

KONFRONTASI:  
Rethinking Explanations for the  
Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation,  
1963-1966

by

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A.B. with Distinction, Economics  
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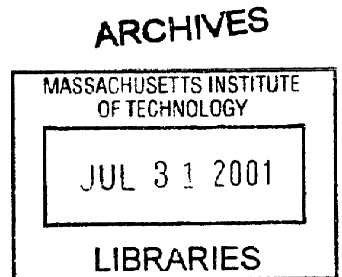
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Submitted to the Department of Political Science  
on May 11, 2001 in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a study of the causes of “Konfrontasi” or Confrontation, the low-intensity war waged by the Republic of Indonesia, under the leadership of President Sukarno, against the Federation of Malaysia, which became independent in 1963. The Confrontation lasted between 1963 and 1966. The thesis compares three categories of hypotheses or arguments for its causes – threat, ideology, and domestic politics – and evaluates each type of argument in turn.

The “threat” argument claims that Malaysia posed a security threat to Indonesia, and that the Confrontation was the outcome of a security dilemma between both states. The “threat” of Malaysia has some substantive elements necessary to justify Indonesian aggression, but it is shown to be largely an exaggerated claim, and does not provide a sufficient motive for the conflict.

The “ideology” argument claims that the Indonesia Confrontation was driven by the ideology of the Indonesian Revolution and the central role of Indonesia in leading a struggle of New Emerging Forces against the Old Established Forces of neo-colonialism, colonialism and imperialism. It is shown that this argument has more substance than the “threat” argument, since Indonesian ideology traces its existence independently to earlier Indonesian historical experience, and Confrontation could not have been rationalized without recourse to ideological principles. However, this thesis also shows how the “ideology” hypothesis for Confrontation is over-determined, as Indonesian ideology did not necessarily make Confrontation an inevitable and necessary outcome. Ideology was necessary, but insufficient for motivating the decision to confront Malaysia.

Finally, the “domestic politics” argument draws its claims from the idea that the Indonesian Confrontation was a “diversionary war” against the Malaysia, where the latter filled the role of “scapegoat,” “bogeyman” or “safety valve.” According to this argument, the Confrontation was started in order to contain serious internal disunities in the Indonesian government, most notably between the army and the ascendant communist party, and to unite these conflicting elements in a nationalist cause. This thesis finds the greatest evidence and theoretical support for this “domestic politics” explanation of Confrontation, and finds this account to be the most consistent and satisfactory argument.

Thesis Supervisor:      Thomas J. Christensen  
Title:                      Associate Professor of Political Science

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## A NOTE ON STYLE

Indonesian spelling is inexact, owing to its origins as a spoken dialect and its relatively recent historical transition into Anglicized form. The national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, was standardized in 1972 with a new format, which introduced spelling simplifications. These simplifications are used wherever appropriate, unless it impairs the recognizability of persons' names (e.g. Djuanda, Djiwandono). Otherwise, "c" replaces "tj," "j" replaces "dj," and "u" replaced by "oe." Examples:

Pantja Sila	→	Panca Sila ("Five Principles")
Djakarta	→	Jakarta
Soekarno	→	Sukarno

Chinese names are also spelled with the "romanized" *Pinyin* format, which is truer to the original pronunciation and contemporary usage. For instance:

Liu Shao-Chi	→	Liu Shaoqi
Peking	→	Beijing

Owing to the British colonial origins of Malaysia and Singapore, many of the English terms used in treaty titles and official phrases were originally spelled in the British, not American style. However, the thesis uses the American spelling, so that it is more easily read by the American reader. The somewhat arbitrary rationale is that the research for this thesis was carried out entirely in the United States, using the educational resources of American universities. Therefore:

Defence	→	Defense
Organisation	→	Organization

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

LuFong Chua (Chua Lu Fong) received his undergraduate education at the University of Pennsylvania (1997-1998) and Stanford University (1998-2000). He graduated from Stanford University in June 2000, with a Bachelor of Arts (with Distinction) in Economics and a secondary major in International Relations. He was made a member of Phi Beta Kappa in the same year.

He is a citizen of Singapore, and is currently on tour with the Republic of Singapore Navy, in the Singapore Armed Forces. The Singapore Armed Forces had not yet been established during the Confrontation period discussed in this thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Search For Simple Explanations

“Our nations and countries are colonies no more. Now we are free, sovereign and independent. We are again masters in our own house... You have not gathered together in a world of peace and unity and cooperation. Great chasms yawn between nations and groups of nations. Our unhappy world is torn and tortured, and the peoples of all countries walk in fear lest, through no fault of theirs, the dogs of war are unchained once again.”<sup>1</sup>

Indonesian President Sukarno

Speech made in 1955, eight years before Confrontation

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Like most countries which became independent after the Second World War, Indonesia and Malaysia were the territorial legacy of colonial borders, previously drawn and administered by the Dutch and the British respectively. While transitions from a colonial status to full independence formed part of a global teleological process, the process of nation-building had not been peaceful for these two countries in the postwar decades. The Indonesian nation-building experience was based on violent struggle against the Dutch for all the former territories of the Netherlands East Indies, while Malaysian independence was based on conciliation and cooperation with the British, who intended a graceful withdrawal from their former empire.

The Malaysian nationalist experiment would have proceeded smoothly, but for a strange episode in regional history: its security came under threat, not from its British colonial masters, nor from the threat of Soviet or Chinese communism from the north, but by its neighbor and kindred young nation, the Republic of Indonesia under the leadership of President Sukarno. This event happened in the years between 1963 and 1965, and was known as “Konfrontasi,” or “Confrontation” in the Malay language largely common to both Indonesia and Malaysia. As a “combination of diplomacy, threats, bluff and infiltration of irregular and regular forces... to

stretch the resources of the enemy to the limit,” Confrontation was intended to remain a prolonged low-intensity conflict that forestalls peaceful settlement and stops short of an all-out, officially declared war.<sup>2</sup>

As two of the major territorial blocs of maritime Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia shared many common cultural, religious and racial ties across the large populations of Malay ethnicity in both countries. These deep affinities are diluted only by their divergent colonial experiences. Therefore, there is no deep-seated tendency toward mutual conflict, as there is in the Middle East between perennial enemies. Nor did Confrontation persist beyond those atypical years of the early to mid-sixties. Yet, despite its uneven momentum, the Confrontation lasted three years, and therefore could not have been a mere accident, a diplomatic quarrel run amok. Something more fundamental was at work during those three tense years in which one massive young nation, itself no stranger to the growing pains of independence, began attacking a smaller neighbor that had only just begun to shed its old colonial dependencies. No less than other larger and more famous wars, the Indonesian Confrontation against Malaysia represents a challenging theoretical puzzle. What caused it? Why did it begin? Does the manner in which it abruptly ended shed vital clues about its causes?

Confrontation was essentially sparked off by the 1962 proposal of the Malayan prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman (more simply: the Tunku, or “Prince”), to merge peninsular Malaya with Singapore and the former British territories of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei into a greater Federation of Malaysia. Sukarno opposed the Malaysian proposal on several grounds, condemning it as a neocolonialist plot to perpetuate British influence in the area, which

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<sup>1</sup> George McTurnan Kahin, Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 40.

<sup>2</sup> J.A.C. Mackie, Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute 1963-1966 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 1974), 99.



threatened the region's freedoms in general and Indonesian security in particular. During the course of Confrontation over the next three years, Confrontation took an erratic but consistently strident course, on economic, military and diplomatic fronts. Armed Indonesians, made up of both regular soldiers and irregular volunteers, were sent into North Borneo and later Malaya to conduct raids and foment unrest. Indonesia also severed economic relations with Malaysia (as punishment, albeit with considerable *self*-punishment involved), and repeatedly uttered threats to "crush" it.

The literature on Confrontation consistently treats the conflict as a rich historical case study, without attempting to use the conflict as a test case for social-scientific theories. Some works of military history, like The Undeclared War (James and Sheil-Small, 1971), attribute the Confrontation to a pan-Indonesian expansionist sentiment on the part of Sukarno. Perhaps Sukarno had dreams of a vast Indonesian empire stretching across Southeast Asia, incorporating Malaysia and even other regional territories; the Malaysian merger was a threat to such aspirations. Evidence for such sentiment, however, is sparse and comes mostly from the private declarations of hyper-nationalist Indonesian leaders during the euphoric post-independence years. Furthermore, the low-intensity character of the Indonesian Confrontation, which always fell far short of total war in the Clausewitzian sense, does not indicate any systematic long-term ambition to conquer Malaysia. The remainder of the academic literature describes a vast and detailed panoply of factors that explain various facets of the Confrontation. J.A.C. Mackie's Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute 1963-1966 (1974) is the most detailed all-round factual study of the Confrontation, particularly from the perspective of the two protagonist states. John Subritzky's Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand Diplomacy in the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation, 1961-1965 (2000) is

the latest addition to the Konfrontasi literature, with a more concise account that focuses on the broader context of Cold War politics and Western foreign policies.

Taken together, the established works provide a rich and multi-layered understanding of the Confrontation from varying angles. This thesis does not attempt to surpass or match the existing literature in the task of chronicling the conflict in blow-by-blow detail. Rather, it attempts to focus attention on the *causes* of Confrontation, in a relatively simple manner that discards proximate and catalytic causes in favor of more fundamental, underlying factors. The postscript of Mackie's Konfrontasi discerns three main classes of explanations for Confrontation – expansionist, ideological, and diversionist – and reveals Mackie's preference for the ideological hypothesis. This thesis attempts to pick up where Mackie left off, by using those explanatory categories as alternative lenses or hypotheses for rethinking the conflict and its causes. For this study, these candidate explanations have been reformulated in the following noun categories: *threat*, *ideology*, and *domestic politics*.

“Threat” arguments belong in the realm of Sukarno's own justifications for the “crush Malaysia” campaign: that the formation of the Malaysian Federation preserved British neocolonialist influence in Southeast Asia and represented a threat of geopolitical “encirclement.” Indonesia did not fear the prospect of conquest or invasion, but rather, the unconventional threat of subversion aimed at breaking up its domestic territory. This fear, in turn, was grounded in a 1958 episode in which American and British agents in regional bases supported rebellions inside Indonesia.

“Ideology” arguments trace the Confrontation to the Indonesian Republic's commitment to fighting colonialism in its own country and, by extension (through its regional influence and leadership), in the region. Sukarno described his battle against British-backed

Malaysia as part of a broader worldwide struggle between New Emerging Forces (NEFOS) against the Old Established Forces (OLDEFOS) of neocolonialism, colonialism, and imperialism (*Nekolim*). An ideology-based argument assumes that foreign policy decisions are made in a manner that is independent of or even contrary to purely material interests, and that Confrontation was motivated by an ideological commitment to fighting the *Nekolim* regardless of these interests.

“Domestic politics” arguments characterize the Confrontation as a diversionary war, meant to distract domestic-political actors from internal rivalries, and unite them against a common external enemy. It does not require a simple-minded elite easily manipulated by a devious national leader; all it requires is that Confrontation is couched in sufficiently nationalistic terms such that no political constituency, whatever its interests and peculiar ideological orientation, could afford to distance itself from the foreign crusade. Sukarno’s balancing game was directed at containing antagonisms between the army and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and playing them off against each other in a delicate balancing game, as a means of preserving his leadership.

This study considers all available evidence for all three hypotheses, providing a more complete perspective on the causes of Confrontation. The dormant security threat embodied in the Malaysian Federation was a necessary factor, but the evidence shows that this threat played an exaggerated part in justifying the decision to confront Malaysia. The consolidation of territories into a greater Malaysia did not constitute an increase in potential security threat over the separate pre-Malaysia territories of Malaya, Singapore and the North Borneo states. The Confrontation was certainly not the product of a classical security dilemma which escalated beyond the control of self-interested states.

Ideology provides an indispensable explanation, especially since Indonesian statements against Malaysia consistently described the *Nekolim* threat in terms that contained ideological terms (“neocolonialist influence”) in addition to purely geopolitical (“encirclement”) terms. Yet, ideology had been manipulated to justify the anti-Malaysia campaign, and had components that were *endogenous* to the conflict. Ideology was not an independent cause of the conflict, but something else was at work which caused the conflict and also influenced the manner in which ideology was used as a justification for war. In other words, there were material factors operating outside of the ideological framework which influenced the manner of Sukarno’s rhetoric and exposition on the purported ideological principles behind Confrontation.

Since “threat” and “ideology” were both necessary but insufficient causes of Confrontation, an important gap remains. “Domestic-political” arguments, based on the theory of Confrontation as a diversionary war against the Malaysian “safety valve,” fill this gap. Confrontation helped Sukarno balance the PKI and the army, the two major political forces in his government, and thereby preserve his own position of leadership and legitimacy through its inherent “rally-round-the-flag” prerogatives. It does not provide a full factual *description* for Confrontation without the “threat” and “ideology” factors, but on its own merit, it provides the most consistent and complete *argument*.

This thesis is organized to address the three candidate explanations in turn. The next chapter provides a short historical overview of the major events leading up to, and through, Confrontation. This overview is kept factually neutral, without favoring one type of explanatory theory over another, with particular attention focused on historic turning points. An attempt is also made to locate the Confrontation within the broader canvas of Cold War politics. In the chapters that follow, the three major explanations for Confrontation are

presented in turn, with each successive treatment providing a closer examination of events and issues. Each explanatory framework will be examined *as if it stood alone* as a primary cause of Confrontation, so as to compel a more comprehensive test and treatment. The concluding chapter connects these alternative arguments together, to complete the picture of Confrontation's causes.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “Crush Malaysia”:

#### An Overview of Confrontation

“Indonesia’s confrontation of Malaysia during the years 1963 to 1966 was an enigmatic affair, less than a war but something more than a mere diplomatic dispute. It began, as it ended, cryptically, hesitantly, and shrouded in ambiguities. In military terms, it was a miniscule conflict, yet the political stakes at issue seemed important enough to influence the destiny of the entire Southeast Asian region.”<sup>3</sup>

J.A.C. Mackie

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#### Background to Conflict

The Federation of Malaya gained formal independence from its former British rulers in 1957 and comprised only the peninsular land area between modern Singapore and Thailand. Formerly a British colony, the granting of Malayan independence was part of the British “East of Suez” policy of phased decolonization. The Anglo-Malayan Defense Agreement (AMDA), signed in 1957, preserved British responsibility for the defense of Malaya, until the latter developed sufficient military capabilities for its own security.

Malaya and Britain shared concerns about leftist political inclinations in Chinese-dominated Singapore, located on the southern tip of the peninsula. Singapore had been a self-governing state since 1959, with the British retaining control over defense, foreign policy and internal security, with expectations of eventual independence. No doubt Anglo-Malayan fears about Singapore had a strong Sino-phobic element, a legacy of the recent Communist Emergency in which British and Malayan leaders fought to contain a communist insurgency led by predominantly Chinese guerillas. The Singapore ruling party, the People’s Action Party (PAP) led by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, was developing a split between a moderate English-educated elite and Chinese-educated radicals with a communist agenda. Lee had

desired merger with Malaya as the basis for Singapore's independence, because of their close geographical and economic ties. However, the primary hindrance to merger, from the Malayan point of view, was the specter of having the large Chinese population of Singapore outweighing the Malay population of Malaya, with repercussions for electoral politics as well as the increased threat of eventual communist dominance.

On May 27, 1961, the Malayan prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, suddenly proposed the formation of a new Federation of Malaysia, in a speech in Singapore to the Foreign Correspondents' Association:

"Malaya today as a nation realizes that she cannot stand alone and in isolation. Sooner or later she should have an understanding with Britain and the peoples of Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak. It is premature for me to say now how this closer understanding can be brought about but it is inevitable that we should look ahead to this objective and think of a plan whereby these territories could be brought closer together in political and economic cooperation."<sup>4</sup>

Sabah (British North Borneo) and Sarawak were British Crown Colonies, while Brunei was a British protectorate. These three territories occupied the northern part of the island of Borneo, and were separated from the main peninsula of Malaya by four hundred miles of sea.<sup>5</sup> The southern half of Borneo was called Kalimantan and belonged to Indonesia. Sarawak and Sabah shared a 970-mile jungle frontier with Kalimantan.<sup>6</sup> This territorial proposal for a Greater Malaysia was, *prima facie*, a geopolitical expansion which touched upon the borders of

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<sup>3</sup> Mackie, 1.

<sup>4</sup> A.G. Mezerik, ed., Malaysia-Indonesia Conflict, Analysis and Review of International Problems (United Nations, N.Y.: International Review Service, 1965), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Mackie, 57.

<sup>6</sup> David Easter, "British and Malaysian Covert Support for Rebel Movements in Indonesia during the 'Confrontation', 1963-66," in The Clandestine Cold War in Asia, 1945-65: Western Intelligence, Propaganda and Special Operations, eds. Richard J. Aldrich, Gary D. Rawnsley, and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 197.

Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the new Malaysia was only 130,000 square miles with ten million people, compared to Indonesia which comprised 750,000 square miles inhabited by one hundred million people.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 1-1:<sup>9</sup>**  
**Map of Indonesia, Malaysian Federation territories, and vicinity, 1962.**  
**Note that Borneo is occupied by Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei, and Kalimantan.**

Indonesia had its independence declared since 1945, and had been fighting against its former Dutch colonial rulers till 1949. Comprising the territories of the former Dutch East Indies, the only remaining outstanding territorial question in the early sixties was that of West

<sup>7</sup> Mackie, 56.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1998), 494.



Irian, the western half of the island shared with Papua New Guinea. The Dutch refused to give up West Irian to Indonesia, which hence prosecuted a military campaign in the years 1962-1963 to reclaim it. Against this background, Indonesia initially expressed no objection against the Malaysia proposal, possibly out of concern that any indication of expansionist sentiment on her northern frontier in Borneo would de-legitimize her claim to West Irian.<sup>10</sup> Speaking at a United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1961, the Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr. Subandrio said:

“We are not only disclaiming the territories outside the former Netherlands East Indies, though they are of the same island, but – more than that – when Malaya told us of its intentions to merge with the three British Crown Colonies of Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo as one Federation, we told them we had no objections and that we wished them success with this merger so that everyone might live in peace and freedom... Naturally, ethnologically and geographically speaking, this British part [of Borneo] is closer to Indonesia than, let us say, to Malaya. But we still told Malaya that we had no objection to such a merger, based upon the will for freedom of the peoples concerned.”<sup>11</sup>

This statement has two significant elements. Firstly, the description of “ethnological” ties between Indonesia and the North Borneo territories suggests that Indonesia might conceivably have irredentist sentiment toward those territories. More broadly and less controversially, it indicates the close cultural and ethnic ties among the indigenous peoples of the Indonesia-Malaya region (as well as the Philippines), part of the pre-colonial Malay empires. Secondly, the last line of the official Indonesian statement – “based upon the will for freedom of the peoples concerned – is a subtle and almost obscure conditionality, but would

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<sup>9</sup> Modified from a 1995 Southeast Asia map to show 1962 boundaries. In Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas (UT) Online [cited May 6, 2001]; available from [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map\\_collection/Map\\_collection.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html); Internet.

<sup>10</sup> Mackie, 103.

<sup>11</sup> Mackie, 105.

later become an important qualifier which Indonesia accused the Malaysian proposal of violating.

### **Tensions Begin**

By late November 1961, Britain and Malaya had reached an agreement about the Federation proposal. Malaysia would be established on August 31, 1963, with an extension of the AMDA of 1957 to cover the new Malaysia; prior to merger, Britain and Malaya would set up a Commission of Inquiry, led by Lord Cobbold of Britain, to ascertain the feelings of the North Borneo populations about the merger proposal. On September 1, 1962, a referendum was held in Singapore in which the majority voted in favor of the merger.

The first warlike sounds emerged one month later in Indonesia when the Indonesian Communist Party, known as PKI or *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, began criticizing the Malaysian project as a “neocolonialist” plan and “an unacceptable colonial intrigue.”<sup>12</sup> At about the same time the Cobbold Commission submitted its official report with positive results in June 1962, the Philippines under President Macapagal began to register an official claim to the territory of Sabah. The Filipino claim, advanced by Macapagal since his senatorial days, was based on the tenuous historical claim that the Sultan of Sulu had wrongfully leased Sabah to the British in 1898 despite owing allegiance to the Philippines.<sup>13</sup>

In August 1962, the West Irian conflict between Indonesia and the Netherlands was formally concluded, with a signed agreement to transfer West Irian to Indonesia in the following May. With this development, Indonesia now owned all the territories of the former Dutch East Indies, and did not have any conceivable territorial dispute with any external party.

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<sup>12</sup> Mezerik, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Mezerik, 11.

In December 1962, an anti-Malaysia revolt broke out in Brunei under the leadership of A.M. Azahari of the Party Ra'ayat, but was promptly crushed by British troops and Malayan police. Indonesia officially denied involvement in supporting the Brunei rebellion, but lauded it as "a struggle for independence and happiness... against colonialism and imperialism and also neo-colonialism."<sup>14</sup> Latter-day accounts do not support these denials, and implicate Sukarno's government in covertly supporting the unrest in Brunei.<sup>15</sup>

The Brunei revolt, and its defeat by the combined armed efforts of British and Malaysians, was used to justify public Indonesian sentiment that the Malaysian proposal was more egregious than it initially appeared. On January 20, 1963, Dr Subandrio made the keynote announcement about the Indonesian policy of "Konfrontasi":

"We cannot but adopt a policy of confrontation towards Malaysia because at present they represent themselves as accomplices of neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist forces pursuing a policy hostile towards Indonesia."<sup>16</sup>

After Subandrio's alarming statement, the Tunku warned Indonesia to "keep your hands off Malaysia," and the British Far East Headquarters in Singapore mobilized its strategic reserves.<sup>17</sup> In anticipation of trouble ahead on the home front, Malaya also cancelled an 800-troop dispatch troops to a United Nations mission, after she accused Indonesia of infiltrating Malayan waters with a gunboat that set fire to a rubber-laden barge.<sup>18</sup> In that same month, small-scale guerilla raids against Sarawak and Sabah began to be launched from Kalimantan.<sup>19</sup> These events realized Subandrio's threats, made in February 1963, that Indonesia would

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<sup>14</sup> Mezerik, 68.

<sup>15</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 467-468.

<sup>16</sup> Mezerik, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Mezerik, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Mezerik, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Easter, 195.

express its opposition to the creation of Malaysia, not with war but with “incidents of physical conflict.”<sup>20</sup>

### **From Failed Diplomacy to “Crush Malaysia”**

Notwithstanding the occurrence of armed “incidents,” diplomatic efforts were made in the run-up to the Malaysian merger. At the end of May 1963, Macapagal and Sukarno met in Tokyo and agreed in principle to holding tripartite discussions between the leaders of Malaya, Philippines and Indonesia. At short notice, Sukarno invited the Tunku for private talks in Tokyo one week later, where they reaffirmed the goodwill embodied by the bilateral 1959 Malaya-Indonesia Treaty of Friendship and Amity. As a precursor to a Summit Conference, a Foreign Ministers’ Conference was arranged for June 7-11 in Manila.

The June talks were attended by: Tun Razak, the Malayan foreign minister; Dr Subandrio, representing Indonesia; and E. Pelaez, the Filipino vice-president. These talks marked the high-water mark of cordiality between the three countries, whereby two key points emerged. Firstly, they proposed a United Nations (UN) assessment mission (in addition to the earlier Cobbold mission), to confirm the willingness of the North Borneo territories to merge into greater Malaysia. This plebiscite was to be led by the UN Secretary-General, U Thant. Secondly, as proposed by the Philippines, the three countries would form a loose confederation called “Maphilindo” (based on the first letters of the country names) which would enable them to cooperate more closely in the future on issues of common interest. The concept of Maphilindo rested delicately on a sense of shared Malay ethnic ancestry in the indigenous majority populations of all three countries, and had been welcomed by the United States

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<sup>20</sup> Christian Science Monitor, 13 February, 1963, quoted in Mezerik, 24.

because it presented an opportunity for these key Southeast Asian countries to assume responsibility for regional security, and to form an anticommunist bulwark.

Unfortunately, the terms of the June Manila Accord were not unambiguous enough to prevent further disputes, which proved to be the undoing of conciliation efforts. Prior to the agreed-upon UN ascertainment mission, the Tunku went ahead on July 9 to sign a Federation agreement in London with Britain, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah (the Sultan of Brunei decided not to join Malaysia). Two days later, Sukarno accused the Tunku of a unilateral breach of faith of those June agreements, because of the latter's action of pre-empting the agreed-upon plebiscite:

“I declare to the world that Tunku Abdul Rahman is a man who does not keep his word... I declare here openly that we Indonesian people not only disagree with Malaysia but we oppose it at all costs.”<sup>21</sup>

On July 17, 1963, Sukarno conceded that he would still attend the scheduled summit talks of the Maphilindo countries, but his rally speech was better-known for its declaration of the “Crush Malaysia” policy:

“[Malaysia] is endangering the Indonesian revolution... To crush Malaysia, we must launch a confrontation *in all fields*.”<sup>22</sup>

The July-August Summit Conference calmed such tensions slightly, as the UN was requested to proceed with its plebiscite mission. Because the UN mission was anticipated to last till September 14, 1963, the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia was postponed from August 31 to September 16. However, Indonesia was still dissatisfied with the UN

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<sup>21</sup> Mezerik, 74.

<sup>22</sup> Mezerik, 75.

plebiscite, questioning U Thant's objectivity and decrying the mission as a hasty and illegitimate.

Undeterred, the Tunku proceeded with the merger as scheduled. On Malaysia's first day of being, the Indonesian embassy in Kuala Lumpur, as well as British and Malaysian embassies in Jakarta, were stoned. Diplomatic and trade ties were severed between Malaysia and Indonesia, and subsequent attempts by the Philippines to urge a return to negotiations proved futile.

Because of Confrontation, Indonesia forfeited \$400 million in expected receipts from American economic and military aid programs.<sup>23</sup> In November, however, this loss would be ameliorated by an agreement with the Soviet Union which would supply arms for the Confrontation, though at a smaller scale than they had done for the West Irian campaign in the preceding two years.<sup>24</sup> Soviet arms assistance was also supplemented by support from the French.<sup>25</sup> Chinese diplomatic support was most forthcoming: in April 1964, Liu Shaoqi, the vice-chairman of the People's Republic of China, visited Indonesia and issued a joint communiqué with Sukarno which declared their opposition to Malaysia and their common intention to destroy it.

### **The Course of Confrontation, and Indonesia's External Relations**

Small-scale raids were carried out from Kalimantan into the North Borneo territories, mostly by irregular forces and "volunteers" who tried to stir rebellions in those territories. From the beginning of 1964, Indonesian offensives in Borneo began to assume a more systematic

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<sup>23</sup> Pamela Sodhy, "Malaysian-American Relations during Indonesia's Confrontation against Malaysia, 1963-66," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 1 (March 1988): 124.

<sup>24</sup> Mezerik, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Mezerik, 48.

character, as regular Indonesian troops were used more frequently. Racial riots developing in mainland Malaysia also coincided with increased Indonesian operations on the peninsula in mid-1964. From May 1964, Sukarno activated a People's Twofold Command or *Dwikora* to encourage Indonesian civilians to volunteer to assist in anti-Malaysia operations.

The burden of Malaysian defense fell heavily upon Britain, which committed 68,000 troops and eighty vessels to the Far East during the peak of Confrontation.<sup>26</sup> British ranks were augmented with support from the Commonwealth allies, New Zealand and Australia, which were connected to Britain through mutual ANZUK defense commitments. Infantry battalions, particularly Special Air Service (SAS) and Gurkha regiments, were a key component of the security forces operating in North Borneo against Indonesian infiltrators. Preoccupied with the Vietnam War, the United States maintained a "non-involved cordiality" toward Malaysia despite its recognition of the latter's sovereignty and political legitimacy, in order to maintain a tenuous friendship with Indonesia. In particular, the US was afraid that its role as Britain's SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) ally or as the ANZUS partner of Australia and New Zealand would drag it into a second Southeast Asian war.

The People's Republic of China became closer with Indonesia during the course of Confrontation, especially as Soviet-Indonesian relations cooled off due to Indonesia's failure to repay earlier arms loans. China provided strong diplomatic support and some material support for the anti-Malaysia campaign, in concert with the growing strength of the PKI within the Jakarta regime. Outside China and the Soviet Union, the PKI was the largest communist party in the world.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Subritzky, Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand Diplomacy in the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation, 1961-5 (Routledge, 2000), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Subritzky, 2.

By the end of 1964, the small-scale actions of Confrontation resulted in accumulated losses on both sides. Malaysia lost more than one hundred lives, while recording that “1,196 Indonesian infiltrators and agents [have been known to be] in Malaysia; Malaysia and its allies have killed 282, captured more than 400 and wounded 70, [with] more than 70 acts of piracy recorded.”<sup>28</sup> The most decisive military flashpoint occurred on September 2, 1964, when Indonesia sent an infiltrating force of roughly one hundred paratroopers into the Malaysian peninsula, at Labis. The concurrent movement of British warships in Indonesian waters threatened to plunge the conflict past a critical threshold into a full-scale war.<sup>29</sup> Malaysia declared a state of emergency and lodged a formal complaint with the UN Security Council, charging that Indonesia’s action was “a blatant and inexcusable aggression against a peaceful neighbor, an act which is in itself a breach of the peace and involves a threat to international peace and security in the area.”<sup>30</sup> At the UN Security Council meeting called later that month, Indonesia conceded those charges but defended her aggression in ideological terms, claiming that the domestic disorder in Malaysia was evidence of Malaysia’s non-viability rather than an effect of Indonesian subversion.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the Council were unmoved by the Indonesian refrain, but a resolution against Indonesia was technically defeated by the veto action of the Soviet Union and the lone vote of Czechoslovakia.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> London Times, December 11, 1964, quoted in Mezerik, 49.

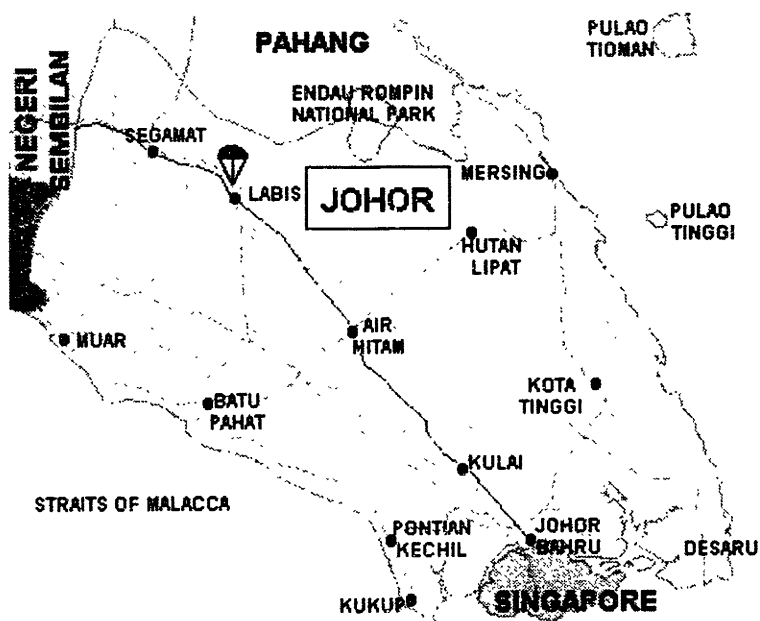
<sup>29</sup> Mackie, 261.

<sup>30</sup> Mackie, 264.

<sup>31</sup> Mackie, 265.

<sup>32</sup> Mezerik, 92.





**Figure 1-2:**  
**The location of Labis (Johore, West Malaysia),**  
**where Indonesian paratroops attacked on September 2, 1964.**

### **Indonesia and the Cold War Powers**

The Indonesian decision to wage Confrontation strained its ties with the United States and jeopardized its economic stability. The US said that the economic stabilization plan planned for Indonesia could not work with the economic strains caused by Confrontation, and cancelled \$400 million in aid. In addition, a \$50 million loan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was cancelled.<sup>33</sup> In reality, residual food aid and officer training programs were retained: the former to maintain a lever for future influence, and the latter to remain engaged with the Indonesian army with a view toward strengthening it against a future anticommunist showdown.<sup>34</sup> However, the US tactic of using residual aid as persuasive levers did not work, especially since Sukarno was prideful and sensitive about appearing to capitulate to foreign

<sup>33</sup> New York Times, September 25, 1963, quoted in Mezerik, 38.

<sup>34</sup> Sodhy, 123.

pressure.<sup>35</sup> In May 1964, when the US threatened to cut off all remaining aid if the Confrontation continued, Sukarno retorted: “Go to hell with your aid!”<sup>36</sup>

The deterioration of US-Indonesian relations contrasted with warmer Indonesian relations with the People’s Republic of China and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union. Indonesian-Soviet relations were at their peak during the West Irian conflict, in which Khrushchev aided Indonesia with an arms loan of one billion dollars.<sup>37</sup> However, relations with Moscow cooled down during the anti-Malaysia Confrontation, for a few reasons.<sup>38</sup> Firstly, Indonesia had failed to repay the Soviet loans in a timely fashion. Secondly, the Soviet Union kept its support for Indonesia at a low key because it was then experimenting with an updated grand strategy of détente and “peaceful coexistence” with the United States, and did not want to risk escalating the Indonesia-Malaysia conflict into a great power conflict. Thirdly, the PKI within the Indonesian government favored China over the Soviet Union, especially after the 1958 Sino-Soviet Split, especially because the former provided far stronger diplomatic support for Confrontation.

Increased closeness between Jakarta and Beijing was a product of several factors. The increasing strength of the PKI in Sukarno’s government must have hastened closer association with Beijing, which provided unflagging diplomatic support for the Indonesian Confrontation. The fierce anti-colonial and increasingly anti-Western character of Indonesian rhetoric justifying the Confrontation was compatible with the Chinese communist ideology, and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) commitment to supporting “national liberation struggles.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Franklin B. Weinstein, Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence: From Sukarno to Soeharto (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 168-169.

<sup>36</sup> Sodhy, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Mackie, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Djiwandono, 145-146.

## **Sino-Indonesian Rapprochement**

Toward the end of 1964, when Malaysia was poised to be seated as a non-permanent member in the United Nations Security Council, Sukarno protested against it on New Year's Eve, telling a popular domestic gathering that Indonesia would withdraw from the UN. On January 7, 1965, Sukarno made good his threat and formally withdrew from the UN and all UN specialized agencies, an action that was unprecedented among the 115 member nations.

Only China endorsed Indonesia's action, which was viewed by the international community as anti-social at best. In late January, the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai even called for a new international organization to rival the UN:

“A revolutionary United Nations may well be set up so that rival dramas may be staged in competition with that body which calls itself the United Nations but which, being under the manipulation of United States imperialism, is capable only of making mischief and can do nothing good.”<sup>40</sup>

China supported Indonesia by extending a loan that is recorded as between \$50 million and \$100 million, and paid for the construction of a center for the upcoming Conference of Newly Emerging Forces (CONEFOS), planned for 1966.<sup>41</sup> This CONEFO would be based on a new axis between Jakarta, Hanoi, Pyongyang, Phnom Penh and Beijing, though this became more popularly known as the Beijing-Jakarta Axis. China also issued a communiqué in late January, stating that “the Chinese people will not stand idly by” if the Americans or British were to attack Indonesia.<sup>42</sup> There was a clear trend in the pro-China, leftist direction that Indonesia was taking, which strained its relations with the US to near-breaking point. The closer association with China can be traced to three factors. Firstly, Indonesia had suffered

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<sup>39</sup> Arnold C. Brackman, Indonesian Communism: A History (New York: Frederik A. Praeger, 1963), 136.

<sup>40</sup> Mezerik, 94.

<sup>41</sup> Mackie, 287.

diplomatic isolation as a result of its Confrontation policy, which enhanced the need for Chinese patronage. Secondly, the growing PKI in Sukarno's government was pro-China. Lastly, China's first nuclear bomb test in October 1964, as a show of new strength, certainly increased the attractiveness of entente with Beijing.<sup>43</sup>

### **The End of Confrontation**

Meanwhile, complex electoral politics in Singapore and Malaya, caused by campaign controversies regarding the preservation or elimination of preferential rights for the indigenous Malay population, caused the separation of Singapore from the Malaysian Federation on August 9, 1965. Lee Kuan Yew's campaign for an egalitarian "Malaysian Malaysia" instead of a "Malay Malaysia" threatened the status quo sufficiently for the Tunku to decide to oust Singapore from the Federation. From the Indonesian viewpoint, it also seemed to portend a successful breakup of Malaysia.<sup>44</sup> .

One month after the Singapore separation, a radical chain of events led to the end of Confrontation. On September 30, a sudden coup d'état occurred against President Sukarno. The coup was carried out by a few rebel military officers, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, and involved the murder of six army generals. Major-General Suharto, commander of the Strategic Reserve (*Kostrad*) and leader of the successful West Irian campaign, promptly rallied loyalist troops to crush the coup. Having pinned blame for the coup on instigation by PKI communists, he then proceeded over the course of the next two years to launch a pogrom-style massacre

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<sup>42</sup> Mackie, 287.

<sup>43</sup> Mackie, 287.

<sup>44</sup> Mackie, 4.

campaign against communists and communist sympathizers across the country, killing about a quarter-million people (the most conservative available estimate).<sup>45</sup>

It is significant that the coup took place at a time when Indonesia exhibited strong tendencies toward turning communist, with the heightened strength of the PKI and the recently established Axis with Beijing. This had certainly alarmed many American planners. More than twenty years after these massacres, American officials reveal extensive US support for these killings, with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supplying "death lists" to Indonesian soldiers.<sup>46</sup> In fact, some accounts go further in arguing that the coup d'etat itself had been traced by one account to the machinations of the CIA.<sup>47</sup>

These developments were concurrent with the events of the downfall of Sukarno and the end of the Confrontation. In March 1966, Sukarno relinquished executive powers in order for the former to restore order and security. Over the next several months, covert talks were held in Malaya and Bangkok, between Malaysian and Indonesian leaders to reach rapprochement. The Indonesian missions were led by the new Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, who formally ended Confrontation with a joint peace treaty signed in Jakarta on August 11, 1966.

The Indonesian parliament elected Suharto as acting president in 1967, and formally as president in 1968. Even in the early years of Suharto's leadership immediately following the 1965 coup, many of Sukarno's foreign policies were reversed. The Axis with Beijing was cancelled, and in September 1966, Indonesia announced its decision "to resume full

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<sup>45</sup> Kathy Kadane, "Ex-agents say CIA compiled death lists for Indonesians," The San Francisco Examiner, May 20, 1990.

<sup>46</sup> Kadane, "CIA compiled death lists."

<sup>47</sup> Peter Dale Scott, "The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-1967," Pacific Affairs, 58, Summer 1985, 239-264.

cooperation with the United Nations and to resume participation in its activities" and regained its seat on the General Assembly.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "List of Member States," in United Nations: UN Press Release ORG/1317 (September 26, 2000), updated 18 December 2000 [cited May 6, 2001]; available from <http://www.un.org/Overview/unmember.html>; Internet.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Insufficient Security Dilemma: The Threat Explanation

“... in the vicinity of Indonesia lie fortresses of imperialism, colonial and semicolonial countries. To the north lie Malaya, Singapore, Siam, South Vietnam, Sarawak, North Borneo and the Philippines. To the south lie Australia as well as the Christmas Islands and the Cocos Islands, which are under British domination. On the east is East Irian<sup>1</sup> under Australian domination, while West Irian is still under the complete domination of the Dutch imperialists. Indonesia has no frontiers with a country which is already completely liberated from imperialist power.”<sup>2</sup>

D.N. Aidit, General Secretary of PKI, 1958

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Much of the high-flown rhetoric issued from Jakarta during the *Konfrontasi* episode claims that the Malaysia concept was a “threat” to Indonesia. This perceived Malaysian threat was primarily described in ideological and geopolitical terms, though these two categories of charges are by no means mutually exclusive, and cannot be easily separated. For instance, neocolonialism was deemed an ideological threat in the abstract (a subject more fully dealt with in the next chapter), but the agents of the *Nekolim* were viewed as posing a material threat to Indonesian security through physical “encirclement.”

To reiterate an earlier point, this “encirclement” does not describe a conventional security threat of foreign invasion or conquest, but the less conventional threat of subversion and intervention in internal affairs. A concise and representative statement of the threat facing Indonesia, which thus justified the Confrontation, was issued by the Indonesian Foreign Ministry in 1964:

“[The Confrontation] is not a dispute between two sovereign and independent states. It is a struggle against the domination and exploitation which British neo-colonialism exercises against the peoples of Malaya, Singapore and North Kalimantan. It is a

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<sup>1</sup> Now Papua New Guinea.

<sup>2</sup> Brackman, viii-ix.

struggle against the interference, intervention, sabotage and subversion which British neo-colonialism exerts against the Indonesian State and Revolution.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the propositions of structural realists, states are always alert to changes in relative capabilities, which are the ultimate basis for security and survival in a self-help international context.<sup>4</sup> Based on this theoretical context, the Indonesian opposition to Malaysia was due to the latter’s growth in size and potential power as a result of the territorial merger, though in this case, the security threat is framed in terms of “subversion” rather than conquest. Therefore, by this argument, the Confrontation was a response to the increased relative capability (not intention) of Malaysia to threaten Indonesian security. By suspending ideological considerations in favor of purely material factors, this framework offers a test of the hypothesis that the Indonesian Confrontation was the straightforward outcome of a security dilemma within an anarchical international system, whereby the increase in one state’s security threatens the safety of another.

For this hypothesis to work in the context of Confrontation, three conditions must be met. Firstly, the Malaysian Federation must be shown to politically and militarily capable of threatening Indonesia. If this condition is not adequately fulfilled, then a security dilemma cannot be said to have existed for Indonesia. This is the condition of *basic threat*. Secondly, the formation of the Malaysian Federation must be shown to a *greater* threat to Indonesian security than the old Malaya. If this condition is met, then the Indonesian response to Malaysia would be justifiably more assertive than its previous response (or lack thereof) to Malaya. This is the condition of *proportional response*. The greater the threat, the more assertive the response. Finally, it must be shown that Indonesia could not practice other more peaceful, less costly

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<sup>3</sup> Mackie, 203.



options (short of military confrontation) that could adequately or more effectively address the Malaysian threat. Less costly options include starting an arms race or, more saliently, forming a diplomatic bandwagon. This is the condition of *last resort*. Put together, these three conditions provide a strict test for the hypothesis that the Confrontation was the outcome of a security dilemma.

Evidence from the Confrontation episode shows that the first condition exists for Indonesia, but neither the second nor the third conditions are adequately met. More simply, Malaysia represented a minimal threat to Indonesia, but it was not an increased threat compared to the pre-Malaysia territorial arrangements, and Indonesia need not have resorted to military confrontation in order to assure its own security. This chapter proceeds to flesh out the evidence.

Firstly, the historical context for security relations between Indonesia and Malaysia is examined, particularly in the light of the Anglo-Malayan defense arrangements and the externally-supported rebellions of 1958 in Indonesia. Next, the Malaysian territorial proposal is analyzed for its implications for Indonesian security, in terms of the “encirclement” problem, as well as the “Chinese problem” that the simmering socialist movement in Singapore represented.

### **The Context of Anglo-Malayan Cooperation**

Under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaya sought to preserve an independent and non-aligned foreign policy in the aftermath of the Second World War, to strengthen the nationalist solidarity of its people, and to avoid being caught in any political or

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation,” in *International Politics*, eds. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 54.

military crossfire between the Western and Communist blocs. Thus, Malaya, and later Malaysia, resisted joining the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), established in 1954, of which Britain was a member. This foreign policy difference was a persistently awkward element in the defense cooperation between Malaya and Britain.

When the Federation of Malaya was declared independent in 1957, the Anglo-Malayan Defense Agreement (AMDA) was signed that same year, committing Britain to assist in the defense of Malaya. In 1959, the other Commonwealth nations Australia and New Zealand joined this defense obligation.<sup>5</sup> The AMDA permitted the retention of British forces and bases in Malaya. In return, Malaya was committed to support Britain if Singapore, British Borneo (North Borneo) or Hong Kong were attacked.<sup>6</sup> Malayan permission was required each time British bases in Malaya were needed for military action, but only in support of Commonwealth, not SEATO, interests. British military bases were also maintained in the Sabah and Sarawak, then British Crown Colonies.

At that time, prior to merger into the Malaysian Federation, Singapore was a self-governing state. Situated at the southern tip of the Malayan peninsula, it relied on Britain for its external defense and foreign policy. In turn, Britain had far fewer restrictions in using its Singapore military bases, most notably its Royal Air Force (RAF) base, than in using its Malayan bases, and could thus use that base for SEATO purposes. Most notably, from the Indonesian point of view, the Singapore RAF base had been used to support anti-government rebellions in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi, in 1958.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Subritzky, 27.

<sup>6</sup> David Hawkins, The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: From AMDA to ANZUK (London: The Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, 1972), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Mezerik, 10.

## **The Western Subversion of Indonesia, 1958**

The 1958 anti-Jakarta rebellions in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi provide the crucial historical basis for Indonesian accusations that “Malaysia was created by the British to encircle Indonesia.”<sup>8</sup> The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) in Sumatra, and the Universal People’s Struggle (PERMESTA) in Sulawesi, were rebellion movements which joined forces to set up an alternative government. The PRRI and PERMESTA sought to replace a central government observed to be leaning increasingly leftward, with the rising strength of the communist PKI within its ranks.<sup>9</sup>

These rebellions were supported by British and American covert military support. The United States and Britain had provided arms to the rebels, and flown aircraft from their airbases in Clark Air Base in the Philippines and the Singapore RAF base respectively. In particular, American participation was confirmed beyond suspicion when an American pilot was shot down near Ambon in May 1958.<sup>10</sup> Anglo-American support for subversive movements within Indonesia were the brainchild of the American Eisenhower-Dulles administration, which wanted to stem the tide of increasing communist influence in Indonesia by cultivating dissident movements that could overthrow the central government.<sup>11</sup> These 1958 efforts were exposed and crushed by the Indonesian military and PKI elements, much to Western embarrassment. More importantly, they formed the basis for Indonesian fears of encirclement and subversion by foreign powers, which had nothing to do with the inferior land mass and population size of neighboring Southeast Asian states.

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<sup>8</sup> Antara, November 11, 1963, quoted in Mezerik, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Dewi Fortuna Anwar, “Indonesia: Domestic Priorities Define National Security,” in Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 481.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Lowry, The Armed Forces of Indonesia (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, Feet to the Fire: CIA Covert Operations in Indonesia, 1957-1958 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 15-16.

Thus, when Indonesia expressed opposition to the Malaysian idea, the Deputy Foreign Minister Sudjarwo said: “In 1958, the secessionist movement broke out in Sumatra with the support of British and other colonial interests [and] this secessionist rebellion, seriously threatening Indonesia’s freedom, obtained active support from British colonial interests in Singapore, Malaya and other colonial territories in Northern Borneo, and... our rebels indeed enjoyed some shelter in the so-called independent state of Malaya...”<sup>12</sup>

These set of circumstances indicate the presence of a security dilemma for Indonesia, as caused by the neighboring presence of Malaya or Malaysia. Indonesian internal unity and order had indeed been upset by British agents operating from the Singapore base, which would become part of the new Malaysia.

Malaysia rejected these Indonesian accusations on two grounds. Firstly, the 1958 rebellion should not have been sufficient to sour Malayan-Indonesian relations to the extent that the episode had to be dredged up in 1963. After all, Indonesia and Malaya had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Amity in 1959, the first article stating that the two nations “shall respect the independence and sovereignty of each other and shall strive to maintain the traditional, cultural and historical ties that have bound them together.”<sup>13</sup> Secondly, Malaysia also cited instances in which it took measures to prevent use of its territory as a rebels’ haven. Furthermore, the Malaysian defense was strengthened by the terms of the AMDA, which forbade the use of Malayan purposes for SEATO purposes.

The use or non-use of Malayan bases for subverting Indonesia in 1958 is a matter for detailed historical investigation, beyond the scope of this study. However, Malaysia had reasonable grounds for rebutting Indonesian arguments based solely on the 1958 incidents: if

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<sup>12</sup> Mezerik, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Mezerik, 97.

they did not prevent the ratification of the 1959 Friendship Treaty, why should they become a substantive issue in 1963? Indeed, Indonesia had not objected to the 1957 AMDA either.

For the second condition (“proportionate response”) to hold, the Indonesian response to its external environment must match perceived changes in the threat environment. There are two ways of framing the potential increase in threat that the Malaysian proposal constituted, in comparison to the pre-Malaysia status quo. Firstly, the encirclement problem could be worsened if British military influence were extended and strengthened not just in the Malayan homeland, but also in Singapore and the North Borneo territories. Secondly, notwithstanding the communist presence in the Indonesian government, the conservative, anti-communist and somewhat Sino-phobic Indonesian military (which was an institutional rival of the PKI) perceived the Chinese dominance of Singapore to indicate a strong communist potential in its people and its leaders. Army leaders in particular feared that the Malaysian Federation, despite its purported ability to prevent the Singaporean Chinese from becoming too influential, would one day be ruled by Chinese communists. This would export the “Singapore problem” or “Chinese problem” to Indonesia’s borders.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Threat Dimensions of the Malaysia Proposal**

Britain recognized that nationalist movements in its former colonies were ultimately irresistible, and saw the Malaysian proposal as a graceful way to reduce its commitments without making a full withdrawal. On their own terms, British commitments east of Suez needed to be reduced because Britain found it increasingly hard to sustain its overseas presence, especially with the debilitating effects of the 1961 sterling pound crisis. In August

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<sup>14</sup> Franklin B. Weinstein, Indonesia Abandons Confrontation: An Inquiry into the Functions of Indonesian Foreign Policy, Interim Reports Series, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1969), 6.

1961, the Southeast Asian commissioner-general of the British government, Lord Selkirk, warned the British Prime Minister Macmillan: “The resources at our disposal have become less and less adequate to meet the commitments we still retain. The result of this is that we are stretched to the point where our strength might snap under the strain.”<sup>15</sup> The British were equally averse to a full withdrawal from Southeast Asia, because of their defense arrangements with New Zealand and Australia, both of which have troops in Singapore and Malaya as part of a joint “forward defense” against a communist threat.

The key to assessing the level of British-Malaysian threat to Indonesia lies in the terms governing the British use of Singapore. Unfortunately, the historical record is ambiguous. It is clear that the Tunku was deeply reluctant to allow British use of Singapore for SEATO purposes, while the British were keen to retain its use with minimum restrictions. This disagreement was never fully resolved even in the Anglo-Malayan talks of November 1961, as the conflicting latter-day interpretive accounts suggest. The London statement of November 23, 1961, was appropriately ambiguous: “[The Malaysian Federation] would afford to the British Government the right to continue to maintain bases in Singapore for the purpose of assisting in the defense of Malaysia, and for Commonwealth defense *and for the preservation of peace in Southeast Asia.*”<sup>16</sup> The last clause suggests that the British gained some ground with regard its use of the Singapore base. However, as late as May 1962, twelve months after the Tunku’s first announcement for merger, he took issue with the British sending a Hunter squadron from Singapore to Thailand as a SEATO gesture, and warned that British forces withdrawn from Malayan bases to assist SEATO operations “would not be allowed to return to Malaya.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Subritzky, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Hawkins, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Hawkins, 20-21.

Thus, it is not clear that the British could use Singapore for SEATO purposes without restrictions, as they would have liked. Neither the British nor Malaysia were in a position to be intransigent about their respective preferences, since they were operating on a tight time schedule in the run-up to Federation. One British official remarked that “the formation of Malaysia was difficult enough without looking into the hypothetical future.”<sup>18</sup> Britain was sensitive to pressure from its allies – Australia, New Zealand, and the United States – to retain a decisive presence in Singapore, which is an important base location in both Commonwealth and SEATO strategies because of its central geographical position.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, nonetheless, Britain was also prepared for the possible eventuality that their use of Singapore eventually face restrictions from the Malaysian leadership. A restricted use of Singapore might not be worth the cost of maintaining forces there, and Britain had in 1962 even considered withdrawing altogether from Singapore and relocating its bases to Western Australia.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, the encirclement threat claimed by Indonesia is ambiguous at best, and is not well-substantiated by the evidence. SEATO and Commonwealth strategies were aimed at containing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, which could conceivably involve subversive operations against communist movements in Indonesia, but the Anglo-Malayan deadlock over the use of Singapore base (prior to Confrontation) indicate that the external threat to Indonesia had not really increased since 1958. Britain was far more likely to face restrictions in using the Singapore base, than have restrictions removed from its use of bases in Malaya and North Borneo. In fact, the latter prospect was improbably, since the Tunku was adamant about keeping Malaya from being part of any SEATO strategy. More importantly, the encirclement threat extrapolated from the 1958 rebellions had an American-Filipino component

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<sup>18</sup> Subritzky, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Subritzky, 28.

in addition to a British-Malayan component, yet the Indonesian diplomatic offensive was directed primarily at the Malaysian idea, not at the US nor the Philippines. This is not an insignificant fact; a later chapter on domestic-political factors will explain why British-backed Malaysia constituted a superior scapegoat for Sukarno's diversionary "solidarity-making" war, compared to the US-backed Philippines.

### **The Singapore-Chinese Problem**

The proposed merger between Malaya, Singapore and the North Borneo territories has an unmistakable ethnic dimension. Prior to 1961, the Tunku had resisted any suggestion that Malaya merge with Singapore, since Singapore contained a large Chinese population that would tip the ethnic balance against the slender Malay majority in Malaya. The "Chinese problem" was twofold. Firstly, the *bumiputera*, or indigenous "sons of the soil" consisting mostly of Malay people, were an economically underachieving group which feared becoming second-class citizens in an economy increasingly dominated by Chinese commerce. If the Chinese gained a population majority and greater electoral strength, they would threaten the institutionalized preferential policies which bestow exclusive economic and political advantages for the *bumiputera*. Secondly, fresh from the Communist Emergency which lasted from 1948 to 1960, the Tunku equated a strong Chinese presence with a strong communist potential, and saw Singapore as a potential internal security threat in the event of territorial co-optation. These perceptions were compounded by the evolving split between the Singapore People's Action Party (PAP) between English-speaking moderates, led by Lee Kuan Yew, and radical Chinese leaders with a thinly veiled communist agenda.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hawkins, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Mackie, 38.



The merger proposal of 1961 marked a paradigm shift in Malayan thinking about Singapore. The possibility of Singapore as an internal security threat seemed to have become viewed as a lesser evil, compared to the prospect of a free-floating “Cuba off the coast of Malaysia.”<sup>22</sup> The Malaysian Federation was the brainchild of British policymakers, who saw it as “an opportunity for the painless decolonization of their three Borneo territories... as well as a way to encapsulate a potentially turbulent Singapore.”<sup>23</sup> A British analyst puts a different nuance on it: “It is... a gross distortion of the facts to claim that Britain forced Malaya to take Sarawak and Sabah as a condition for her being given Singapore. If anything, the reverse is more likely to have been true – that we wouldn’t let Malaya have the other territories without Singapore.”<sup>24</sup>

More simply put, Singapore was a “hot potato” for which neither the British nor the Malaysians were eager to take formal responsibility. Despite the British desire to retain military use of Singapore, they were reluctant to retain responsibility for its internal order. The latter burden on the British will be eased if Malaya merged with Singapore. The inclusion of the North Borneo territories helped to preserve the indigene majority in the Malaysian merger, and prevent the formation of a Chinese majority. This made the territorial proposal more acceptable to the Tunku.

The following table shows the ethnic compositions of the Malaysian territories as of December 1961:<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hawkins, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Sodhy, 112-113.

<sup>24</sup> Hawkins, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Mackie, 37.

Ethnic Composition of the Malaysian Population (thousands): December 1961

	Malaya	Singapore	Sarawak	Sabah	Total	%
Indigenes (including Malays)	3,620	238	529	320	4,707	46.2
Chinese	2,670	1,279	243	110	4,302	42.2
Indian/Pakistanis	813	142	0	0	955	9.4
Others	129	41	8	45	223	2.2

Table 2-1

A straightforward union of the peninsula alone, which is a merger between Malaya and Singapore, would have removed the majority status of the indigene (mostly Malay) majority of Malaya, and increased the perceived “Chinese problem” decisively. The following chart compares the ethnic ratios of two territorial arrangements: the actual merger arrangement of the Malaysian Federation, and the hypothetical, geographically more ‘natural’ merger between Malaya and Singapore alone.

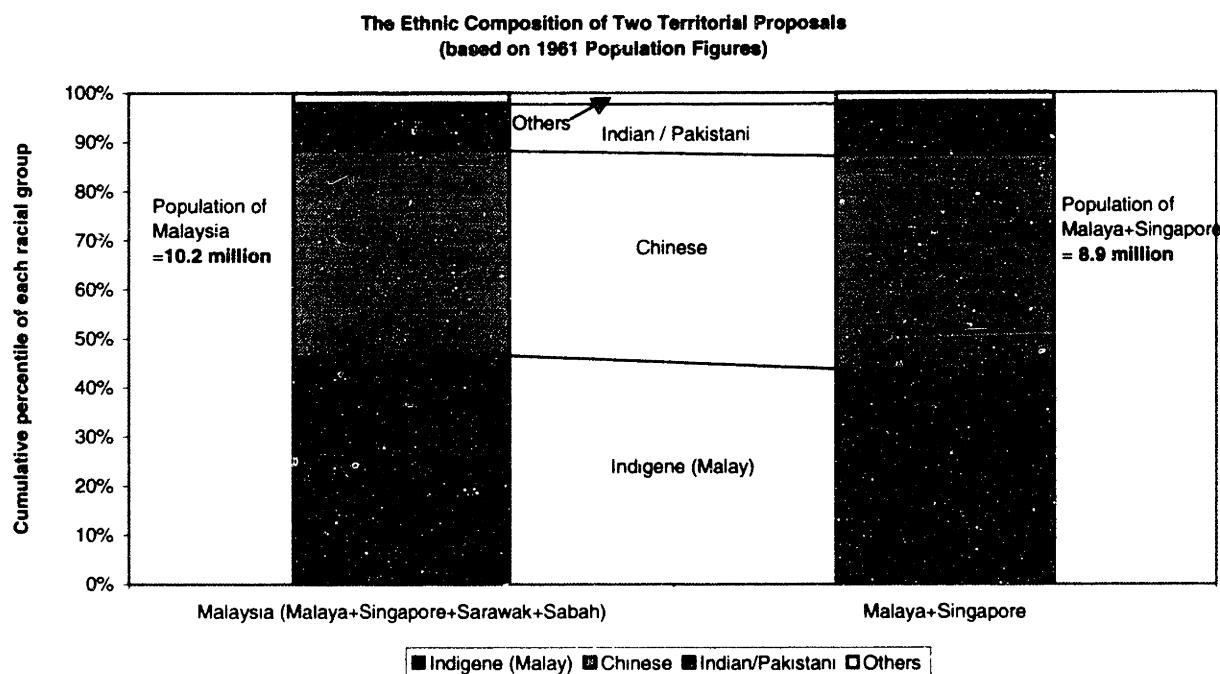


Figure 2-1: Comparing the Ethnic Composition of Two Territorial Arrangements

Therefore, the British idea of forming a Malaysian Federation simultaneously addressed the fears of Malayan leaders, who were more concerned with the electoral aspects of ethnic ratios, and British leaders, who were primarily concerned with containing a dormant internal security threat.

However, Indonesian army leaders were not as sanguine, and feared that the Malaysian territorial consolidation would simply export the “Singapore problem” to Indonesia’s borders, in the event of a takeover of Malaysia by communists in Singapore.<sup>26</sup> This fear was also shared by the Philippines, which was alarmed by the prospect of a Chinese communist movement developing near its southern border. Significantly, the fear of Chinese communists was never directly stated in Indonesian rhetoric, since it was a fear largely confined to army leaders, but not applicable to the powerful PKI. Indeed, since the Confrontation was in part a nationalistic foreign adventure meant to contain the antagonistic rivalries between the army and PKI, its rhetorical justifications must be unifying rather than divisive.

Whatever the nature of Indonesian rhetoric, the Chinese presence in Malaysia appeared to represent a genuine threat of communist subversion. If Indonesia were a unified rational actor that acted only against genuine (or, at least, sincerely perceived) threats to its security, without any extraneous concerns about domestic politics, it would embark on a Confrontation if and only if it effectively combats the Chinese threat, compared to other non-confrontational options.

However, Confrontation was never a necessary measure against the Chinese threat; the June 1963 Foreign Ministers’ Conference had established a confederation between the Maphilindo states, and the Maphilindo alliance was anti-Chinese in its orientation. The Philippines Foreign Minister S.V. Lopez commented that Maphilindo was “a means of stopping

possible Singapore subversion of Indonesia.”<sup>27</sup> The Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio also commented in August 1963: “The problem of internal Chinese subversion and threat of political control by the Chinese can probably not be effectively met through establishment of Malaysia, but probably this is as good as any other solution. Maybe Maphilindo can be worked out in a way that will contribute to this.”<sup>28</sup>

More simply, Maphilindo as a political association aimed at drowning 7 million overseas Chinese in their states in a sea of 125 million of Malay origin, as opposed to a match between 4.3 million Chinese and 5.7 non-Chinese in the Malaysia Federation.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in order to strengthen the ethnic formula for preserving a Malay majority in Malaysia, the Tunku needed to expand the notion of Malay ethnic identity to subsume other non-Malay *bumiputera* races in the nominal Malay numbers, which had reportedly offended the indigenous Dayaks and Kadazans of Sarawak.<sup>30</sup>

However, Sukarno barely gave the Maphilindo plan a chance to work, for he had declared his policy of “Crush Malaysia” (or *Ganjang Malaysia!*) in July 1963, barely a month after the Manila talks in June. This suggests that he was motivated by more than just the need to contain the Chinese threat, or was not even motivated by this threat. Specifically, he was probably restrained by the strong PKI constituent in his government, for the Indonesian communists had feared that Maphilindo would become more anti-Chinese than anti-colonial.<sup>31</sup>

Comparing Maphilindo cooperation with Confrontation as alternative policies to address the perceived “Chinese threat” embodied in Singapore and consequently in the creation of Malaysia, Confrontation did not appear to be more effective *ex ante*, and certainly appeared

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<sup>26</sup> Weinstein, *Indonesia Abandons Confrontation*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Sodhy, 117.

<sup>28</sup> Sodhy, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Sodhy, 117.

to be more costly, *ex post*. Therefore, Confrontation has no basis as a last resort against the security threat posed by Malaysia, certainly not along the “Chinese problem” dimension.

### **The Threat Hypothesis Reconsidered**

The criterion formulated to test for the presence of a security dilemma for Indonesia, based on a material security threat posed by Malaysia, is not fully satisfied by the evidence. The first condition of *basic threat* is satisfied by Malaysia, since Indonesia has a historical basis for fearing subversion by neighboring powers and agents.

However, the Indonesian response to the Malaysian threat was not a *proportional response*, since there is no convincing evidence that Malaysia could threaten Indonesia more than Malaya could. In fact, because the British had problems retaining its unrestricted use of the Singapore military base after the creation of Malaysia, it is far easier to make the case that Malaysia threatened Indonesia even less than Malaya. Furthermore, British military bases had existed in North Borneo before the formation of Malaysia. If the baseline level threat posed by Malaya against Indonesian security was a sufficient *casus belli* for Indonesian armed retaliation, then Indonesia would not have signed the 1959 Friendship Treaty with Malaya, and nor would it have waited till the 1962 West Irian conflict to end before expressing defensive concerns about the impending formation of Malaysia.

Lastly, Confrontation cannot be shown to be a rational response to a security threat environment, or a *last resort*. The Maphilindo coalition would have addressed the communist threat posed by the Chinese component of Malaysia and, more broadly, the Chinese populations in all three Maphilindo states.

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<sup>30</sup> Mackie, 42.

<sup>31</sup> Mackie, 169.

One additional consideration, which does not fit neatly into the hypothesis test used so far, is that the post-coup events of 1965 placed the Indonesian army in much firmer control of the regime, yet the strengthened army control was followed soon by the end of Confrontation and a peace agreement with Malaysia. To the extent that one expects the army to be either the most militarily aggressive or most concerned about the military security of the country, its autonomous decision to abandon Confrontation deals a serious blow to the idea that Malaysia had all along been a genuine security threat.

Breaking down the Malaysian threat into its “encirclement” and its “ethnic” dimensions, the encirclement of Indonesia has not increased with the consolidation of territories into a Greater Malaysia, and that the Confrontation was not the least-cost method of addressing the Singapore-Chinese threat. The security dilemma is at best permissive, but not sufficiently strong to compel Indonesia to choose the path of Confrontation. The “threat” explanation is insufficient to our understanding of the causes of Confrontation, and the other candidate explanations must be considered.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**Leading The New Emerging Forces:**  
**The Ideological Explanation**

“The Indonesian Revolution he [Sukarno] evokes is seen as the greatest revolution of all time: greater than the American Revolution,... the French Revolution, and... the Communist Revolution in Russia, for in the Indonesian Revolution, according to Sukarno, are included the national revolution, the political revolution, the social revolution, the cultural revolution and the revolution of man, a ‘summing up of many revolutions in one revolution.’”<sup>1</sup>

J.A.C. Mackie

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The ideological explanation for Confrontation, considered in this chapter, is intimately connected with and not totally separable from the domestic-political explanation (considered in the next chapter), because both consider the domestic political history and development of Indonesia up to the point of Confrontation, as well as the conflicting ideological commitments of rival political actors. Yet, these two explanations are also the most closely competing hypotheses. While the domestic-political argument stresses the role of Confrontation as a unifier of rival domestic-political forces, launched by a leader in search of a scapegoat and safety-valve, the ideological argument claims that the principles and imperatives of Indonesian ideology necessitated and justified the Confrontation. *Ideas* matter more than *actors* in this framework.

Ideology may be defined briefly as “a form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones. It is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it.”<sup>2</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher, Destutt de Tracy, first conceived the concept of ideology during the French Revolution, and described five features of ideology, which still have relevance today and in application to Indonesian

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<sup>1</sup> Mackie, 91.

ideology. Firstly, an ideology contains a comprehensive theory about the world and its ontology. Secondly, it sets out a program of action. Thirdly, this program of action involves struggle. Fourthly, there is extensive recruitment for an ideological cause. Lastly, some importance is placed on the role of intellectual leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The chief ideological basis for Confrontation was that it was part of the larger global struggle between New Emerging Forces (NEFOS) and Old Established Forces (OLDEFOS). The NEFOS was said to include the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as socialist countries and other intra-state 'progressive' elements, while the OLDEFOS were the *Nekolim*.<sup>4</sup> This ontology is by no means the only feature of Indonesian ideology, which traces its lineage to its wartime occupation days and embodies contradictory, evolving elements.

An ideological explanation for the Confrontation, favored by J.A.C. Mackie, has two key propositions. Firstly, the ideology of a NEFOS-OLDEFOS struggle was necessary for the Confrontation. In other words, as a necessary factor, the ideology served to justify and rationalize the conflict. The second and stronger proposition is that the Confrontation was *necessary* for the ideology to remain valid. Another way to paraphrase this proposition is that ideological factors *made* Confrontation necessary, and are its *sufficient* cause.<sup>5</sup>

These propositions may be tested by examining the historical bases and sources of Indonesian ideology, including elements which corroborated or contradicted the more developed theory of the NEFOS-OLDEFOS struggle. In particular, the ideological basis for

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<sup>2</sup> "Ideology," in Encyclopædia Britannica [cited May 6, 2001]; available in <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=109254&tocid=0>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> "Origins and characteristics of ideology," in Encyclopædia Britannica [cited May 6, 2001]; available in <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=109254&tocid=12148#12148.toc>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup> J. Soedjati Djiwandono, Konfrontasi Revisited: Indonesia's Foreign Policy Under Soekarno (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1996), 45.



earlier conflicts, the Indonesian war of independence (1945-1949) and the West Irian conflict (1962), are shown to be less disputable and can therefore serve as a baseline against which to assess an ideological explanation for Confrontation. The evidence strongly indicates that the ideological factors were necessary for the prosecution of Confrontation, but were not sufficient. In fact, aspects of Indonesian ideology became transformed in response to the act of Confrontation itself, indicating that other causal factors, outside the ideological framework, were responsible for Confrontation. Therefore, ideological explanations are at best permissive explanations for the Indonesian decision to “crush Malaysia.”

### **Ideological Roots: Anti-Colonialism and Non-Alignment**

Modern Indonesia owes its borders to the Dutch East Indies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the age of European colonialism in Southeast Asia. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch control of the territories were challenged by nascent nationalist movements led by indigenous élites, as well as the Japanese Occupation of 1942-1945. After the Japanese surrender of 1945, Sukarno, then a prominent nationalist leader, and his deputy Muhamad Hatta declared Indonesia independent. A provisional parliament elected Sukarno president. The Sukarno-Hatta government then spent the next four years fighting and negotiating with the Dutch, who rejected the 1945 independence proclamation. In 1949, the Dutch finally capitulated, but the status of West Irian remained in dispute. The Indonesian war of independence was over in 1949, but the larger Indonesian Revolution, as the national struggle for freedom and sovereignty came to be known, was therefore not complete.

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<sup>5</sup> Mackie has more than two propositions, but some of them are synonymous claims. The two propositions described in this thesis are the most parsimonious reformulation of his claims. See Mackie, 331.

The protracted, populist nature of Indonesia's independence experience caused it to become fiercely anti-colonial and nationalistic in its outlook. It viewed the outside world as being filled with hostile forces threatening its independence and integrity.<sup>6</sup> The first sentence of the preamble to the 1945 Constitution reads: "Whereas Independence is the natural right of every nation, Colonialism must be abolished in this world because it is not in conformity with Humanity and Justice."<sup>7</sup>

This great concern with independence, both in terms of formal sovereignty and freedom from external influence, is the motivation behind non-alignment, or what Sukarno called an "active and independent foreign policy."<sup>8</sup> Indonesia did not want to appear subservient to any foreign power. At the same time, however, Indonesia was acutely aware of its need for foreign aid in its task of national economic reconstruction, and non-alignment was partially a means by which Indonesia could avail herself to any power willing to provide aid, regardless of ideological orientation.

In 1955, the Afro-Asian Conference of Non-Aligned Nations held in Bandung was an opportunity for Indonesia, on account of its size and the charismatic qualities of its leader, to establish its moral and ideological leadership over the international community of previously colonized, non-aligned nations. At this conference, Sukarno espoused a three-camp theory of the world, maintaining that the Non-Aligned Movement represented a third political force in addition to the Western and Communist blocs. Despite the effort invested in cultivating this ideology of non-alignment, Sukarno would later abandon it in the course of Confrontation, in favor of closer diplomatic association with China.

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<sup>6</sup> Djiwandono, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Djiwandono, 35.

## The Growth of Anti-Western Sentiment

Anti-Western overtones began to emerge in Indonesian foreign policy only since 1959, when Sukarno re-established the 1945 Constitution over the parliamentary systems established in 1949 and 1950. The 1959 establishment of the authoritarian Guided Democracy henceforth gave Sukarno the powers and freedom to give fuller and a more militant expression to the anti-colonialist strand of his foreign policy. Neither was the anti-Western bias confined to Sukarno alone for, “although there were unquestionably substantial differences in the intensity with which Sukarno, the army leadership and the PKI harbored suspicions of the major power, it may be said that all three of the political forces in the ascendancy was Guided Democracy took root were seriously distrustful of the West.”<sup>9</sup>

The years preceding Guided Democracy had allowed anti-Western sentiment to simmer and grow. The system of parliamentary democracy, a Western institutional import, failed to meet the requirements of internal security, as evidenced by the breakout of rebellions in Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1958. Furthermore, these rebellions had been supported by American and British agents. Indonesia was also frustrated by its failure to negotiate a satisfactory settlement over West Irian with the Dutch, and the reluctance of the United States, for all its commitment to supporting self-determination, to aid the Indonesian cause with pressures against the Dutch, until late in 1962.<sup>10</sup> “Guided Democracy” permitted these built-up anti-Western grievances to be expressed more fully.

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<sup>8</sup> Djiwandono, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Weinstein, *Dilemma of Dependence*, 302.

<sup>10</sup> Djiwandono, 38.

## The West Irian Conflict, 1962-1963

Foreign Minister Dr Subandrio announced in July 1959 that Indonesia would no longer rely on the UN to support its West Irian claims against the Dutch, but would embark on a confrontation “in all fields... as was the case during the struggle between 1945 and 1950.”<sup>11</sup> Sukarno began publicizing his conviction that imperialism and colonialism was the abstract and ubiquitous evil threatening world peace and national freedoms, which must be opposed through revolutionary means. In 1960, while addressing the United Nations General Assembly, Sukarno renounced imperialism in an impassioned speech:

“There are tension and sources of conflict [sic] in many places... Almost without exception, imperialism and colonialism is [sic] at the root of the tension, of the conflict... until these evils of a hated past are ended, there can be no rest or peace in all this world.”<sup>12</sup>

The Indonesian-Dutch conflict in West Irian was framed, not as a purely bilateral conflict, but as a microcosm of the worldwide revolution against colonial forces:

“The struggle to liberate West Irian is also part of the struggle to abolish imperialism-colonialism all over the world... the struggle of Algiers,... Congo,... Angola,... Tunisia... the struggle of all nations against imperialism everywhere!”<sup>13</sup>

In these statements, only the classical concepts of imperialism and colonialism are mentioned, but not neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism was still a relatively new concept, recently put forward at the 19<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly in 1958 and defined as “the

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<sup>11</sup> Djiwandono, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Djiwandono, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Djiwandono, 43-44.

practice of granting a sort of independence with the concealed intention of making the liberated country a client-state, and controlling it effectively by means other than political ones.”<sup>14</sup>

The West Irian conflict was ideologically justified by recourse to the threat of imperialism and colonialism, but not neo-colonialism, which became incorporated into Sukarno’s ideology only in the next year, at the 1961 Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned Nations. Sukarno asserted that the world was divided into two camps in mutual *confrontation*: the Old Established Forces (OLDEFOS) of *Nekolim* versus New Emerging Forces (NEFOS).

The addition of the concept of neo-colonialism was not the only update to Sukarno’s ideology. Another change was the implicit rejection of the more common view of a world divided along Cold War cleavages, in favor of a worldview that emphasized the antagonism between colonial interests and anti-colonial forces. Sukarno also contradicted his own earlier three-camp theory of the world (divided between the Communist bloc, the Western bloc, and the Non-Aligned Movement) described at the 1955 Bandung Conference. He said at Belgrade that non-alignment and independence in foreign policy meant not taking sides in the Cold War, but required “firmly choosing the side of the progressive, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, anti-neocolonial forces” and opposing the exploitative status quo, in the more important NEFOS-OLDEFOS conflict.<sup>15</sup>

### **Toward the Confrontation Against Malaysia**

It is worth revisiting the original Indonesian statement, made in November 20, 1961, by the Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr. Subandrio about the Malaysian proposal mooted six months earlier:

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<sup>14</sup> Mezerik, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Weinstein, *Dilemma of Dependence*, 167.

“We are not only disclaiming the territories outside the former Netherlands East Indies, though they are of the same island, but – more than that – when Malaya told us of its intentions to merge with the three British Crown Colonies of Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo as one Federation, we told them we had no objections and that we wished them success with this merger so that everyone might live in peace and freedom... Naturally, ethnologically and geographically speaking, this British part (of Borneo) is closer to Indonesia than, let us say, to Malaya. But we still told Malaya that we had no objection to such a merger, *based upon the will for freedom of the peoples concerned.*”<sup>16</sup>

The last clause of the statement expressed an Indonesian sympathy for the rights of the co-opted territories to self-determination. In November 1961, prior to any expression of further Indonesian opposition to Malaysian merger, Britain and Malaya made arrangements for the British Cobbold Commission to assess the wishes of the peoples regarding merger. In September 1962, a Singapore referendum also confirmed the willingness of the Singapore people to merge with Malaya. Such arrangements should have been sufficient to address the Indonesian concerns for self-determination.

Most accounts assert that Indonesia did not oppose Malaysian merger at this point in time because of its preoccupation with the West Irian struggle. This assertion suggests that the delay in opposition against Malaysia could be afforded because it was not an immediate security threat. Furthermore, the Brunei revolt of December 1962 provided the *casus belli* for Indonesian objections to the Malaysia proposal, since the revolt called the free will of the people into question. From this point onward, Confrontation against Malaysia appears to be an inevitable product of the Indonesia’s ideological commitments. As Mackie claims: “Confrontation was ideologically necessary for Indonesia in the sense that a government proclaiming the doctrine of the New Emerging Forces could not afford to ignore the Brunei

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<sup>16</sup> Mackie, 105.

revolt and subsequent developments in Malaysia without being accused of denying or abandoning its own principles.”<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, the first proposition of the ideological explanation for Confrontation is satisfied: without ideology, Indonesia could not oppose Malaysia except on expansionist grounds. Furthermore, because Confrontation jeopardized and indeed led to the cancellation of massive IMF-American loans to Indonesia under the eight-year stabilization plan proposed for 1963, the Indonesian decision to risk losing these material gains in favor of an costly but ideologically attractive anti-*Nekolim* crusade underscores the importance of the ideological motivation behind Confrontation.<sup>18</sup>

The second proposition - that ideology *made* Confrontation *necessary* – has a mixed record. It is supported by the overriding impression that Malaysia was truly neo-colonial; as historian John Darwin writes: “Malaysia, strongly bound to Britain by defense treaty and economic ties, was intended to perpetuate British influence well into the post-colonial era.”<sup>19</sup> The vigorous British and allied response to the subsequent Indonesian Confrontation bears some witness to this claim.

However, the ideological necessity of Confrontation is called into question by the following factors. Firstly, according to anti-colonialist principles, the Portuguese colonial control over East Timor, located in the geographical embrace of the Indonesian archipelago,

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<sup>17</sup> Mackie, 331.

<sup>18</sup> Franklin B. Weinstein devotes his entire book, Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence: From Sukarno to Soeharto, to comparing the foreign policies of Sukarno and his successor Suharto, by examining how they addressed the central tension or dilemma of foreign policy: “How to use outside resources without compromising independence. Should leaders permit the country to become dependent on foreign capital, or must independence be guarded even at the sacrifice of such resources?” Unlike Suharto who favored getting foreign aid, Sukarno was more committed to the ideology and reality of independence. See page 20.

This tension has been framed differently by Dewi Fortuna Anwar, who described “administrators” and “solidarity-makers” in Indonesian government. See Anwar, “Indonesia: Domestic Priorities Define National Security,” in Alagappa, 480.

<sup>19</sup> Subritzky, 8.

should have made East Timor the more obvious object of struggle after West Irian. While Malaysia was *neo*-colonialist, Portuguese East Timor was purely colonialist. Furthermore, it would have been militarily easier to fight the Portuguese in tiny East Timor than to confront British troops in Malaysia. To the extent that Indonesian ideological drives call for a more glorious, strenuous and obviously heroic struggle for the Indonesian people, perhaps British-backed Malaysia was an ideologically more attractive target for attack than Portuguese-controlled East Timor. However, it remains to be seen why Sukarno chose to focus the national attention on Malaysia rather than East Timor, when Portuguese colonialism could easily be argued as being more ideologically egregious than British neo-colonialism.

Secondly, there are indications that the Brunei revolt was supported by Indonesia, in preparation and execution, since the rebel leader Azahari had visited Jakarta twice in 1962.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, though the rebellion ultimately failed, its boldness strongly suggests that it had received some sort of backing from Indonesian agents.<sup>21</sup> Since this rebellion was the *casus belli* for the start of Indonesian criticisms against Malaysia, it indicates that Sukarno wanted to manufacture a convenient excuse for opposing Malaysia.

Thirdly, there is at least one dimension in which the anti-Malaysia Confrontation was ideologically less necessary than the earlier anti-Dutch campaign in West Irian. While Dutch-controlled Irian was purely colonial, British-controlled Malaysia was, at worst, neo-colonial. Notwithstanding the counterpoint that neocolonialism and pure colonialism are equally egregious as components of the OLDEFOS concept, West Irian was part of the former Dutch East Indies, but Malaysia is a separate, albeit neighboring, territory altogether. The West Irian

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<sup>20</sup> Mackie, 121.

<sup>21</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 468.



campaign is much more justifiable as a consolidation of the Indonesian struggle for independence and freedom, than the Confrontation against an external territory.

In order to strengthen the ideological justification for confronting Malaysia, Sukarno needed to redefine the successful resolution of the West Irian dispute, not as a consolidation of Indonesia's nationalist pro-independence goals, but as a *beginning* to a wider movement of confrontation against the *Nekolim*:

“... Our victory last year was just the beginning of victory. What is the use of a beginning if it is not continued?... we will still have to continue the struggle.”<sup>22</sup>

There is a sense in which the ideological need to confront Malaysia was trumped up, beyond the level of ideological rationale needed for the West Irian conflict. The successful resolution of the West Irian conflict could have ended the Indonesian struggle, without significant loss of prestige for Indonesia if it had allowed the Malaysian proposal to proceed peacefully (which it did not, and even the *casus belli* for opposition was planted). Indeed, the Indonesian offensive against Malaysia was not supported by most members of the Afro-Asian community over which Indonesia had claimed ideological and moral leadership in 1955! The Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's trip to Africa in late 1964 confirmed the anti-Confrontation stance of several African countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, Algiers, Mali, Liberia and the Ivory Coast countries.<sup>23</sup>

Comparing the three major Indonesian conflicts up to that point (the war for independence 1945-1949, the West Irian campaign 1962, and the Confrontation), the ideological justification for Confrontation was weaker than for the two preceding conflicts. As

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<sup>22</sup> Djiwandono, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, 525.

Saul Rose writes: "Sukarno, having been through two Dutch police actions, kept on shadow-boxing after the referee had rung the bell."<sup>24</sup>

### **Revolutionary Ideology and Its Contradictions: A Brief Digression**

The concept of a NEFOS-OLDEFOS confrontation is a specific formulation of the more general and vague concept of the Indonesian Revolution, usually defined in the nationalistic terms of sovereignty and freedom. In one statement:

"A Revolution is a long chain from one confrontation to another... against all obstacles hindering the process of Revolution... only when we have gone through the process of confrontations... will our Revolution reach the level of 'self-propelling growth'..."<sup>25</sup>

The idea of an Indonesian Revolution obscures subtle ideological differences within the Sukarno regime. Donald K. Emmerson makes a distinction between two types of revolutions: *national revolutions*, which are horizontally directed between the countries emerging from a colonialist-colonized relationship, and *social revolutions*, which are vertically expressed between classes within a society.<sup>26</sup> The Indonesian Communist Party, PKI, was ideologically committed to both concepts of revolution. However, the Indonesian military, especially the army, was committed to national revolution but not social revolution. The conservative, anti-communist army traces its roots to the national revolution of 1945-1949, but a social revolution threatens its hegemonic role in enforcing internal order, and implies support for secessionist movements in Indonesia and the arming of a communist "fifth column."

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<sup>24</sup> Saul Rose, "Asian Nationalism: The Second Stage," *International Affairs*, April 1967, quoted in Djiwandono, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Djiwandono, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Donald K. Emmerson, interview with author, at Stanford University, Jan 24, 2000.

Deliberately or otherwise, Sukarno's grandiose, hyper-nationalist descriptions of the Indonesian Revolution avoid grappling with the conceptual details of revolution. A domestic-political argument, examined in detail in the following chapter, proposes that Sukarno's marshalling rhetoric, aside from its substantive ideological content, functioned as a unifier of heterogeneous domestic political actors. Such nationalist rhetoric forces political actors to temporarily bury their differences; no party can afford to waste opportunities to demonstrate their loyalty to the nationalist cause.

This suggests that ideology is in part influenced by the expedient of satisfying disparate domestic interests and commitments. In the case of Confrontation, the nature of the revolutionary ideology appears influenced by the exigencies of muting intra-regime differences. Furthermore, as Confrontation progressed, Indonesia compromised another pillar of its ideology (its non-aligned stance) by its decision to enter an axis with China in 1965. These factors show that, despite the claim that ideology was a contributing factor to Confrontation, the latter in turn influenced the precise shape of ideology.

### **Ideological Explanations Reconsidered**

This chapter discusses the ideological underpinnings of Confrontation, with particular attention paid to the decision to *start* Confrontation. In summary, it is shown that ideology was indeed necessary to rationalize the Confrontation. Without the anti-*Nekolim* ideology as nominal rationale, Indonesia could hardly wage a military campaign against Malaysia without being unambiguously accused of blatant expansionist aggression. However, evidence for the ideological necessity of Confrontation – that ideology made Confrontation *necessary* and *inevitable* – is weak. The ideology of the Indonesian Revolution and the NEFOS-OLDEFOS

struggle did not make “crushing Malaysia” nearly as necessary as it was to fight the Dutch in West Irian.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**Confrontation As Solidarity-Maker:**  
**The Domestic Politics Explanation**

“There is no doubt that Sukarno’s anti-colonialism was genuine, but clearly he used the struggle against an external enemy as a rallying point to unite the polarized national élites and to keep himself in power.”<sup>1</sup>

Dewi Fortuna Anwar

“... the essential shape of political competition during the Guided Democracy years was triangular, and it was the increasingly tense struggle between the army leadership and the PKI, with Sukarno attempting both to sustain and limit that rivalry in order to enhance his own position, that came to dominate the politics of the period.”<sup>2</sup>

Franklin B. Weinstein

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The threat-based and ideology explanations, examined in the previous two chapters, have been shown to be necessary for Confrontation, but they leave important questions unanswered. The threat that Malaysia represented in comparison to Malaya was not truly increased, so Sukarno was clearly motivated by more than just security factors when he decided to wage confrontation. Ideological factors certainly played an important role in motivating the conflict, but ideology did not make the Confrontation path either necessary or inevitable. This chapter attempts to argue that the Confrontation served the instrumental function of containing internal tensions and uniting rival political forces against a common enemy.

A story about domestic politics as a cause of Confrontation is necessarily complex and dynamic, but three main components can be discerned. Firstly, the internal instabilities of Indonesia are described in brief historical context, as well as with reference to the key cleavages within Indonesian government. The key political forces in tension are the Indonesian army and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The characteristics of each group and the

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<sup>1</sup> Anwar, “Indonesia,” in Alagappa, 482.

nature of their mutual tensions are described. Secondly, it is shown that domestic-political considerations made Confrontation necessary in the immediate aftermath of the West Irian conflict. As Brackman writes: "Arrows pointing to Malaysia as the next destination [after West Irian] were nailed to the signpost."<sup>3</sup> Lastly, in connection to domestic-political factors,, the course and especially the conclusion of Confrontation are used to provide vital clues to the real causes of its *beginning*. The Confrontation ended largely as a result of radical changes in the domestic-political situation when, after the failed coup of October 1965, the army took over and eliminated the PKI.<sup>4</sup> With a shortened political spectrum and the removal of a rival, Confrontation no longer served a useful domestic-political function and could be ended.

### **Prelude to Guided Democracy**

After the Indonesian war of independence against the Netherlands was concluded in 1949, a new parliamentary constitution was drawn for Indonesia, which reduced Sukarno to a figurehead president. Indonesia's first national elections of 1955 cemented the position of four dominant political parties: the Islamic parties Masjumi and Nahdatul Ulama (NU), the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) and the PKI, most of which drew their credentials from their supporting roles in the nationalist revolution.

The years following the 1955 elections brought many internal problems, however. Party rivalry was bitter, and the conflict between the export-producing outer islands and the

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<sup>2</sup> Weinstein, *Dilemma of Dependence*, 302-303.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold C. Brackman, *Southeast Asia' Second Front: The Power Struggle in the Malay Archipelago* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 131, quoted in Djiwandono, 47.

<sup>4</sup> See Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3d ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 80. Blainey makes a misinformed criticism against the diversionary war theory: he says that the intensification of "civil war" in the years 1965-66, meaning the anti-communist crackdown of the army, should have correspondingly intensified the external Confrontation according to diversionary war theory, but such a relationship did not occur. In a tacit misapplication of *ceteris paribus*, he did not consider that Sukarno was no longer around after 1965 to play the "unifier role" so necessary to the workings of a diversionary war.

urbanized island of Java (where Jakarta is) became more marked. The outbreak of revolts in Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1958 catalyzed Sukarno's argument that Western-style parliamentary democracy was unsuitable for Indonesia's particular needs and conditions. In July 1959, the system of "Guided Democracy" was instituted as an authoritarian alternative to parliamentary arrangements. It strengthened the hand of Sukarno's executive leadership at the expense of the parliament's representative powers, and aimed to restore 1945 Presidential Constitution.

This development engendered a climate of political competition in which political parties needed to out-bid each other in strident nationalist rhetoric, in order to preserve their power by demonstrating loyalty. Sukarno's ruling strategy was to reconcile competing political forces by nurturing an "overriding sense of national purpose."<sup>5</sup> It was in this atmosphere of whipped-up nationalist frenzy that the PKI became an ascendant power in the domestic regime, its popular support and electoral strength strengthened by widespread village disintegrations and economic decline.<sup>6</sup> Outside the Soviet Union and China, it was the largest communist party in the world with a member count of approximately two million.

### **The Army and PKI**

The Indonesian army, the largest and most powerful service of the armed forces ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*), grew out of the people's fight against the Dutch for independence, and retains a fiercely nationalistic and revolutionary character. As one commentator asserts: "The Indonesian army sees itself as quite different from other armies in the world, because it was never created as an instrument of the state, but was itself involved in

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Jan M. Pluvier, *Confrontations: A Study in Indonesian Politics* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 1965), 42.

the creation of the state.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike other armies, the ABRI is also an active participant in domestic politics, with its dual functions (*dwifungsi*) of external defense and internal stabilization first described in 1958.<sup>8</sup> In that same year, the Army Chief of Staff, Major-General A. H. Nasution also prescribed a “middle way” for the army, which refers to a median course between the extremes of political inactivity (as in most states) and a military takeover of the country (as in Latin America).<sup>9</sup> The national-revolutionary feature of the military is complementary to the nationalist ideology of revolution, but must not be confused with the social revolution envisioned by the PKI communist ideology.

Guided Democracy was based on the inclusive slogan of *Nasakom*: nationalism, religion, communism. This certainly paved the way for the PKI to grow in strength, under the protection of Sukarno. The PKI appealed to Sukarno because he could identify ideologically with its “progressive revolutionary” agenda, and also because the PKI was a well-organized party with extensive mobilization reach down to the village level. As Sukarno did not want to become too dependent on the army with its monopoly over armed force, and chose to cultivate the PKI as a counterweight to the army.<sup>10</sup> As the legitimacy of army political power was dependent on the legitimacy and prestige of Sukarno’s personal leadership and government, the army did not seek to openly oppose Sukarno but instead persuaded him to limit the growth of the PKI. The triangular relationship between Sukarno, the army and the PKI was kept in equilibrium by constant political maneuvering by leaders and by the skilful hand of Sukarno.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics Under Suharto: The Rise and Fall of the New Order*, 3d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 63-64.

<sup>8</sup> Crouch, 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Crouch, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Weinstein, *Dilemma of Dependence*, 303.



## **The Aftermath of the West Irian Victory**

The West Irian conflict of 1962 may have grown out of ideological prerogatives, but it also divided the political elite between so-called “administrators” and “solidarity-makers.”<sup>11</sup> The former group was concerned with economic stabilization and development, while the latter group was dedicated to anti-colonial and revolutionary principles, *even at the cost of economic decline*. The use of the term “solidarity-maker” by Anwar (1998) implies that aggressive or assertive foreign policies played a key role in unifying disparate interest groups within the Indonesian government.

The conclusion of the West Irian conflict had provided a closure to the Indonesian struggle for its own territorial sovereignty and unity, since all the territories of the former Dutch East Indies were now absorbed into Indonesia. Sukarno now had the time and resources for the development and rehabilitation of the domestic economy, embattled by expensive external conflicts. The fiscal deficit had grown almost nine-fold from seven billion *rupiahs* in 1960 to sixty-one billion *rupiahs* in 1962.<sup>12</sup> Galloping inflation also threatened to ruin Indonesia, with a six-fold increase in living costs from 1958 to 1962.<sup>13</sup> The first minister Djuanda was an “administrator” who saw the end of the West Irian war as an opportunity to stabilize the economy. In addition to a proposed austerity plan, economic deregulation were begun in May 1963, and a comprehensive 8-year aid program was worked out with the United States (agreeing to total loans of \$400 million) and the International Monetary Fund (with a “standby loan” of \$50 million).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anwar, “Indonesia,” 480.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Army Area Handbook for Indonesia, prepared for the Department of the Army (Washington DC: Foreign Area Studies Division), September 1964, 647.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Army Area Handbook, 673.

<sup>14</sup> Crouch, 56.

This opportunity for economic rehabilitation, rational as it was, did not match the agenda of key political élites. Sukarno, the quintessential “solidarity-maker,” may have calculated that the nationalist agenda of West Irian conflict served well in holding his government together, and that “a concentration on economic reform... would have exacerbated domestic conflict by imposing sacrifices in the interests of stabilization... thus a continuing low-level crisis might have seemed more effective in gaining support for Sukarno than a program involving economic deprivation.”<sup>15</sup> The army feared that the end of martial law (scheduled for May 1963), the end of external conflict, and the Djuanda austerity proposals will result in deep budget cuts and an extensive demobilization of the 300,000 troops raised for the West Irian campaign.<sup>16</sup> There were fears that an army without an external vent would direct its energy against the PKI.<sup>17</sup> The PKI itself, being one of the most stridently anti-Western groups in the Guided Democracy, opposed the economic stabilization plan, for it threatened to draw Indonesia into the Western camp and compromise its political independence.<sup>18</sup> If Indonesia were to abandon its austerity plans in favor of high spending on an external confrontation, these aid packages would almost certainly be withdrawn.

Though the economy required it, this political climate of disunity and mutual distrust was not conducive to the mammoth administrative task of economic reconstruction, which threatened to open up more rifts. Instead, it appeared restless for another foreign adventure toward which different groups could direct their nationalistic energies.

This interpretation of domestic politics as the impetus for the subsequent anti-Malaysia Confrontation is well-supported in the literature. Harold Crouch (1978) writes: “With the

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<sup>15</sup> Crouch, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Crouch, 51, 59.

<sup>17</sup> Crouch, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Mackie, 135.

intensification of the struggle for West Irian in 1960 the climate facilitated mutual accommodation between the main political forces. But the successful conclusion of the campaign in 1962 introduced a period of uncertainty that was resolved only when Indonesia launched a crusade against the formation of Malaysia in September 1963.”<sup>19</sup> This echoes an argument made with more panache in 1965 by Jan M. Pluvier:

“[The 1962 Indonesia-Netherlands conflict in West Irian] was a clear victory for Indonesia, for Sukarno personally and for his regime which, like all dictatorial regimes, needed an occasional fanfare of success. But this very victory contained an element which could prove dangerous. The ending of the West Irian problem meant the removal from the political scene of an issue upon which popular attention could be focussed... Now that the Dutch scapegoat was finished with, a new scapegoat was needed to divert attention from the economic situation.”<sup>20</sup>

To support his claim that Confrontation against Malaysia was a diversionary war, Pluvier makes the case that the Portuguese government in East Timor, the Philippines and Malaysia were plausible candidates in 1962 as targets of an Indonesian crusade, and compares them accordingly.<sup>21</sup> The following table makes use of Pluvier’s observations to compare these three candidate targets on three dimensions: security threat, level of colonialism, and scale of potential conflict. These indicate the kind of calculations and alternatives that Sukarno might have faced in contemplating his next external crusade. Furthermore, they reinforce the arguments made in the last two chapters to undermine the full validity of “threat” and “ideology” theories of Confrontation.

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<sup>19</sup> Crouch, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Pluvier, 62-63.

<sup>21</sup> Pluvier, 63-64.

<b>Potential target (patron power)</b>	<b>Security Threat</b>	<b>Level of colonialism</b>	<b>Scale of Potential Conflict</b>
East Timor (Portuguese)	Low	High (complete colonialism)	Low (too short war)
Philippines (American)	Moderate	Moderate (neo-colonialism)	High(U.S. involved)
Malaysia (British)	Moderate/High	Moderate (neo-colonialism)	Moderate

**Table 4-1: Comparing Potential Scapegoats after the 1962-1963 Settlement of the West Irian Dispute.**

East Timor, with a small area of less than eight thousand square miles, is the eastern half of Timor island located southeast of Sulawesi. It was a Portuguese colonial enclave, never part of the Dutch East Indies. Portugal was the only real colonial, not just neo-colonialist, power left in Southeast Asia. Therefore, it would have justified an ideologically motivated Indonesian attack. However, any conflict over East Timor would not have lasted long enough, nor warranted enough troops, to fulfil a sustained mobilizing and unifying function.

The Philippines, with its American bases, was no less “neo-colonialist” than Malaysia. It also posed an “encirclement”-style security threat to Indonesia, since its air force base had been used to support the Sumatra and Sulawesi dissident movements of 1958. In fact, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had masterminded that subversive operation against Indonesia! However, any anti-Philippines conflict threatens to involve the US, which grossly outmatched Indonesia in military capability.

Malaysia was therefore the ideal “safety-valve” because it was neo-colonialist and represented an adequate front for a diversionary external conflict. Its security threat could be considered higher than the threat of Philippines only because of the contiguity between East Malaysia (North Borneo) and Indonesian Kalimantan. Yet, the prospect of fighting British troops was much more manageable than the prospect of challenging American military might

in the Philippines. Furthermore, as Confrontation developed, it was clear that Sukarno and army leaders aimed, initially at least, to keep the conflict at a low intensity, short of a declared war, so as not to provoke a full and determined British retaliation.<sup>22</sup>

The British were also psychologically more attractive as a target, than either the Americans or the Portuguese. Indonesia has no outstanding quarrel with Portugal, and although it resented the lack of American support during the West Irian conflict, it was US pressure which, however late it came, tipped the balance against the Dutch during the conflict's resolution and settlement. However, Anglo-Indonesian relations is laden with baggage from the early years after Indonesian independence during which, in the name of preserving "law and order," British troops had briefly aided the Dutch against Indonesian fighters.<sup>23</sup> If Sukarno needed to find another foreign enemy to oppose, to replace the Dutch bogeyman after 1962, the British were an ideal lightning rod for domestic restiveness.

### **The Difficulties of Solidarity-Making**

The domestic-political explanation for Confrontation, based on the concept of a diversionary war, is not without its ironies. While the anti-Malaysia campaign served as an effective temporary palliative against internal disunities, it actually deepened those disunities beneath the surface of nationalistic solidarity. These exacerbated internal tensions had culminated dramatically in the coup attempt against Sukarno in October 1965. Nevertheless, this result of Confrontation does not effectively repudiate the domestic-politics theory. The failure of Confrontation to effectively address domestic political tensions over the *long term* does not disprove the *short-term* effectiveness of Confrontation as a rallying action in the

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<sup>22</sup> Crouch, 60-61.

context of 1962. The failure of an action to fulfil its intended purpose does not discredit the importance of that purpose; the failure of a breadwinner to keep his family united does not mean that he did not try in the first place.

In fact, the difficulties of solidarity-making during the Confrontation period highlight the importance of the domestic-political functions which Confrontation aimed initially to fulfil. Firstly, it must be recognized that the unifying function of Confrontation had both positive and negative aspects. Its positive aspect emphasizes benefits for all participating actors. This is succinctly summed up by Weinstein (1969):

“In the name of confrontation, the army could hope to maintain both a strong military establishment and a strong political position, while at the same time the PKI could use confrontation to legitimize its own hopes for a Fifth Force and for an anti-Western trend in foreign policy that would weaken the army’s political position. And at the very same time, confrontation lent legitimacy to Sukarno’s contention that national unity under his revolutionary leadership was indispensable to Indonesia’s survival. Each of the three groups, then, sought to use confrontation’s legitimizing capacities to alter the domestic political environment and enable maximum use of its own particular political skills of instruments of power.”<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the negative aspect highlights the *costs* of *not* supporting Confrontation. Once Sukarno had committed the nation to Confrontation and couched the anti-Malaysia campaign in shrill nationalist terms, neither the army nor PKI could afford to distance itself from the policy and risk losing political legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> This aspect of Confrontation contained the seeds of its failure to fundamentally unite the country because: “although all groups mouthed approval of the president’s ideological precepts, his doctrines often became

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<sup>23</sup> Djiwandono, 26-28.

<sup>24</sup> Weinstein, Indonesia Abandons Confrontation, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Emmerson interview, Jan 24, 2000.

weapons in the hands of the army, the PKI, and other groups in their efforts to demonstrate each other's [sic] disloyalty."<sup>26</sup>

Hence, to the army and PKI involved, Confrontation was both an opportunity to exploit, and an opportunity not to be missed. However, the course of the conflict benefited both groups unevenly. While the army obtained corporate benefits such as the maintenance of a high budget and mobilization level as well as the partial reintroduction of martial law in 1964, it was ambivalent about the Confrontation because it risked plunging Indonesia into a full-scale war against Britain and its allies. In this light, the corporate benefits of Confrontation were an appeasement rather than a reward, and the nationalist and ideological character of Confrontation meant that the army could ill afford to be apathetic.<sup>27</sup>

As the conflict with Malaysia simmered, the army developed doubts about the campaign. It did not play the foremost military role as it did during the West Irian conflict, but faced competition from the navy and especially the air force, which was perceived as being more sympathetic to the PKI.<sup>28</sup> The decision to extend the campaign to the Malayan peninsula was made not by the army leadership, since it escalated the conflict to a level of risk and intensity which the army did not feel prepared for, but by an intelligence division of the Supreme Operations Command (*Koti*) headed by Foreign Minister Subandrio. The Labis parachute drop of September 2, 1964, was spearheaded by the air force commander Omar Dhani, head of the Vigilance Command (*Koga*) established in May 1964.<sup>29</sup>

The PKI made far greater gains than the army from Confrontation, which must have exacerbated the tensions inherent in a domestic zero-sum power struggle. The militant anti-

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<sup>26</sup> Crouch, 44.

<sup>27</sup> This echoes the "negative aspect" of solidarity-making described just one paragraph earlier. More importantly, it reinforces the argument, made in Chapter 4, that "ideology" was necessary for Confrontation (though the converse has been somewhat discredited).

colonial character of Confrontation gave it a tremendous opportunity to strengthen its own ideological appeal, consolidate its mass support, and reinforce the legitimacy of its presence in the government of Guided Democracy.<sup>30</sup> Right from the start, the PKI was responsible for mobilizing and instigating the mob attack against the British embassy in Jakarta.<sup>31</sup> The PKI was also successful in ultimately alienating Indonesia from the international community, which suited its ideology of independence from foreign influence, and welcomed the rapprochement with China.

The Confrontation represented a continued attempt by Sukarno to simultaneously foster and limit competition between the army and PKI, in a delicate balancing game of which the PKI was the primary beneficiary. This balancing game eventually turned deadly for Sukarno, as the abortive coup attempt of October 1965 led to his eventual political downfall and death while under virtual house arrest.

### **The Manner of Confrontation's End**

The coup d'état against Sukarno, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung of the palace guard but eventually crushed by General Suharto the commander of the Strategic Reserve Command (*Kostrad*), marked a sea change in Indonesian domestic politics. Suharto pinned blame for the coup on the PKI and spent the next two years wiping out the communists. Confrontation did not end immediately as the army needed to maintain some of the nationalist propaganda behind the conflict, but raids against Malaysia followed an obviously declining pattern in the following months, until Indonesia signed a peace accord with Malaysia in August 1966 to end the dispute.

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<sup>28</sup> Weinstein, *Indonesia Abandons Confrontation*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Crouch, 61.

<sup>30</sup> Crouch, 63.

<sup>31</sup> Mackie, 189.



Those two years are an enigmatic period which invites deep historical investigation and speculation to this day. Two types of questions emerge. Who masterminded the coup: dissident officers, the PKI (as claimed by Suharto), the army (looking for an excuse to divert troops back to Jakarta), or the American CIA? How exactly did the US support or assist the army's anti-communist pogrom? These questions are not the focus of this study and have been more fully treated elsewhere, though the historical overview of Confrontation is based on the emerging consensus that these domestic-political changes had received American support.

One thing is clear: Confrontation ended because of a change in domestic politics.

Weinstein summarizes this proposition:

“... it is impossible to gain any real understanding of confrontation's demise without attempting to see foreign policy from the perspective of the competition for political power in [Jakarta]. Confrontation derived much of its vitality from its ability to carry out important [domestic] political functions, and it was only when the changed political [domestic] situation rendered it incapable of fulfilling those functions any longer that confrontation was abandoned.”<sup>32</sup>

In fact, Confrontation was not only *incapable* of fulfilling the political function of “solidarity-making” after 1965, but was no longer *necessary* for that function, because that function was no longer relevant to what Emmerson calls “a shortened political spectrum.”<sup>33</sup> Even before the coup attempt, the covert attempts of some senior army officers to explore peace negotiations with Malaysian representatives as early as January 1965 (after the UN withdrawal) indicate that, although the army leadership seemed keen by then to end Confrontation, it could not afford to voice any overt opposition to the campaign while Sukarno was in power and the PKI was entrenched.

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<sup>32</sup> Weinstein, Indonesia Abandons Confrontation, 90.

<sup>33</sup> Emmerson interview, Jan 24, 2000.

Clearly, the competitive realities of domestic politics were not just necessary for the beginning of Confrontation, but a primary driver behind its prolongation. The domestic-political explanation for Confrontation, in the particular form described thus far, provides a far more consistent account of the Indonesia-Malaysia conflict than the “threat” and “ideology” explanations.

## CONCLUSION

“You will find that for every occurrence there are at least three explanations. The most likely, the absolutely certain one... and the true one.”<sup>1</sup>

A fictional detective’s maxim

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To sum up, each of the three explanatory categories examined – threat, ideology, domestic politics – contains important facets of the causes of Confrontation, and none of these hypotheses are dispensable. However, the threat and ideology arguments fall short of their own expectations.

The threat argument is incomplete because the Indonesian response to its external environment cannot be traced to any substantive change in the security environment, except perhaps in the psychological sense that an official consolidation of territories into a larger Malaysian entity seemed to pose a cognitive threat to Indonesia. If Malaysia were truly a threat to Indonesian security, Indonesia should not have hesitated to oppose its formation early in mid-1961, even if it were occupied by the conflict in West Irian. The end of Confrontation also fails to match the expectations of the threat hypothesis. Notwithstanding the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in August 1965, the Confrontation had ended just as it begun, with no appreciable change in the regional security environment. In fact, though the Singapore separation could have assuaged Indonesian fears of an eventual Chinese takeover of Malaysia, it could have just as easily rekindled fears of an unrestricted use of its military bases by the hostile British *Nekolim*. The change in the security environment was ambiguous at best, and the Singapore separation cannot be interpreted to mean very much in the Indonesian security calculus. If Malaysia had been a genuine threat all along to Indonesia, the military takeover of

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<sup>1</sup> Paolo Levi, “The Ravine,” trans. Denis Godliman, in The Oxford Book of Detective Stories, ed. Patricia Craig (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 318.

Jakarta should not have led to the end of Confrontation, but to its continuance or even its intensification.

The ideology argument stands up to scrutiny far better than the threat argument, because Confrontation could hardly be justified without a recourse to the deep ideological principles that had, for all their grandiloquence and conceptual tensions, guided Indonesian conduct. However, to say that Confrontation needed ideological factors as justification does not imply that ideology made Confrontation necessary or inevitable. Indonesia could have wrapped up or at least paused its so-called revolutionary struggle in 1962, after winning West Irian from the Netherlands, without appreciably discrediting its ideological commitments. Furthermore, much of Indonesian ideology rested on its self-proclaimed leadership over the New Emerging Forces, roughly corresponding with the non-aligned Afro-Asian nations which had attended the 1955 Bandung Conference. Yet, Confrontation caused Indonesia to lose the support of this important group of nations who viewed the anti-Malaysia campaign as gratuitous aggression, not as an ideologically or morally necessary crusade.

Domestic politics provide the most vital clues to the roots of the conflict. In its beginning, its progress and its end resolution, the Confrontation provides evidence consistent with the expectations of a “diversionary war” hypothesis. After West Irian, Indonesia needed a scapegoat and a unifying “safety-valve” more than it needed economic reconstruction, though the latter need was not trivial. During the fight against Malaysia, each group (Sukarno, the PKI, the army) tried to use Confrontation to try to further its own interests. Yet, despite the uneven success of these actors, most notably the army’s lackluster success in gaining political centerstage and Sukarno’s increased isolation from the international community (and the lack of any face-saving exit from the conflict), no group could afford not to distance itself from the

Confrontation cause. If the army decided not to support Confrontation because of its tenuous security justifications, it would lose out to the PKI which strengthened its own domestic prestige by zealously supporting Confrontation and increasing its influence over Sukarno. Before the army could regain the initiative against its domestic rival after the dubious coup of 1965 and eliminate the communist presence from Indonesia, the Confrontation needed to continue. After the “October affair” of 1965 and the subsequent communist crackdown by the army, however, the most dangerous internal political cleavage was removed, thus removing the domestic need for Confrontation.

Since the peace accord of 1966 between Indonesia and Malaysia, the two nations have lived in peace. The British eventually left its last Far East base in Singapore in 1971, unwilling to maintain even a nominal military presence after depleting its economics resources in the limited war against Indonesia. In that sense, after the British departure, Malaysia was no longer a security or ideological threat to Indonesia. The domestic situation had also stabilized during the New Order, under the presidency of Suharto (who stepped down in 1998), whose tight control over the military and the country had kept domestic tensions at bay.

The Confrontation was the peculiar result of a peculiar time, with its unique mix of historical, political and personal factors: the volatile atmosphere of post-colonial nationalisms, the complex interplay between Cold War rivalries and regional and internal politics, and the personal hold of an extraordinarily charismatic and ultimately dangerous man over the country he led. As new norms of peaceful inter-state cooperation emerge in Southeast Asia since the 1967 establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a repeat episode of Confrontation seems less likely than ever. However, as Sukarno himself said in 1955 in dark and prophetic irony, “the peoples of all countries walk in fear lest, through no fault of theirs,

the dogs of war are unchained once again.”<sup>2</sup> His legacy for the region, as a microcosm of an anarchic international realm, is one of fear.

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<sup>2</sup> Kahin, 40.

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