intolerance toward other interpretations of Islam—such as Sky Kingdom—indicate not a moderate Islam but rather a moderated, controlled version which eliminates any threat, real or otherwise, to the political and economic status quo.

Overall, the long-term impact of *Islam Hadhari* on the domestic sphere in Malaysia appears to be twofold. First, it illustrated that the Muslim population—and the population in general—would support an interpretation of Islam that was consistently promoted as moderate, whether it was so or not. Second, it provided the government with a justification for the continued use of its coercive apparatus, as elements deemed as going against the moderate image the Abdullah administration sought to portray at home and abroad became more readily identifiable.

#### **Internationalising UMNO: The External Impact of *Islam Hadhari***

Despite the patchwork nature of *Islam Hadhari's* domestic implementation, the first full term of the Abdullah administration saw *Islam Hadhari* promoted widely to international audiences, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. In a sense, the product being sold was the UMNO/BN model of development, at the core of which is its state-sanctioned version of Islam. *Islam Hadhari* was portrayed as a model for Muslim development, nationally, internationally and spiritually, as well as an ideological counter to the extremist ideologies of al-Qaeda and its various cells.

A primary function of *Islam Hadhari* was to solidify Malaysia's place as a model Muslim nation and leader of the Islamic world. With Malaysia presiding over the OIC under Abdullah, *Islam Hadhari* allowed the Prime Minister to "internationalise UMNO's religious credentials beyond

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<sup>44</sup> Farish, "Islam Hadhari" cannot correct itself", *op. cit.* For a list of the books banned by the Malaysian authorities in 2006 (56 in total), see: SUARAM, *Malaysia: Human Rights Report 2006: Civil and Political Rights* (Petaling Jaya: Suaram Komunikasi, 2007), 54–60. For another example of this policy see also: "Ministry Bans 11 Books About Islam", *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 29 January 2008.

their former association with only national development."<sup>45</sup> Abdullah proclaimed that it was Malaysia's "duty" to:

demonstrate, by word and action, that a Muslim country can be modern, democratic, tolerant and economically competitive.<sup>46</sup>

Although acknowledging *Islam Hadhari* was not a "one-size-fits-all" solution, Abdullah emphasised that Malaysia nonetheless provided an insight into how to successfully build a "progressive and modern Muslim nation."<sup>47</sup> The very vagueness of the *Islam Hadhari* concept and its principles has allowed for the internationalisation of the UMNO model. Academic Terence Chong notes that its ambiguity has "endowed *Islam Hadhari* with the flexibility to respond to both domestic local politics and the global "War on Terror."<sup>48</sup> Abdullah's claim that several countries sought to discuss the concept with Malaysia would appear to be a confirmation of this.

In 2004, before the elections were held, Abdullah stated that several countries expressed an interest in *Islam Hadhari* and a desire to adapt it to their circumstances. This was a clear attempt by the Prime Minister to use his international standing as a Muslim statesman to bolster his electoral appeal to the domestic Malay masses. In the years that followed this statement, however, there are only a few examples of countries indicating an interest in *Islam Hadhari*, let alone implementing it. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India stated that his country shared Malaysia's view of Islam as a "civilisational force" and described

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<sup>45</sup> Khoo, "The house of the rising sons" *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Ioannis Gatsiounis, "Islam Hadhari in Malaysia", *Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World*, 16 February 2006, [http://www.futureofmuslimworld.com/research/pubID.43/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.futureofmuslimworld.com/research/pubID.43/pub_detail.asp) (accessed 17 June 2008).

<sup>47</sup> "Malaysian PM Takes 'Islam Hadhari' to India", *Islam Online*, 22 December 2004, <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2004-12/22/article03.shtml> (accessed 22 April 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Terence Chong, "Beating terror, the McDonald's way: A global movement should adapt itself to local needs just like Islam Hadhari has," *Today (Singapore)*, 1 February 2006.

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*Islam Hadhari* as "timely and necessary."<sup>49</sup> In 2006, Brunei also expressed an interest in the *Islam Hadhari* approach.<sup>50</sup> There is little indication these statements are more than mere rhetorical support as it does not appear that either country has since put *Islam Hadhari* into practice. The concept has attracted little support in neighbouring Indonesia and the Philippines, where Ioannis Gatsiounis argues it would presumably be most attractive, given the similarly flexible variants of the Islamic faith in those countries.<sup>51</sup> *Islam Hadhari* proved more successful at the OIC, with it being incorporated into the Makkah Declaration and the summit's joint communiqué in 2005.

In terms of the wider War on Terror, the concept has had more, albeit still limited, success. During a working visit to Malaysia in 2005, Robert Zoellick, now US Deputy Secretary of State, was briefed on *Islam Hadhari*. Of particular interest to Zoellick was the concept's applicability to the situation in Iraq and whether the Malaysian government could use its experience to help.<sup>52</sup> US image builder Karen Hughes reaffirmed this during a visit to Malaysia later that year. Hughes stated that the BN model provided an "outstanding" model of governance for Iraq. Hughes secured a pledge from Malaysia to spread *Islam Hadhari* to help fight terrorism in Iraq, stating, "*Islam Hadhari* has a powerful message of inclusion and tolerance."<sup>53</sup> Other Middle Eastern countries have reportedly also invited Malaysia to describe the concept.<sup>54</sup> In terms of the so-called Second Front of the War on Terror (Southeast Asia), the most notable, though seldom reported, instance of *Islam Hadhari* being used to fight extremism is in Mindanao in the

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<sup>49</sup> "Islam as a civilisational force, India shares Malaysia's vision", *Hindustan Times*, 22 December 2004.

<sup>50</sup> "Brunei keen on Malaysia's 'Islam Hadhari' Concept", *Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies*, 5 July 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Ioannis Gatsiounis, *Beyond the Veneer: Malaysia's Struggle for Dignity and Direction* (Singapore: Monsoon Books, 2008), 184.

<sup>52</sup> "Malaysia a model Muslim nation, says Zoellick", *New Straits Times*, 10 May 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Leslie Lau, "Malaysia the way to go for Iraq, says US image czar", *The Straits Times*, 26 October 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Chong, "The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*", *op. cit.*, 41–42, and; Ahmad Osman, "Other Muslim states show interest in Islam Hadhari", *The Straits Times*, 29 September 2004.

Philippines. According to Malaysian academic Norulhuda Othman, Mindanao illustrates a "practical example" of promoting *Islam Hadhari* and counter-terrorism, with the Abdullah administration providing medical aid, development assistance, economic planning and having meetings with local leaders and government representatives to, essentially, help set up a Malaysian-style government.<sup>55</sup> Most of this has occurred behind closed doors and, as such, the direct success of this policy is difficult to ascertain.

*Islam Hadhari* signals not just an ideology to combat extremism within the Muslim world, but provides to the rest of the world, the West in particular, an interpretation of Islam and a soft power tool that counters extremist ideology. Abdullah denies this:

It is not an approach to pacify the West. It is neither an approach to apologise for the perceived Islamic threat, nor an approach to seek approval from the non-Muslims for a more friendly and gentle image of Islam. It is an approach that seeks to make Muslims understand that progress is enjoined by Islam.<sup>56</sup>

However, there is much evidence to suggest that *Islam Hadhari* is more than a philosophy to be emulated by other Muslim countries. For example, Abdullah later claimed there was a noticeable difference in the tone and views of non-Muslim communities overseas after 9/11 when compared to their views after the *Islam Hadhari* concept was explained to them.<sup>57</sup> Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar also noted that several European countries saw *Islam Hadhari* as a useful "platform" to foster more effective relations.<sup>58</sup> Syed has stated that *Islam Hadhari* would

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<sup>55</sup> Norulhuda Othman, 25 July 2007. Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>56</sup> Abdullah Badawi, "Islam Hadhari in a multi-racial society", speech, Asia Society of Australia, Sydney, 8 April 2005, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/311ee38bcfdd22e348256fde00089b82?OpenDocument> (accessed 18 February 2008).

<sup>57</sup> "Islam Hadhari: Give ideas, detractors told", *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 2 July 2005.

<sup>58</sup> "Positive response for Islam Hadhari from abroad", *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 18 July 2005.

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help improve communications between the Islamic and non-Islamic world and could help prevent a "clash of the civilisations."<sup>59</sup> *Islam Hadhari* ultimately allows Malaysia to position itself as a model Muslim society, one which counters the view prevalent in the West of Islam as radical and backward. The post-9/11 world increased international interest in a moderate Islamic ideology and Islam Hadhari responded.<sup>60</sup> *Islam Hadhari* offered a "moderate" form of Islam at a time when Islam was associated with extremism and violence.<sup>61</sup> Abdullah's *Islam Hadhari* attempted to reclaim Islam's image, "to extricate the Islamic world from this crisis and to help the process of rehabilitating ourselves to restore Islam's past glory."<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, while *Islam Hadhari* made a relatively minimal impact at the international level, it can be regarded as a success for the Abdullah administration in one important respect—it positioned Malaysia as a leader of the Islamic world and therefore further legitimised the BN regime.

## CONCLUSION

In Malaysia, ideology has been increasingly used to promote government interests and limit the discursive space for alternative and opposing viewpoints in the aftermath of 9/11. The ideologies of Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi both attempted to deal with the root causes of terrorism, internationally and domestically, and in doing so utilised a security policy which blended coercion and ideology. Each premised his ideological response on a form of Islam which promoted, first and foremost, the regime's interests. Mahathir positioned Malaysia as a leading Muslim country and attempted to formulate a new discourse on "moderate" Islam in the post-9/11 climate. Many of Mahathir's ideas were repackaged and slightly retooled in Abdullah's *Islam Hadhari* project. There are elements to be admired in the ideological approaches of both Prime Ministers. Their strategies

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<sup>59</sup> Gatsiounis, *Beyond the Veneer*, *op. cit.*, 183.

<sup>60</sup> Chong, "The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*", 41–42.

<sup>61</sup> Khoo, 'The house of the rising sons', *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Abdullah Badawi, "UMNO's 57th Annual General Assembly", speech, UMNO 57th General Assembly, Kuala Lumpur, 15 November 2006, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/3c88fd1e03a248da4825722700186ac2?OpenDocument> (accessed 18 February 2008).

represented a cohesive attempt to undermine extremist interpretations and promote a more peaceful view of the faith. On the other hand, the ideological approach of both leaders was most concerned with maintaining the domestic political status quo. The strategy of both was to limit the ideological space of their opponents and use 9/11 as a pretext to further restrict the discourse on Islam in their country. While internationally and domestically the Islamic agendas of Mahathir and Abdullah were promoted as genuine attempts to rally the Muslim world against terrorism and undermine the influence of extremists, the ultimate goal of their ideological approach was to maintain the legitimacy of the existing political order within Malaysia.

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