

‘Malaysia’

An Inevitable Creation, 16 September 1963

Ooi Keat Gin

School of Humanities
Universiti Sains Malaysia

The concept of ‘Malaysia’ was conceived as a strategy of the Western powers, notably Britain, to ensure that its former colonial possessions, namely (British) Malaya and (British) Borneo (Sarawak, Brunei, North Borneo) did not switch or fall into the socialist/communist camp. The genesis of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia which comprised the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Sabah (formerly North Borneo¹), and that was realized on 16 September 1963 presented a bulwark to the advancement of the influence of the communist ideology in the Southeast Asia region. The post-war situation and condition of the then British colonial territories and protectorates of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo witnessed the increasing influence and threat of communism permeating the region. Comparatively, however, Brunei and North Borneo had scant Leftist impact.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the mandarins at Whitehall, the Foreign Office (FO), and Colonial Office (CO) were particularly anxious and apprehensive that their colonial possessions in Southeast Asia appeared to be susceptible and be swept by the Leftist ‘wave’ then prevailing in the region. Symptoms of this Leftist wave could be seen in neighbouring Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI, Indonesia Communist Party), the Philippines (Hukbalahap, Huk), and Vietnam (Viet Cong). Within Malaya itself, there was the protracted Emergency (1948-1960) with the formidable Malayan Communist Party (MCP), whereas in Singapore the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front) was gaining strength and influence, and over in Sarawak, the clandestine manoeuvres of the Sarawak Communist Organization (SCO) through the Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP) were worrisome, developments that were threatening and troublesome. Brunei, on its part, had to contend with the Partai Rakyat Brunei (PRB, Brunei People’s Party) that had less than clear direction and/or ideological orientation but apparently leaning towards Sukarno’s Indonesia. Nevertheless, the bipolar world brought forth by the Cold War during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s created a critical geopolitical situation in Southeast Asia analogous to the Malay saying, *bagai telur di hujung tanduk*, literally like an egg at the tip of the horn, a perilous situation.

It was apparent that Britain’s interests, and that of its ally, the United States, in Southeast Asia appeared to be amply threatened by the socialist/communist camp, not only directions from Moscow but also Beijing, the latter seemed even more daunting. Consequently, and *inevitably*, Malaysia was created to serve as a barrier to stamp the then increasing spread of communism and thwart the Domino theory.

¹ North Borneo changed its name to Sabah when it became a component part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963.

Therefore, this essay shall argue that the formation of Malaysia was not only to ensure that Britain's colonial possessions of British Malaya² and British Borneo³ to not fall prey to the prevailing Leftist wave then sweeping across post-war Southeast Asia, but also to ensure that these aforementioned strategic territories remained committed to the Westminster system of constitutional monarchy in their post-independence existence. To this end, British officials worked hand in hand with local pro-Western leaders in accepting the wider federation concept of 'Malaysia' and its realization, and that the newly created nation-state (Federation of Malaysia) shall remain grounded in the Western/'free world' camp in the post-war bipolar world.

THE 'BIG' PICTURE

The Cold War (1947-1990)

In brief, it was the divergent aspirations, needs, histories, governing institutions, and ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union that turned unavoidable tensions into the epic four-decade confrontation that we call the Cold War (McMahon 2003: 5).

Even before the dust had settled comfortably in the aftermath of the Second World War that had brought untold misery, death, horrors to the greater part of the world, ideological disparities reared its ugly head to cast asunder two colossal powers who were once wartime allies, namely the United States (U.S.) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (also Soviet Union, Soviet Russia). The ideological differences between them were far too divergent for a wartime alliance to be sustainable in the post-war scenario. Whilst the U.S. preached its brand of democracy and claimed to represent the so-called 'free world', the USSR on the hand, insisted that the Soviet socialist model was the ideal for all nations, and intended to 'export and impose' it on the world particularly the newly independent and emerging nation-states (Gaddis 2006).

In facing off one another, both armed with nuclear arsenal, the quality and quantity only known to themselves, Washington and Moscow knew the risks and high stakes involved in an ultimate showdown (Westad 2017). Hence, they played out their respective roles on a world stage in a dramatic play titled the **Cold War** that ran between 1947 and 1991.

The synopsis of this Cold War play was basically described as a constant nonviolent state of political hostility between the Soviet Union and the U.S. characterized by threats, propaganda, and other covert measures short of open warfare (Fink 2017). Nonetheless, if it

² British Malaya comprised the Straits Settlements (1826) – crown colonies of Penang, Melaka, and Singapore, the Federated Malay States (FMS, 1895) – protectorates of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang, and the Unfederated Malay States (UMS, 1909, 1914) – protectorates of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johor.

³ When Britain granted protectorate status over Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo in 1885, thus was created 'British Borneo' differentiating from Dutch Borneo (presently Indonesia Kalimantan).

fitted their respective agenda, both subscribed to proxy wars, that is they both utilized external strife and/or conflict to attack the interests of the other. Washington took a further step in being involved as a direct combatant in Korea, and later in Vietnam, whilst Moscow and Beijing, the third major player, lent support to North Korea and North Vietnam.

The Korean War (1950-1953) was the first proxy war between them. The United Nations (UN), with the U.S. as the principal force, lent military assistance to South Korea amounting to slightly exceeding 300,000 ground troops (Kane 2013). China came to the aid of North Korea with ground forces of some 1.3 million so-called "volunteers", and the Soviet Union committed a force of 72,000 of which 5,000 were with the air force (Zhang 1995: 257; Kolb 1999).

When on 1 November 1955 U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) deployed the Military Assistance Advisory Group to train the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), it marked the official beginning of American direct involvement in the war, the Second Indochina War, and popularly, the Vietnam War. A decade later, U.S. ground troops stepped on Vietnamese soil for the first time. At its peak in April 1969, there were 543,000 U.S. military personnel (Tucker 2011: xlv).

Besides Vietnam, elsewhere in Southeast Asia, both Washington and Moscow lent moral and to some extent material support to local struggles taking opposing sides. Beijing, much nearer and much familiar to the region with historical ties stretching over several centuries, provided moral support and material assistance to Leftist-leaning groups attempting to assert themselves in the region.

The Leftist 'Wave'

The post-war decades of the 1950s and 1960s witnessed a Leftist wave rolling across East and Southeast Asia. On the Chinese mainland, the less than comfortable alliance (1937-1945) between the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) broke into an all-out civil war (1945-1949) following Imperial Japan's unconditional capitulation in August 1945. The Huaihai Campaign was the decisive military turning point in the drawn-out civil war (Westad 2003). The Battle of Hsu-peng (November 1948-January 1949) where more than 550,000 KMT troops were pinned down and encircled by the CCP's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Xuzhou marked the beginning of the end of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi). The defeat of the KMT led to CCP dominance of northern China. Thereafter, Nanjing fell in April, Shanghai in May, and by October Mao at Tiananmen proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). By year's end, witnessed Chiang and the remnants of the KMT fleeing to Taiwan.

Meanwhile, tensions were escalating on the Korean Peninsula (Cumings 2010). Between 1910 and the end of the Asia Pacific War (1937-1945), Korea was under Imperial Japanese colonial rule. In connivance with Washington, Moscow in August 1945 declared war on Imperial Japan and proceeded to liberate Korea north of the 38th parallel. South of the

parallel saw the deployment of U.S. troops. Subsequently to avoid any untoward situation especially of a military nature, the Soviet Union and the U.S. decided to split the peninsula at the 38th parallel between them with local governments supported by the two powers. However, neither 'Koreas' accepted the existence of the other, instead both regimes claimed to be the legitimate government of Korea.

Then on 25 June, Pyongyang launched an invasion of the south (Appleman 1989). Two days later, on 27 June, the UN Security Council sanctioned the formation of UN forces to repel the offensive of North Korea. With U.S. commitment of almost 90 per cent ground troops, a UN force comprising 21 nations was dispatched to the peninsula hence begun the three-year conflict (25 June 1950 – 27 July 1953). The Soviet Union and the PRC supported the Pyongyang regime whilst the U.S. and other Western democracies were on the side of the non-communist government of South Korea.

A pendulum-like conventional war was played out on the peninsula. By July 1953, it was clear that neither side had the upper hand: a stalemate. An armistice was then proposed; likewise, it also took on a pendulum-like nature with an 'on-again, off-again' negotiation series that stretched over two years (July 1953 – November 1954) (Mount 2004). The belligerents, viz. the UN Command, the North Korean People's Army, and the Chinese People's Volunteers, penned the Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953 thus ending the fighting. While the 'hot' war may have ended, in the absence of a peace treaty, a 'cold' war ensued between Pyongyang and Seoul to the present (Jager 2013).

In the region that subsequently came to be known as 'Southeast Asia' owing to its war-time designation of an area of military operation, the return of Western colonial powers to their respective territories sparked armed conflicts with nationalist-led forces resisted the reinstatement of the pre-war status quo. On the mainland, the series of conflicts referred as the First and Second Indochina Wars were protracted wars that commenced almost from the end of the Pacific War (1941-1945) until the fall of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) in April 1975. Less drawn-out was in insular Southeast Asia namely the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949). Elsewhere, there were pockets of Leftist-led insurgencies the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), and the Hukbalahap Rebellion (1946-1954).

Vietnamese-communist Viet Minh clashed with the French colonial forces in the First Indochina War (1946-1954) (Waite 2012). The Viet Minh relied on support from both Moscow and Beijing. The all-out armed conflict was played out in northwest Vietnam in and around Hanoi. The French were finally defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu (May 1954). The French reluctantly withdrew from Vietnam following the Geneva Agreements (June 1954). The latter also dictated that Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, formerly comprising French Indochina, became separate political entities. Pending elections to finally unify the country, Vietnam was split into North and South at the 17th Parallel. The North was under the Viet Minh with Ho Chi Minh at the helm whilst the U.S.-backed Ngo Dinh Diem administered the South. The elections, however, were never held.

Clouded with controversy and conspiracy speculation, the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Incident on 2 August 1964 sparked an international confrontation between the U.S. and North Vietnam. Apparently, the USS *Maddox*, a destroyer was not only pursued by North Vietnamese torpedo boats but was attacked with torpedoes and machine gun fires. Whatever was the truth of this engagement, this naval incident marked the beginning of U.S. direct military involvement in the Second Indochina War or more commonly and popularly referred to as the Vietnam War (Karnow 1997; Freedman 2016). Between 1964 and the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, the Communist Vietnam People's Army (VPA, or People's Army of Vietnam, PAVN) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) (namely South Vietnamese NLF guerrilla fighters allied with the PAVN, collectively and derogatorily referred to as Viet Cong, literally 'Communists Traitors to Vietnam') on the one side against the U.S. and the U.S.-backed Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) on the other. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the official designation of North Vietnam was supported morally, financially, and militarily by Beijing and Moscow, and also their communist allies in the Communist bloc.

The Vietnam War overflowed and juxtaposed with the Laotian Civil War (1962-1975) and the Cambodian Civil War (1967-1975) (Issacs et al. 1987). The conflict scenario was identical to the Vietnam situation, namely a communist side clashing with a non-communist opponent. In neighbouring Cambodia, the armed struggle was between the communist Khmer Rouge and its PAVN allies against the U.S.-supported government (Kingdom of Cambodia, 1967-1970; Khmer Republic, 1970-1975) (Kubota 2013). The situation in Laos witnessed the U.S.-backed Kingdom of Laos defending itself from the communist Pathet Lao with support from the PAVN (Conboy 1995). Behind the communist side in both conflicts was the support lent by Beijing and Moscow.

Across the South China Sea, a protracted uprising known as the Hukbalahap Rebellion (1942-1954) that was initially staged against the occupying Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) during the Pacific War (1941-1945) continued in the post-war period against the independent Philippine government at Manila. Whilst the conflicts in Indochina were communist-led national liberation wars, the Hukbalahap Rebellion appeared to be struggles by peasants against apparent socio-economic injustices and mistreatment. It was largely a consequence of the collapse of the traditional *padrino* relationship (landlord-tenant), the Huk uprising represented an economically maladjusted peasantry's response to change. The Manila government labelled the Huks as communist owing to its alliance with the Pambansang Kaisahan ng Magbubukid (PKM, National Peasants Union) that later transformed into the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Initially guerrilla fighters of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Anti-Japanese People's Army) fought against the IJA, then the U.S. and colonial Philippine constabulary, and thereafter following independence, the independent Philippine government. It was alleged that the Huks received support from the Soviet Union (Gojo 1984).

Meanwhile, the returning colonial Dutch forces that landed in post-war Netherlands East Indies following Imperial Japan's surrender faced a strong Indonesian nationalist movement.

Triumphant over the Dutch in the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949) not only offered invaluable military experiences for the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, Indonesian National Armed Forces) but also it ensured post-war leaders such as Sukarno, president of the Republic were somewhat beholden to the generals. The 1950s to the mid-1960s saw the struggle between the TNI and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) jostling for favour, power and influence with President Sukarno. Sukarno, the consummate Javanese *dalang* (puppeteer) sought to balance the two formidable national forces, undoubtedly a challenging and dangerous act. The PKI became increasingly demanding to the extent of intending to form a people's militia that could directly threaten the TNI.

THE 'SMALL' PICTURE

Against the aforesaid backdrop across East and Southeast Asia, the concept and subsequently the reality of the creation of Malaysia was realized in 1963. Turning to the 'small' picture of the environments of what was then Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo, the foregoing section will consider the Leftist wave from within.

The View from Within

Almost similar to the Philippines Hukbalahap Rebellion, the genesis of the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) dates back to the military occupation of Malaya by the IJA during the Pacific War (1941-1945). The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) that was initiated and dominated by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) posed at best an irritant to the IJA. The British who were the colonial master of pre-war Malaya airdropped supplies including arms and ammunition to the MPAJA; the MCP hid most of these weapons and military supplies deep in the jungle (Chen 1995). Post-war developments saw the returning British colonial authorities moving against Leftist elements.

Then in mid-1948, a 'reign of terror' begun with the MCP killing several European rubber planters that sparked the declaration of the so-called Malayan Emergency.⁴ From here, the MCP differentiated from the Huks in that MCP Secretary-General Chin Peng and his jungle guerrillas intended to overthrow the government of the day (British colonial regime, and thereafter, from 1957 the government of independent Malaya) replacing it with a communist republic of Malaya (Tonder 2017). Whilst the MCP waged a jungle guerrilla war in the rural regions of Malaya, Leftist elements in urban Singapore sought the overthrow of the colonial government through industrial action of labour strikes, sabotage, riots, and acts of social unrest. Meanwhile the MCP launched economic subterfuge in slashing rubber trees and destroying equipment and machinery in tin mines to create economic dislocation and social disorder. Following the outbreak of chaos and turmoil, the MCP in Malaya and Leftist elements within the Barisan Socialis (Socialist Front) in Singapore would seize the

⁴ Although it was an all-out war situation, the term 'emergency' was used for purposes of insurance claims particularly essential in the mining and plantation sectors.

opportunity for attaining political power. Both parties to the struggle and armed conflict in Malaya and Singapore attempted to win over the 'hearts and minds' of the common people (Stubbs 1990).

Contemporaneous to happenings in Malaya and Singapore, the communists in Sarawak attempted to infiltrate labour unions, peasant organizations, and bona fide political parties. Infiltration in the former two failed but succeeded in the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP). The communist 'united front' strategy worked in SUPP almost dominating this political party short of the presidency and secretary-general's post that were held by moderates. The Chinese-dominated Sarawak Communist Organization (SCO) adopted the strategy of pushing for independence from the British government and thereafter seizing political control in post-independence elections (Ooi 2012). The Sarawak Chinese vis-à-vis indigenes were far better off economically, educationally, and in political consciousness.

Not only were there merely small communities of Chinese in neighbouring North Borneo, they too were less politically active as their brethren in Sarawak. Leftist activists too were less successful in garnering recruits and/or support from both Chinese or natives in North Borneo. North Borneo, therefore, in the post-war decades of 1950s and 1960s was a political backwater vis-à-vis its immediate vicinity.

The Malay Muslim sultanate of Brunei had for centuries being ruled by absolute monarchs. Weaknesses from within in the second half of the 19th century saw the sultanate conceding territories to neighbouring Sarawak then under the White Brooke Rajahs and North Borneo administered by the British North Borneo Chartered Company (BNBCC). In order to safeguard the political integrity of Brunei, the British government in 1885 conferred protectorate status over Brunei, Sarawak, and North Borneo that subsequently referred to as British Borneo. Brunei maintained its status quo as a British protectorate in the post-war period. But there were quarters from within the sultanate that wanted to reform the absolute monarchy whereby seeking a devolution of political power from the *istana* (palace) (Bijl 2012). The founder-president of Partai Rakyat Brunei (PRB, Brunei People's Party) A. M. Azahari vacillated between, on the one hand, the restoration of the sultanate to its imperial heyday of the 14th /15th century where its influence and power engulfed the entire island of Borneo, and on the other hand, the more modest and realistic ambition of setting up the Negara Kesatuan Kalimantan Utara (Unitary State North Borneo) that comprised Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo with the sultan as head of state and himself as prime minister (Ooi 2012).

'MALAYSIA'

Against the background of developments between the late 1940s to the early 1960s where the Leftist wave was sweeping across East and Southeast Asia, British concerns of its possessions in the later region, viz. British Malaya and British Borneo appear vulnerable in succumbing and/or being drowned in the wave. On the one hand, from London's perspective, decolonization appeared inevitable in the post-war situation. The question or challenge then

was how to sever colonial relations without plunging the newly-independent state into chaos or a bloodbath between contentious political groups or ethnic communities, or being consumed by the then prevailing Leftist wave. The situation was both delicate and urgent; 'delicate' in the context of a multiracial territory like Malaya where the economically dominant group were non-native Chinese whilst the indigenous Malays were retarded economically and educationally. The Indian minority, a colonial creation out of necessity for labour, was of concern as the majority were equally as backward as the Malays. The reins of political power and leadership need to be handed to those who would not utilize power and position to dominate and exploit others, particularly minorities and disadvantaged groups. The urgency was in the face of the increasing strength of the Leftist wave on the one hand, and British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan's 'Wind of Change' speech in 1960 that officially marked the implementation of the decolonization policy, a letting-go of imperial responsibility, on the other hand.

From the British colonial viewpoint, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, a Malay prince from the northern Malay state of Kedah appeared to be the trustworthy candidate to hand over the baton. A Cambridge-trained lawyer, Tunku was an Anglophile and staunchly anti-communist (Abdullah Ahmad 2016). The informal political cooperation between Tunku's United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in local government elections of 1955 proved a successful coup in demonstrating a viable Sino-Malay political partnership. Later the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) joined the UMNO-MCA pact subsequently evolving into the Alliance Party. It was to Tunku as chief minister (internal self-rule), later prime minister (independence), and the Alliance Party that the British handed over the reins of political independence of Malaya in August 1957. Independent Malaya joined the British Commonwealth demonstrating the goodwill and close affinity between Kuala Lumpur and London.

Having successfully negotiated with the British government for the independence of the Federation of Malaya in 1957, Prime Minister Tunku announced the concept of a wider federation known as 'Malaysia'. In May 1961 Tunku publicly proposed to create a wider federation that would comprise independent Malaya, the British crown colonies of Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo, and the protectorate of Brunei. This Malaysia concept proverbially appeared to 'kill two birds with a single stone': firstly, the decolonization of Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak, and North Borneo, and secondly, ensuring that the aforesaid territories including Malaya remained within the British orbit of influence. Moreover, this proposed wider federation could pose as a bulwark to the Leftist wave with anti-communist Tunku at the helm. 'Malaysia' then seemed to be the 'ideal' solution in the event when Britain withdrew from the region.

But in convincing the leaders of the various territories to buy into the 'Malaysia' concept seemed rather challenging (Ghazali Shafie 2015). Chief Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his People's Action Party (PAP) then governing self-rule Singapore was supportive of 'Malaysia'. Brunei's Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III was initially keen on the concept, but kept reservations over the monarchy issue and financial matters. Oil-rich Brunei was

apprehensive if a satisfactorily financial arrangement not adversely disadvantageous could be attained with the other partners particularly the Tunku and Malaya (Vienne 2015). Leaders of Sarawak and North Borneo were hesitant towards 'Malaysia' as many were political novices. Subsequently Malayan and Singapore leaders were able to convince their Bornean counterparts that 'Malaysia' was *the* passport to unshackling the colonial yolk.

On their part, British officialdom 'on the spot' worked hard for the realization of 'Malaysia'. Directly involved were Lord Selkirk, British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia (1959-1963) and his predecessor Malcolm MacDonald (1948-1955), Sir William Goode and Sir Alexander Waddell colonial governors of North Borneo and Sarawak respectively, and H. C. White, the British high commissioner to Brunei.

However, anti-Malaysia elements attempted to derail the formation of this wider federation. In Sarawak, the SCO that had infiltrated SUPP convinced the latter to oppose 'Malaysia' as it was thought, rather correctly, that joining this new extended federation would make it harder to seize power as the Malay-dominated federal government in Kuala Lumpur would be a formidable opponent to any Leftist political action (Ooi 2012). SUPP was the only political party in the Bornean territories that was not in favour of Tunku's wider federation. Instead SUPP campaigned for Sarawak's independence from Britain. Donald Stephens, founder-president of the United National Kadazan Organization (UNKO) of North Borneo initially allied with SUPP and PRB leaders in opposing 'Malaysia'. Stephens later relented.

Azahari and the PRB objected to 'Malaysia' in favour of Negara Kesatuan Kalimantan Utara where Brunei would take the lead in this northern Borneo nation-state. Indonesia's Sukarno saw through the British ruse in the formation of 'Malaysia' that would continue as a British neo-colony (Poulgrain 2014). Britain's influence and power in the region would be sustained through this new federation. A war of words erupted between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta; Sukarno accused Tunku of being a British puppet, and in turn, Tunku labeled Sukarno a puppet of Beijing. It appeared that Sukarno's opposition was prompted by PKI that saw British-supported 'Malaysia' as a bulwark to the spread of the communist wave across the region. PKI had CCP support, hence Tunku's likening of the Indonesian strongman as a Chinese puppet.

President Diosdado P. Macapagal's opposition was his contention that North Borneo was a territorial possession of the Philippines. In the late 19th century when North Borneo came under the administration of BNBCC, the latter acquired rights from both the Brunei and Sulu sultanates. Since the Sulu sultanate was part of the independent Republic of the Philippines, Manila laid claim to North Borneo (Sabah, from 1963). This 'Sabah Claim' strained relations between Kuala Lumpur and Manila over several decades (Amer 2004).

THE SO-CALLED BRUNEI REBELLION (1962)

In December 1962, nationalists in Brunei, the hugely wealthy small kingdom on the North Coast of Borneo, formed the Army of North Kalimantan (TNKU) and,

demanding greater democracy, engineered a rebellion against the Sultan and seized a large number of hostages. Perceived to be an attempt by communists to destabilise the Sultanate and seize power, within twelve hours of its outbreak, British forces were despatched by ship and aircraft from Singapore to restore order, the first unit to arrive being 1/2nd Gurkhas, who entered the capital. Within the week, the 1 Queens Own Highlanders had recaptured the strategically important oilfields and occupied Seria, 42 Commando, Royal Marines attacked Limbang and 1 Green Jackets landed in west Brunei. The next six months were spent rounding up TNKU and, since there were major concerns that Indonesia could be behind the Revolt, the charismatic Major General Walter Walker, then commanding 17th Gurkha Division, was sent to Brunei to command operations. By mid-May 1963, the surviving TNKU had been captured. While rapidly suppressed, the Revolt was the catalyst for the three-year Confrontation with Indonesia 1963-66 (Bijl 2012: blurp).

Having successfully won local government elections, the PRB became impatient with the palace that seemingly hesitated to convene the Legislative Council. Azahari had prepared two plans: coming to power through constitutional means through domination of the Legislative Council, and an alternative route, namely armed seizure of power. Whilst the former was being pursued, the latter was clandestinely organized with military-style uniforms and arms.

When PRB demands were turned down by the sultanate's government, plans were underway for an armed insurrection scheduled for 24 December 1962. But the chance arrest of several individuals with a cache of military uniforms and some weaponry, the date for an armed seizure of power had to be pushed forward lest the detainees exposed the PRB plans in the course of interrogation.

Hence, on 8 December 1962, members of PRB's military arm, Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara (YNKU, National Army of North Kalimantan) launched concerted attacks on police stations throughout the sultanate. "Perceived to be an attempt by *communists* to destabilise the Sultanate and seize power", Sultan Omar invoked British military assistance as laid out in the Anglo-Brunei Agreements. British Gurkha battalions were airlifted from Singapore. In less than a week, the swift military action of British forces suppressed the uprising; hundreds were detained. Azahari was in the Philippines during the outbreak of hostilities; thereafter he fled to Indonesia.

Sultan Omar might have been influenced by his advisors that the PRB was leaning towards the Left. The slant of Azahari's PRB towards Sukarno's Indonesia as indicated in the usage of *partai* instead of *parti* was clear indictment of partiality to the southern neighbour that was then experiencing the increasingly influence and power of the PKI. Like the Malayan Tunku, Sultan Omar was anathema to socialism and/or communism.

This so-called Brunei Rebellion sparked a witch-hunt in neighbouring Sarawak in particular, and to a lesser extent in North Borneo, where Leftist elements were detained, imprisoned, or

deported. SUPP's membership was literally denuded; non-Chinese members and supporters deserted the party when it was realized the great extent of Leftist infiltration.

The Less than 'Happy Family'

Owing to the crackdown, hundreds of SCO members, mainly young Chinese men and women, PRB members and TNKU officers and militias fled across the border to Indonesia Kalimantan. They were welcomed by PKI activists. The Sarawak and Brunei refugees were organized into military units and underwent military training by TNI instructors with the intention that they (refugees) would cross back to fight the Sarawak and Brunei governments.

A host of anti-Malaysia elements - SCO members, PRB members and TNKU officers and militias, PKI cadres, and TNI military units - on the Kalimantan borderlands with Sarawak had an uneasy cohabited (Ooi 2012). Despite acting as military instructors to the Sarawak communist Chinese youths, TNI officers were ever weary of Leftists elements, particularly PKI cadres. Meanwhile, both PKI and TNI in their respective reckoning were uncertain about PRB and TNKU militias of what their intentions, aims, ambitions. Apparently, the Bruneians themselves were unclear about the so-called rebellion; many thought that they were fighting on behalf of the sultan, therefore were disillusioned when the latter called upon the British for assistance. Consequently, relations among the various groups were at best civil and formal, all quarters were less than trustful of one another. Hence, this less than 'Happy Family' tried their best to survive the harsh conditions of the thick tropical jungle enveloping the Kalimantan-Sarawak borderlands.

Once preparation and re-organization of its military units were accomplished, SCO members crossed back to Sarawak to launch assaults against the colonial administration targeting rural police stations where much needed arms and ammunition could be seized. The year 1962 marked the commencement of the Sarawak Communist Insurgency, a protracted all-out military campaign of the SCO in attempts to topple initially the colonial regime and thereafter when Sarawak became a part of Malaysia (from 1963), the Malaysian government (Porritt 2004; Tan 2008). Alongside a mainly jungle war of attrition, there was the psychological struggle on either side to win over the 'hearts and minds' of the populace. A tit-for-tat as well as a hide-and-seek affair was a drawn out struggle that dragged over nearly three decades with significant casualties on either side including civilians caught in the cross-fires.

PERSPECTIVE FROM WHITEHALL

Meanwhile in the corridors of Whitehall, CO mandarins and FO officials were discussing ways and means to attain the smooth decolonization process of the last remaining three crown colonies of Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo. The Malaysia plan was an ingenious strategy that not only severed the colonial strings from the three territories but also ensured that all the three remained non-communist. The staunchly anti-communist Tunku was the ideal prime minister for independent Malaysia. Faith in the Tunku was high as his Malayan government with assistance from British and Commonwealth military forces had successfully

defeated a communist insurgency (1948-1960); in fact, the colonial, and later independent Malayan government, was the first to overcome a communist armed insurrection (Thompson 1966). The new nation-state of Malaysia, from London's viewpoint, was comfortably safe in the hands of the Tunku.

Sukarno's declaration of 'Konfrontasi' in opposition to the formation of Malaysia was met with increased allocation of military resources including ground troops from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and other Commonwealth countries that lent assistance to Malaysian security forces in countering TNI military incursions along the Kalimantan-Sarawak border. At the same time, Malaysian military forces were engaging with SCO guerrillas in Sarawak's forested interior as well as the Rejang delta areas, a 'hotbed' of SCO activities of recruitment, propaganda and garnering support from the largely Chinese inhabitants.

THE 'HIDDEN' HAND

Questions emerged of the 'hidden' hand behind the circumstances leading to the pronouncement of the wider federation of Malaysia in 1961 and developments thereafter, namely the Brunei Rebellion (1962), Konfrontasi (1962-1966), the formation of Malaysia (1963), the Sabah claim (since 1962), and the Gestapu Affair (1965). On hindsight, the decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were the defining years of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. The main Cold War actors notably the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and the PRC might each have played a part in initiating developments, either directly or through 'puppets' and 'agents' to further their interests and agenda in this pivotal corner of the world. The then subscription to the 'Domino Theory' that foresaw that the fall of the Indochina states (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) would unleashed a domino effect witnessing the chain reaction of the collapse of the Thai monarchy and government, then military-ruled Burma, independent Malaya/Malaysia, the Philippines republic, and the unitary state of Indonesia, all falling into the hands of Leftist groups in the respective territories.

First and foremost, was the concept of 'Malaysia' Tunku's brainchild, or was the idea of a wider federation imposed on him by the CO and FO mandarins? The creation of Malaysia was, as mentioned, a decolonizing scheme by Whitehall to ensure that Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo were granted independence under the fold of a staunchly anti-communist leader, namely the Tunku of Malaya. With or without the Tunku, London was determined to discharge its Bornean territories (Sarawak and North Borneo) as well as its naval base at Singapore. Within a short period, Britain announced in 1966 its 'East of Suez' withdrawal of military commitments in line with MacMillan's 'Wind of Change' speech.

Therefore, from Whitehall's perspective, Malaysia was an *inevitable* creation. The Tunku was an ideal leader to hand over the reins of power of this wider federation whom Whitehall trusted in keeping the faith (pro-British) politically as well as economically. All the territories that comprised Malaysia – Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah (formerly North Borneo) – possessed substantial British capital and investments. Whitehall was convinced that the Tunku would not perform an ala-Sukarno in nationalizing all foreign (mainly British) assets

in post-independent Malaysia. Rightly read by Whitehall, the Tunku did not desert London for Malaysia, as in the case of Malaya (1957) previously, immediately joined the British Commonwealth shortly after its formation in 1963. Whitehall prevailed; none of its former colonial possessions in their post-independent existence switched to the socialist/communist camp.

But from Tunku's perspective, it appeared that 'Malaysia' was a 'touch and go' case with himself having to work hard towards its realization.

Tunku himself vividly reminisces unhappy encounters among the three main leaders – President Sukarno, President Macapagal and Tunku himself – and the bitter and frustrating experiences he had to ensure in his struggle to make Malaysia a nation. Tunku, for example, reveals the almost impossible task of achieving any kind of permanent concessions on the merger from either the Indonesian or Filipino leaders; the fence of the new Federation against the Confrontation with Indonesia; or dealing with domestic opposition to the merger (Kobkua 2017: 187).⁵

Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Datu Bandar Abang Hj Mustapha, Stephen Kalong Ningkan and Temenggung Jugah anak Barieng of Sarawak, Donald (Fuad) Stephens and Tun Datu Haji Mustapha bin Datu Harun of North Borneo (Sabah) were, like the Tunku of Malaya, pro-British and anti-communist. Stephens, as earlier mentioned, opposed 'Malaysia', but did a surprising turnaround to led his support. If it was to be believed an 'open secret' in Sabah revealed that Singapore's Lee, prompted by the Tunku, baited Stephens with a 'deputy premiership that apparently got the latter onboard the Malaysia bandwagon'.⁶

Only leaders of the SUPP, namely Founding-President Ong Kee Hui and Founding-Secretary General Stephen Yong Kuet Tze, owing to party grassroots' opinion that was heavily influenced and infiltrated by Leftist elements, steadfastly opposed Malaysia when it was first mooted in 1961 and held to its anti-Malaysia stance for at least a decade. A witch-hunt following the Brunei Rebellion (1962) and Operation Hammer (1965) where hundreds were resettled ensured that Leftist elements amongst the Chinese communities in Sarawak and within the SUPP structure were flushed out – detained, imprisoned, or deported.

Were Wen Ming Chyuan, Yang Chu Chung, Bong Kee Chok, and others of the SCO merely pawns of Beijing or were they acting unilaterally on their own pace? The former was in all probability as can be seen in the action and activities of Wen, head of Sarawak People's Guerrilla Force (SPGF, Pasukan Gerilya Rakyat Sarawak, PGRS) in Sarawak's First Division, and founding-chairman of the North Kalimantan Communist Party (NKCP, 1970). Wen had given up his Sarawak citizenship in 1962, and requested that he be deported to China. Between 1962 and the formation of NKCP, Wen clandestinely travelled between China, Sarawak, and Kalimantan. Following the formation of NKCP, Wen went to Beijing

⁵ The 'domestic opposition' refers to the detractors such as Abdul Aziz and his National Convention Party (NCP) that campaign in the General Elections 1964, and Dr Lim Chong Eu's United Democratic Party (UDP).

⁶ See Fernandez (2011).

where he remained for the next two decades. Wen's residence in Beijing and his previous shuttling between the mainland, Sarawak and Kalimantan undoubtedly had the support of both the CCP and the PKI that facilitated and support his activities. It could be surmised that Wen could likely qualify as Beijing's 'man-on-the-spot' in Sarawak throughout the second half of the 1960s in directing the armed struggle until his departure for the mainland in 1970.

It was unclear where Azahari stood on the Cold War divide. Although unlikely to be on the Soviet/PRC camp, he was partial to strongman Sukarno having participated alongside Republicans against the Dutch and British during the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949). Alternatively, Azahari could staunchly be a Brunei patriot in wanting to revive the sultanate's past glory in his proposed Negara Kesatuan Kalimantan Utara. But Sultan Omar preferred the British umbrella with Gurkhas as security.

Did Sukarno's anti-Malaysia stance be construed as a diversion to appease the TNI? A foreign war would undoubtedly please the generals with expanded budgets for military resources to support Konfrontasi. TNI had to be appeased in the face of the emergence of PKI as a force to be reckoned.

Confrontation served important domestic interests in Indonesia. Sukarno could distract attention from political tension and deteriorating economy by focusing on an external enemy. Military action justified greater resources for the armed forces, and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) could use the campaign to help radicalize the masses (Cribb 2004: 741).

Meanwhile, Sukarno, the consummate Javanese *dalang* sought a balancing act between the TNI and the PKI, even attempting to play off one against the other. In the end, the *dalang* lost all his tricks; the generals acted with the Gestapu Affair, that not only ended Konfrontasi but also signalled the start of a Leftist bloodbath that consumed the lives of thousands. Sukarno himself was held under house arrest until his passing in 1970.

Macapagal's opposition to Malaysia over the Sabah claim was on his own volition spurred by a patriotic notion of the territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic. It was unlikely that Manila's erstwhile ally, the U.S. had any 'hidden hand' in Macapagal's territorial claim.

In 1950, Congressman Macapagal, along with Congressmen Arsenio Lacson and Arturo Tolentino, sponsored a resolution urging the formal institution of the claim to North Borneo. Prolonged studies were in the meanwhile undertaken, and in 1962 the House of Representatives, in rare unanimity, passed a resolution urging the President of the Philippines to recover North Borneo consistent with international law and procedure. Acting on this unanimous resolution and having acquired all the rights and interests of the Sultanate of Sulu, the Republic of the Philippines, through the President [Macapagal], filed the claim to North Borneo (Soliven 2013).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper sets out to demonstrate that the creation of Malaysia was intended to ensure that British Malaya and British Borneo were not swept up by the prevailing Leftist wave then rolling across post-war Southeast Asia. At the same time, post-independent Malaysia remained in the Western/‘free world’ camp and practiced a system of constitutional monarchy. Its immediate membership of the British Commonwealth further confirmed Malaysia’s commitment to the Western/‘free world’ side of the Cold War divide.

Against the context of the regional situation of the 1950s and 1960s where Leftist influence was increasingly expanding, Malaysia’s creation in 1963 was *inevitable*. The Malaysia concept attained Britain’s two objectives, viz. firstly a smooth decolonization of its remaining crown colonies (Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo), and secondly, the newly-created nation state did not fall prey to the socialist/communist camp. In a single stroke, Britain played its cards according to its strategic interests. In walking away (‘East of Suez’), Britain was contented that Malaysia was in good hands (Tunku’s).

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Biodata: Ooi Keat Gin is professor of history and coordinator of the Asia Pacific Research Unit (APRU) at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia. His research focus ranges from socio-cultural to economic history with primary attention on Borneo. Recent publications are *Post-war Borneo, 1945-1950: Nationalism, Empire, and State-building* (Routledge, 2013); as editor, *Brunei - History, Islam, Society, and Contemporary Issues* (Routledge, 2016); co-editor with Hoang Anh Tuan, *Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1350-1800* (Routledge, 2016); and co-editor with Volker Grabowsky, *Ethnic and Religious Identities and Integration in Southeast Asia* (Silkworm Books, 2017). A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (London), he serves as founding-editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* (IJAPS) (www.usm.my/ijaps/).

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