

Prime Minister Mahathir Will Continue Malaysia's Multipolar Course

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*Former long-time Prime Minister and nonagenarian **Mahathir bin Mohamad** returned to office after incumbent **Najib Razak** suffered a humiliating loss that many analysts attribute to the multibillion-dollar [1MDB corruption scandal](#) that he's implicated in. A whistleblower leaked incriminating documents about this scam a couple of years ago that have since been used as the basis for the US Department of Justice to launch a multicontinental criminal investigation into what really happened. Suffice to say, the ordinary problems of most Malaysians took on a qualitatively new character after they began to believe that their situations wouldn't be as bad had the government reinvested the billions of dollars that it's accused of stealing into the economy like it originally promised it would do through that fund. Naturally, the civil society anti-corruption campaign that emerged in the wake of this ended up unseating Najib and could even lead to formal charges against him now that he's no longer in power.*

Prime Minister Mahathir campaigned on a platform of [investigating every deal](#) that his predecessor signed, including Silk Road ones with China [such as the East Coast Rail Line](#) (ECRL), and this has led to concern that Kuala Lumpur might renege on some of these contracts on the pretext that they were agreed to on corrupt pretenses that don't serve Malaysia's true national interests. Some of the projects have indeed proven to be controversial, such as the ECRL that Prime Minister Mahathir railed against on the campaign trail, but irrespective of this particular project's ultimate fate, it's highly unlikely that [Malaysia](#) will become "[anti-Chinese](#)" because its latest and previously longest-serving leader has a proud multipolar track record. What the new government wants to do is restore a sense of balance to Malaysia's international economic relations that avoids any perceived (key word) overreliance on China, especially after Trump pulled out of the US-led TPP that the country was signatory to during his first day in office.

These steps to strike a multipolar middle ground that's neither anti-Chinese nor pro-American is an emerging trend among some countries that altogether points in the direction of creating a new Non-Aligned Movement (or [Neo-NAM](#)) in the [New Cold War](#) to replace the presently existing but practically defunct one that was inherited from the Old Cold War. This time around, however, instead of balancing between capitalism and communism, this "third force" would walk the line [between the American-led and Chinese-led globalization models](#), picking and choosing the best projects offered from each of them in order to acquire the most advantageous development portfolio for their specific national interests. For example, while the ECRL veritably fulfills a long-term strategic significance in the grand sense of multipolarity by helping Chinese traders avoid a potentially US-blockaded Strait of Malacca,

the medium-term costs imposed on the Malaysian economy through loans and other means have understandably become a lightning rod of controversy in the country.

It's for these reasons why Malaysia under the returned leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir is expected to remain multipolar, even if it changes the manner in which it has hitherto expressed this geostrategic vision by rebalancing its relations with China and the US.

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