

Malaya or Malaysia?

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The pan-Malay movement may be relatively unknown among pan-nationalist movements, but, unlike the other pan-nationalist movements, it was uniquely positioned to succeed for a brief period in the 1960s (roughly 1961-1966). There was no single unified movement, but there was a genuine attempt by various groups throughout Nusantara to pursue a pan-Malay union,<sup>1</sup> arguably supported by Sukarno of Indonesia, although ultimately without success. I propose to study the height of the pan-Malay movement in the 1960s, which began with the proposed formation of Malaysia, culminated with the establishment of the Maphilindo organisation, and ended with the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (border conflict). There are multiple problems with the very conception of the pan-Malay movement owing to disagreement over its exact scope, which such research may be able to address: Was Indonesia's opposition to Malaya and Malaysia due to genuine pan-Malay interest, Sukarno's prestige and egotism, internal problems in Indonesia, or something else entirely? Was there any objective reality to pan-Malay sentiment, such as Maphilindo, across Nusantara and especially Malaya-Borneo? Answering these questions will construct a picture of Indonesian and Malayan/Malaysian policy from the outside looking inwards, thereby shedding light on the true nature of Confrontation. My research will be based on English-language scholarly and government sources, which will be sufficient for a political history approach. These will be from Western governments, as, although Malayan and early Malaysian documents were kept in English, access to them is paid (per document!). These constraints lend themselves more to a political approach than a cultural approach, although the latter is more appropriate for the question of Malay identity and would have been more easily answered using Malay-language sources. In any case, how governments

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<sup>1</sup> I use Nusantara to refer to the wider Malaya region (the Malay peninsula and the Malay Archipelago, excluding New Guinea and the Philippines), Malaya to refer to the Federation of Malaya, and Malaya-Borneo to refer to all territories that were offered federation in Malaysia (Malaya, Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei, and Singapore). Malaya-Borneo/Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines are the three Malay(-influenced) states.

and scholars treated the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia will provide partial answers: Malayan-Borneans probably never developed a pan-Malay identity because their territories were the Malay heartland and could not have controlled all of Nusantara. It is doubtful that any government genuinely believed in pan-Malayism, except for that of Indonesia, and even then, it was probably not a popular sentiment. Sukarno likely believed in Greater Indonesia as a working mechanism towards pan-Malay unity, though he probably did not consider territorial control to be integral to his goals, and these expansionist or hegemonic goals were probably what truly fuelled anti-Malaysia sentiment and pan-Malayism in the regions where it did exist.

Scholars of Nusantara in the 1960s generally agree on the non-development of pan-Malayism in Malaya-Borneo, while they disagree on the motivations behind Confrontation and Maphilindo. Cultural historians do not contest the idea that Malay identity in Malaya-Borneo meant Malay ethnicity, and claim that any pan-Malay sentiment was due to security and economic concerns.<sup>2</sup> In Indonesia, however, Malay identity included all Malayic peoples and even the non-Malayic Papuans,<sup>3</sup> and therefore comprised a centripetal force that brought together the many ethnicities which inhabited the Dutch East Indies.<sup>4</sup> In other words, a pan-Malay identity never developed in Malaya-Borneo to the same extent as in Indonesia simply because there was no reason for its existence. Colonial Indonesia had always been massive and happened to contain mostly Malayic peoples, yet colonial Malaya-Borneo was always dominated by Malays, Chinese, and Indians. While Indonesia's very existence would be threatened by Malayic nationalists clamouring for independence, this was not the case for Malaya (though it was the

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<sup>2</sup> Inamur Rehman, "THE MAKING OF MALAYSIA," *Pakistan Horizon* 16, no. 3 (Third Quarter 1963): 215, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41371778>.

<sup>3</sup> I use Malayic to refer to any ethnic group related to the Malays, such as the Javanese or the Acehnese, and refers to the same people to which pan-Malay refers.

<sup>4</sup> Lian Kwen Fee, "The Construction of Malay Identity across Nations: Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 157, no. 4 (2001): 872, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27865781>.

case for Malaysia, by which point the problem had been solved). Indonesian pan-Malayism was baptised in fire during the Indonesian War of Independence, yet, as important as it was to the Indonesian national mythos, political historians do not believe that pan-Malayism was the real driving force behind Confrontation and Maphilindo, although they also do not agree on any explanation. There is no scholarly agreement on whether Indonesia pursued Confrontation because Indonesians genuinely feared Malaysia as an existential threat,<sup>5</sup> merely wished to divert from domestic issues as a political balancing act,<sup>6</sup> or legitimately believed in Indonesia's leading role in protecting the Malayic peoples.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, scholars variously regard Maphilindo either as a format for discussion (its official purpose),<sup>8</sup> an actual attempt to unite Nusantara (which agrees with various public statements),<sup>9</sup> or an organisation aimed at maintaining Malayic dominance over Chinese influence across Nusantara.<sup>10</sup> These scholars' usage of public statements and not government documents (most research was done during or shortly after Confrontation) may have contributed to this confusion, though this lack of consensus still reveals two key insights: Indonesians could not have genuinely been invested in a military conflict in which there were no clear objectives, meaning that maximal pan-Malayism could not have been particularly popular; and the three Malay states genuinely felt some kind of attractive force between them, even if it was only a racially-motivated interest in regional security. Scholarly discussion almost entirely

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Hindley, "Indonesia's Confrontation with Malaysia: A Search for Motives," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 6 (June 1964): 907-908, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3023528>; Alastair M. Taylor, "Malaysia, Indonesia - and Maphilindo," *International Journal* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1964): 162, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40198963>.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. C. Mackie, "Indonesia: A Background to 'Confrontation,'" *The World Today* 20, no. 4 (April 1964): 139, 142, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40393595>.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, "Malaysia, Indonesia - and Maphilindo," 169.

<sup>8</sup> M. B. Khalid, "WHITHER MAPHILINDO MUSHWARA ?," *Pakistan Horizon* 18, no. 2 (1965): 152, 155, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41392842>.

<sup>9</sup> Rehman, "THE MAKING OF MALAYSIA," 217; Taylor, "Malaysia, Indonesia - and Maphilindo," 168-169.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick P. Bunnell, "Guided Democracy Foreign Policy: 1960-1965 President Sukarno Moves from Non-Alignment to Confrontation," *Indonesia*, no. 2 (October 1966): 60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350755>; R. S. Milne, "Malaysia," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 2 (February 1964): 696, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3023577>; Taylor, "Malaysia, Indonesia - and Maphilindo," 169.

ignores pan-Malayism as a motivating factor, yet it must have been significant or else Maphilindo would never have existed. It could have been the case that the people of the Malay states would have supported an international grouping like the Organisation of African Unity or the Arab League, but Sukarno's radical demands ruined any chance of Maphilindo expanding beyond just a discussion format. Furthermore, even if Maphilindo only existed to obstruct Malaysia's formation, Malaya's voluntary participation indicates some meaningful attraction towards pan-Malayism, or at least willingness to pretend to this effect. The pan-Malay movement must therefore be somewhat genuine; regardless of limited Malayan-Bornean support for a united Nusantara, it likely remains the case that some Malayic leaders, such as Sukarno, genuinely believed that the Malayan-Borneans desired to unite with their Indonesian brothers.

The best accessible primary sources, Western government documents, tend to regard Confrontation and Maphilindo negatively or dismissingly, which is problematic for future research. It is unlikely that British documents will be particularly useful, as the UK was directly involved as Malaya's colonial overlord and considered Confrontation a matter of Sukarno's "personal prestige."<sup>11</sup> Thus, a change of research direction was necessary; the US was comparatively detached from the conflict, so it appeared that the Foreign Relations of the United States series would be more objective. Unfortunately, these documents mostly restate Sukarno's interest in a Greater Indonesia (or "Pax Indonesiana")<sup>12</sup> and consider Maphilindo an extension of this expansionism.<sup>13</sup> The Foreign Relations series is very expansive, but the authors were clearly too detached and not writing from a position of interest. There was little new information and

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<sup>11</sup> Richard A. Butler. "Policy towards Indonesia" (London: Foreign Office, January 6, 1964): 5-6, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7659848>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Kinney, "Memorandum of Conversation" (New York: Department of State, October 4, 1964), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d340>.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Jr. Hilsman, "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to Secretary of State Rusk" (Washington, DC: Department of State, August 2, 1963), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d332>.

one author explicitly pushed responsibility for Malaysia onto the UK, claiming that the US should not get any further involved.<sup>14</sup> As a result, investigating the National Archives of Australia may prove to be more effective. This can be attributed to Australia's unique position of both interest and incapability, which may manifest as detailed analysis with less discussion of punitive action. This is because, despite Australia's natural interest in its neighbours, Indonesia and the UK (behind Malaya) were the main belligerents in Confrontation, and Australia merely played a supporting role in maintaining stability. There is likely to be little unique material diplomatically, but studying the initial development stages of Malaysia and Confrontation should illuminate Malayan-Bornean attitudes towards pan-Malayism, which no source thus far has satisfactorily answered. For example, a memorandum from the Department of External Affairs considered Maphilindo to be a genuine attempt at federation (the strongest claim thus far),<sup>15</sup> while another memorandum argued that Indonesia actually wished to annex Borneo, despite other governments disagreeing with this interpretation.<sup>16</sup> These claims are at odds with other sources, which means that they are necessary for a more accurate, complete synthesis and supports the usefulness of Australian documents. In particular, the Rebellion in Brunei and Malaysia - Political Internal Security collections are likely to be especially beneficial. Few sources thus far have mentioned the Brunei Revolt, which is strange given its explicit appeal towards Bornean nationalism, and hence Malayic (not necessarily pan-Malay) nationalism. Rebellion in Brunei will likely answer any questions about wider support for the Bornean nationalists, Indonesian involvement in fomenting the rebellion, and the relationship between the

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<sup>14</sup> Roger Jr. Hilsman, "Memorandum," <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d332>.

<sup>15</sup> Maphilindo (A4359, 221/6/3B, Canberra: National Archives of Australia), <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=4209383>.

<sup>16</sup> Proposed merger of Malaya, Singapore, British North Borneo, Sarawak, Brunei - The Grand Design (A4359, 221/6/2B, Canberra: National Archives of Australia), <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=4209375>.

rebellion and the pan-Malay movement.<sup>17</sup> Malaysia - Political Internal Security covers both internal and external threats to the various regions of Malaya-Borneo, including separatists and pro-Indonesian (potentially pan-Malay) agitators, which is an area that has been sorely lacking in other sources.<sup>18</sup> Collectively, these Australian collections are the most likely to be useful in further research, as they are far more detailed and expansive than any other source used thus far.

My research will be structured in two distinct sections: one cultural section detailing the development of the Malaysian identity (yet not the pan-Malay identity) and one political section detailing the situation behind Confrontation and Maphilindo. The cultural section, whose purpose is to clarify the extent of pan-Malay nationalism in Malaya-Borneo and Indonesia, will be divided into three subsections. The first subsection will provide the general background for pan-Malay nationalism: **Pan-Malayism developed to such a great extent in Indonesia due to its necessity for national survival, which also explains its failure to develop in Malaya-Borneo.** Preliminary research answers most of this, but there are further questions in the next subsection. Here, the specific issue of Borneo will be explored: **Bornean nationalism, one of the few forms of Malayic nationalism which ever became politically relevant, was unsuccessful and eventually gave way to Malaysian nationalism rather than pan-Malay nationalism.** This subsection will also answer questions not previously answered in preliminary research: Was Bornean nationalism, represented by the Brunei Revolt, a powerful force or merely a historical footnote, and why did Borneans choose to unite with Malaya and not Indonesia? This is where the Rebellion in Brunei collection will be most useful. The last

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<sup>17</sup> Rebellion in Brunei - December 1962 (A1945, 248/5/6, Canberra: National Archives of Australia), <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=1565691>; Rebellion in Brunei - December 1962 - File 2 (A1945, 248/5/7, Canberra: National Archives of Australia), <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=1793876>.

<sup>18</sup> Malaysia - Political Internal Security, (A1838, 3027/2/9, Canberra: National Archives of Australia), <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=583236>.

subsection will be dedicated to pan-Malay sentiment in Indonesia: **Although pan-Malayism was fundamental to Indonesia's existence, the Indonesian people generally did not believe in it as a geopolitical goal.** There is one last major unanswered question that should be answered here: What did the Malays of Sumatra, part of the Malay heartland, think of Confrontation? American documents provide some initial evidence for a potential answer, but Australian documents may be better for reasons already explained. Although completing the cultural section is hampered by my inability to understand Malay, answering them as best as possible with limited resources is a prerequisite to finding a complete answer for my research questions. The political section, whose purpose is to clarify the scope and purpose of Confrontation and Maphilindo, will be divided into two subsections. The first subsection will explain the basis of Confrontation: **Pan-Malay nationalism was used by Indonesia to legitimise Confrontation, which was generally an attempt to assert Indonesia's dominance over Nusantara.** This has been somewhat supported already by scholars and diplomats, but there is one major question left unanswered: Why did political pan-Malayism not become politically significant earlier? The Malaysia - Political Internal Security collection should prove useful here. The next subsection will focus on the purpose of the ephemeral Maphilindo: **Maphilindo was a political tool whose purpose and scope was intentionally kept vague in order to best utilise the unclear pan-Malay movement.** This will rely heavily on limited American, Australian, and scholarly sources, but is the most unique and promising area of research. In addition to confirming Indonesia's leadership of Maphilindo, there is one major question about the Philippines, until now largely ignored, that must be answered: If Indonesia was to be the protector and Malaya-Borneo the protected, what purpose would the Philippines have served in this collective? The



Philippines, treated as an Indonesian accessory by the US,<sup>19</sup> must be key to this conflict, for it was Diosdado Macapagal of the Philippines who formulated Maphilindo, which met in Manila.

The pan-Malay movement was unsuccessful, unpopular, and ignored, but the conflicts, state formation processes, and organisations associated with it were geopolitically significant and cannot simply be ignored as the British and American governments have done. Understanding the genesis of the movement, its proponents, and its principal manifestations, Confrontation and Maphilindo, is necessary to understand the actors and events of the 1960s. Beyond Sukarno, disparaged as arbitrary and egotistical and thus very poorly understood, there are other figures and events that have not been adequately studied. Who supported the Brunei Revolt, and why? What did Macapagal see in pan-Malayism that drove him to form Maphilindo? Were Malayan-Borneans really more afraid of the Indonesians than the Chinese? The answers for these questions are not known, but the foundation for further research exists. Malays in Malaya never sought to form a pan-Malay state, Malayic Borneans were offered many options but chose Malaysia, and Indonesians either chose Indonesia or sought to control Malaya-Borneo. These historical developments were the result of conflicting historical processes, including pan-Malayism and not regardless of it; thus, understanding this pan-nationalist movement, unique for its real or imagined support and legitimate geopolitical significance, is critical to our understanding of the 1960s as a global, dynamic, and era-defining decade.

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<sup>19</sup> Roger Jr. Hilsman, "Memorandum," <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d332>.

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