

## Malaysia – Indonesia Conflict: In the National Interpretation 1963 – 2010

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### *Abstract*

*The people of Malaysia and Indonesia established kinship relations long before the two countries were formed which gave rise to similarities in culture, customs, and habits. However, in reality, the national perspective of each country is not always in line, thus triggering the ups and downs of bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries. Through this research, the examiners wish to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of the two countries' nationalities from geo-strategy, geo-economic aspects, socio-cultural geography aspects, as well as defense and safety aspects. . These aspects show a fairly high dynamic, as can be seen from the ups and downs of Indonesia-Malaysia relations between 1963 and 2010. To obtain an accurate analysis, data was extracted directly from leading information providers from both countries who have knowledge and experience. Knowledge of the object under study, such as former government officials who were involved in foreign activities, former soldiers who were directly involved in the confrontation and still have fresh memories of the war, as well as academics and researchers who have studied the confrontation. To achieve this, data from a number of Malaysian scientists were also sought. Realist and Liberalist theory as well as other relevant theories used in this research as. From the data analysis, the study reveals that geoscientific and geographical aspects are the main causes of the "tidal wave" relationship between the two countries. Moreover, the Melaka border strait has become a "critical point for the two countries, which have overlapping interests so that the Malaysia-Indonesia conflict will*

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*continue to exist. Therefore, the most optimal recommendation according to this study is to place the sea boundary in a "Status Quo" position or a "floating" position, but managed jointly through formal and informal approaches for the welfare of both countries. and culture through economic, Islamic, and military diplomacy approaches.*

*Keywords: Kinship Relation, National of Interpretation, Floating Position.*

## **Introduction**

Indonesia and Malaysia are two neighbouring countries that are geographically close together so that socio-culturally they have many similarities and geo-economically they have a symbiotic relationship. This kind of condition has at least a close national perspective throughout the ages. However, in reality the closeness to expectations is not always the same because the two countries have different national interests. Linda Sunarti, 2014, said that if we look closely, the similarities are not binding factors between the two countries to always have a harmonious relationship.

As the impact of the cold war and the systemic factor of the role of the United States and the Soviet Union, third world countries had no other choice in determining their foreign policy because the international arena played an important role in determining the course of action of the leaders of small and weak countries (Mohd. Noor Mat Yazid (2016) This is the beginning of the dynamics of the ebb and flow of Malaysia's relationship with Indonesia which is influenced by the competition between the two world powers between the Communist Bloc and the Capitalist Bloc (Hadiningrat, 1971).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW/ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Judging from the history of bilateral relations between Indonesia and Malaysia, the period 1963-1966 was the most bitter because of the personal rivalry between Sukarno and Tengku Abdul Rahman (Pour, 2004). Gullick in Yoseph (2004) said that President Sukarno and Tengku Abdul Rahman did not like each other. The strong sense of mutual suspicion between the two leaders of the country cannot be separated from the historical background and leadership factors of each (Linda Sunarti, 2014).

Since the fall of Sukarno who was replaced by Suharto and the arrival of Tun Abdul Razak who replaced Tengku Abdul Rahman, political changes began to occur to end the conflict in the form of a compromise (Ahmadi, 2007). In the peace process there were systemic factors that pushed the two countries to end the confrontation, firstly

the war had experienced saturation and Sukarno's policy of collapsing Malaysia's confrontation resulted in a dilemma, secondly the separation of Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia on August 6, 1965 as a form of absolute defeat of the British policy in supporting Malaysia (Pour, 2009), thirdly as a result of changes in Indonesia's own domestic politics and Western powers, especially the United States which supported Suharto's rise to power with the aim of avoiding the formation of a communist state Mohd Noor Mat Yazid (2016).

Ironically, entering 1998, when the two countries had an intimate honeymoon, the relationship was again contradicted, although at the level of state policy makers trying to maintain good relations, the public was not satisfied with the policies taken by the state. Suryono (2012) said that in the social interaction cycle, it will rotate following changing conditions such as cooperation, competition, conflict and accommodation. After the 1998 reformation, the Indonesian political system more democratic change of which opened up wide opportunities for the public to be critical of government policies, which caused domestic factors to greatly influence the national perspective. The emergence of cases of mutual cultural claims (Efantino & Arifin, 2012), disputes in the Sipadan-Ligitan islands following Malaysia's claim to the Ambalat islands in the Sulawesi Sea (Media Indonesia, 2010). The climax of the case of the arrest of the Indonesian Marine Security apparatus (KAMLA) from the Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) by the Malaysian Marine Security Authority in the vicinity of Tanjung Berakit, Riau Islands (Munaf and Susanto, 2014) was in the spotlight of the media and the Indonesian people. President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (SBY) soft diplomacy political decisions received emotional pressure from the Indonesian people (Detik News, 2010 and Rosyidin 2014). Finally, President SBY stated that maintaining good relations with friendly countries, especially with Malaysia, was very important. But we cannot ignore the national interest, especially the sovereignty and integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Wibowo, 2010).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The purpose of this study is to understand the interpretation of nationality among Malaysia – Indonesia and to find solutions that can better support the relations between the two countries, qualitative methods are considered the most relevant to answer very complex, diverse and meaningful problem phenomena that it is impossible to collect data on social situation using quantitative methods. In addition, researchers also intend to be able to understand the social citations in depth, find patterns, hypotheses and theories.

### Study Location

The location of the study were Indonesia and Malaysia, especially in big cities with the consideration that it was easy to find former government officials who played the role in contributing to the principles of state politics, easy to find military figures who played historical roles in confrontations, easy to find sources from academics and historians who are observers of the Malaysia - Indonesia conflict and easy to find historical documents from news centers such as the national library and the media.

### Study instrument

In this qualitative research, the researcher becomes the main instrument. With the aim that researchers have the freedom to explore very complex and meaningful information from resource persons. Furthermore, based on the consideration of the study, a prefix theory was made which was used as a guide in collecting the necessary information data.

### Selection of resource persons

In this study, resource persons are selected based on their understanding and knowledge of the object being studied, so that they can open the door for further data collection. Therefore, who and how many resource persons are selected, can only be known after the study is carried out in the field or known as the snowball approach. In accordance with the study strategy prepared, in the 1963-1966 period, the main sources of historical actors who were directly involved in the confrontation were selected, the 1966-1998 period was directed to seek information directly from informants from former government officials who had been involved in formulating state policies in building relations between the two countries. A harmonious country, for the period 1998-2010 researchers tried to seek changes that occurred from the academics.

The former high-ranking government officials were chosen because they are considered to understand the dynamics and political policies taken by the government at that time. Meanwhile, the academic communities were chosen because they are considered to have studied Malaysia-Indonesia relations a lot, as well as the theories they found. Members of the military (Indonesian National Army) were chosen to supplement data from primary sources, because it is believed that they still have strong memories of the reasons for their involvement in the war. Likewise, military historians were chosen because they are considered knowledgeable about the military background involved in the confrontation.

### Data Collection Techniques

At first, the researcher tried to identify the chronology behind the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation and its dynamics after the confrontation through open sources. To understand each resource person's interpretation, the researcher asked open-ended questions starting with semi-structured interviews followed by more specific conversations in line with the answers of the resource persons. Data collection is done by triangulation through combining interviews with documentation studies and inductive analysis so that the results are more directed at understanding the meaning of generalizations based on the knowledge and views of the resource persons, so it is not the researcher's own interpretation.

In this study there are three main domains based on the principle in question, namely; cognitive domain to find out the flow of thought related to the knowledge understood. Affective domain to understand feelings such as emotions, motivations and attitudes when providing the information. The psychomotor domain aims to determine the behavior of resource persons in expressing problems. The three study were further developed into fifteen (15) categories and fourteen (14) study issues.

### Data Processing Techniques

Data analysis was carried out before entering the object under study until it entered the object of research. A Badur (2014) said that the common problems for qualitative researchers are subjectivity and reactivity. Therefore, by realizing that the amount of data information collected is very large and varied, then for further data processing, it is systematically compiled and analyzed using the Nvivo-Mac-11 program. Of course, the expected goal is that the results of the study can flow into their true meaning.

### Validity test

In qualitative methods, data discovery can be implied to be valid if there is no difference between what is reported by the researcher and what actually happened to the object being studied. In this case, the researcher devoted attention and tried to understand as best as possible the information provided by the resource persons he has met. The researchers tried to establish a closer, open, mutual trust and sustainable relationship so that no information is not revealed. If the results of the study were to get a clear picture and are in accordance with the desired context of the problem, it is transferred to the context of another problem, because it considered to have met the desired data standards. Stopping the search for information when the depth and certainty of the data has been obtained procedures

## **ANALYSIS**

The analysis of the best informative data that can be collected is descriptive in nature with the aim that the premise data can support and answer the problem being studied by the researcher. The results of the study and data analysis are as follows:

### **1. Similarity of Interpretation**

The results of the study show that there is a common interpretation that the confrontation case reflects the subjective circumstances that have been played by state leaders (Sukarno and Tengku Abdul Rahman). The impact on the interpretation of the community experienced the lowest level of public trust. When there is a change from being hostile to friendly and vice versa, it can be ascertained that the national interests in both countries have shifted their orientation. Likewise, when the two countries set priority for economic development to improve the welfare of their people and consider conflict as useless, then a good relationship is established. On the other hand, when there is a change in national interests that prioritize development in border areas, the potential for conflict begins again. The same interpretation is put forward as in the case of the occurrence of public emotions in the form of demonstrations (shows) both in Indonesia and in Malaysia, which are strongly influenced by the media for commercial purposes and even politicized for the interests of certain groups so that it often makes people's emotions difficult to understand. However, most people from both countries believe that the relations between the two countries that have been realized so far will not be affected. The results of another study show that there is a common view of the concept of brotherhood to create friendship as desired by the older generation, which is no longer fully in line with the desires of today's younger generation. Regarding the case of overlapping cultural symbols. Actually, both communities in Indonesia and Malaysia have the same interpretation that the culture that is developing today comes from the inheritance of the same ancestor. Therefore, if the cultural ties are close, it is believed to be able to create an inner bond or feeling for the people of the two countries. Another similar interpretation was found from the results of the study that the excessive sentiment that had occurred between the two countries did not have a strong impression on the current good relations. It is illustrated that when the hateful torture of one of the Indonesian prisoners of war in Malaysia quickly turned into a kinship when the two countries ended their confrontation. Therefore, it is believed that the hatred of the Indonesian people when swiping Malaysian citizens and burning the Malaysian flag is only a momentary hate event, when negative stimuli do not occur again, it will disappear by itself.

## 2. Interpretation Difference

The results of the study also show differences in the interpretation. It is recognized that the most vulnerable problem of high conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia is the issue of maritime borders which cannot be separated from the national interests of each country which have a political-geographic dimension. Interestingly, although both countries have ratified UNCLOS 1982 in 1985, until now there are still 18 points in the Malacca strait that have not been approved by the two countries. The results of the study show that until now there are still differences in interpretation so that there is no "political will" to resolve the dispute even though it is very urgent in terms of its geographical dimension which contains long-term national interests. Another difference in the interpretation is the belief of the Malaysian community that is quite large in the importance of cognate understanding in building their relationship with the Indonesian people, but for the pluralistic Indonesian people, it is impossible to rely on cognate principles to build lasting friendships. In the Indonesian workers case, it is recognized that they have symbiotic interests in both countries that need each other, but in fact the problems often occur so that both governments are busy to solve them. From the results of the study, it was found that there were different interpretations in the Malaysian media which described Indonesian workers as a negative social disease. This is what ultimately affects the different interpretations of society in the two countries. For Malaysia, this case is not disputed, because the occurrence of cases of Indonesian workers is considered a normal thing which is described as a relationship between employers and workers when a case occurs, especially if it is seen that the number of cases of Indonesian workers is very small compared to the number of Indonesian workers working in Malaysia. But for Indonesia, the case has become a public concern because it is considered to have no respect for Indonesian citizens. Another difference is found in the interpretation among Malaysians who consider Indonesia's aggressive attitude to be the same as the fierce and cruel behavior of the Majapahit kingdom when it occupied the Malay Peninsula. Based on this interpretation, the Malaysian armed forces in every scenario they make war games always illustrate the potential threat from the South, namely Indonesia, not from southern Thailand. Meanwhile, for Indonesia, Malaysia is not the main potential threat, so they never had a view of a threat coming from Malaysia.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the analysis of the study, it can be concluded that Indonesia and Malaysia are two countries in Southeast Asia that have uniquely

different characteristics from other countries. The two countries have many socio-cultural similarities and are relatively close kinship, but the relations always experience ups and downs, even though the two countries are a joint capital strength in ASEAN.

Judging from the history, it is recognized that the beginning of the division of the Malay family was when the British and the Dutch separated the archipelago into two colonies for their economic interests. In its development, the independence obtained by Indonesia and Malaysia after the cold war, further distanced the national life of the two countries because their national interests grew different. Since then, the subjectivity of the national perspective has caused conflicts in almost all aspects of life.

In realism's view, conflict occurring between countries is normal because a country sees other countries as enemies and to prevent war there must be a "balance of power". Different views from liberalism, conflict can actually be suppressed by prioritizing "common safety" through close economic, socio-cultural and strong political will. Associated with social systems theory, the tidal relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia is normal and inevitable. If there is a conflict, social norms will seek balance, eventually returning to normal again. However, from all the problems found, the root cause of the emergence of different national perspectives needs to be understood objectively in the aspects of geostrategy, political geography, geoeconomics, geosocioculture and defense also security, so that alternative solutions to the problem can be carried out through the right political, economic, public diplomacy, diplomacy and military approaches. Some of the subjectivity from a national perspective that occurred between Indonesia and Malaysia are as follows:

1. National interest is the implementation of a country's strategy in an effort to maintain its survival. Therefore, if there are ups and downs in relations between Indonesia and Malaysia, it is not far from the problem of changing the basis of their national interests.

2. There is a memory of hatred among some Malaysians who identify Indonesia such as the Majapahit Kingdom as Siamese Malays who are vicious and repressive. The psychological memory that is formed is not easily lost, it is evident in every Malaysian military making war drill scenarios, always directed at Indonesia as a potential threat. Another fact shows that Malaysia is still cooperating in the FPDA (Five Power Defense Arrangement) consisting of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. This less basic mutual suspicion can become a thorn in the flesh when the two countries want to build better relations.



3. The dynamics of the ups and downs of Indonesia-Malaysia relations from time to time will continue to occur which is difficult to predict because the socio-cultural aspect has the strongest influence. The case of using cultural symbols by Malaysia to attract tourists from other countries has caused political tensions with Indonesia. The tension that occurs is not due to cultural similarities caused by acculturation, but rather to the demands or recognition of Indonesian culture in Malaysia.

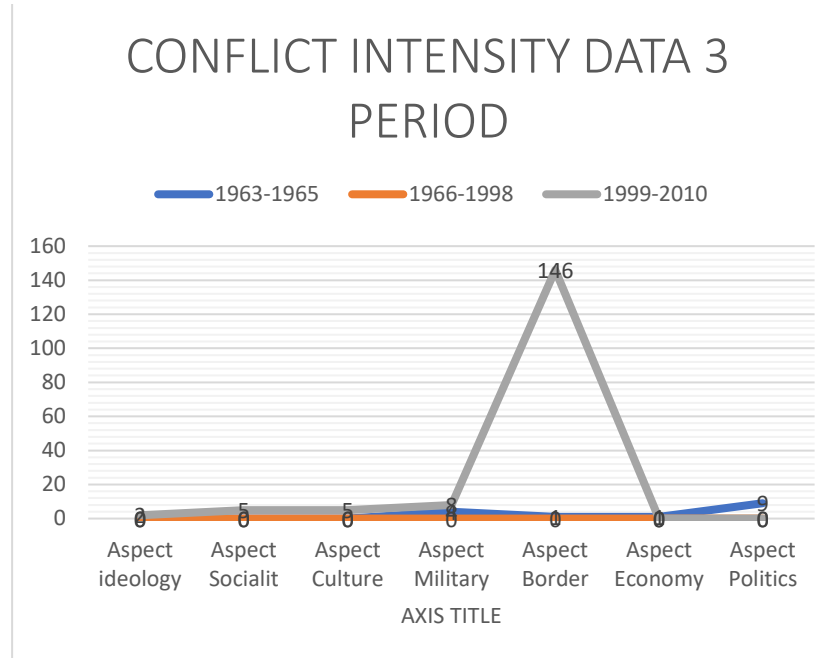
4. There was a refraction of Malay culture which was previously a tool to realize the closeness and kinship of the people of the two countries. This is indicated by the view of young people in both countries that cultural similarity is no longer seen as a tool for establishing relations between the two nations. Likewise, the print and electronic media, which serve as funnels of information, are not bound (independent) to put the news out in a proportional manner, but rather choose for their business interests only.

5. Indonesia and Malaysia are countries that both implement a democratic system but in fact differ in their implementation. After Indonesia's 1998 reform, the right to freedom of expression in public is protected by state law. However, Malaysia is still implementing the Internal Security Act (ISA) to maintain the stability of the country's safety. This difference is a stumbling block in relations between the two countries, which often creates diplomatic tensions when freedom of expression is exploited by parties who are less responsible for business and political or business interests.

6. The tension that has occurred in the Melaka Strait is the most crucial case compared to other cases. International political experts recognize the critical point of relations between countries on border issues because it is closely related to self-esteem, sovereignty and the right to exploit wealth in it. Actually, Indonesia and Malaysia have ratified UNCLOS 1982 since 1985, but in fact various problems have not been resolved until now, where there are still 18 points that have not been agreed upon. The impact of this case was that it caused military-diplomatic tensions when Malaysian Marine Security officers arrested Marine Security officers from the Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) on August 13, 2010 around Tanjung Berakit, Riau Islands and cases in the Ambalat islands.

7. From the various data collected, it can be seen that the frequency of conflicts between Malaysia and Indonesia that occurred in the 1998–2010 period was almost ten times higher than the 1963–1966 period, as illustrated in the following figure.

**Figure 1. Various forms of conflict**



The conflict that occurred in the period 1963-1966, the intensity was lower than in 1998-2010, there were only three causes of the dominant political aspect up to 64%, followed by the use of military force 29%. The dominance of the political aspect shows that there are very strong differences in interpretation between the two state leaders, while the use of military force that leads to confrontation is a consequence of political strategy. On the other hand, in the 1998–2010 period, the intensity of conflict was even higher. There were five causes of conflict, including: ideological, social, cultural, military and border (territorial) aspects. Border conflicts are very prominent 88% followed by the use of military force reaching 5%.

This shows that the potential for current conflicts and the threat of future conflicts are likely to be dominated by border (territorial) disputes, especially in the sea and land areas. Meanwhile, the use of military force is still limited as a deterrent power strategy. The effort to refrain is inseparable from its attachment as an ASEAN country. The condition that is feared in the future is if the country's leaders are no longer able to think objectively in seeing problems and the strengthening of differences in national interpretations and if the weakening of ASEAN ties is in line with the strengthening of each country's ego centricity because they feel economically strong.

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