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Brunei and the British Decolonisation Policy, 1950 – 1966

ABSTRACT: This article is about Britain's long-term plan to decolonize Brunei between 1950 and 1966. The Sultan was concerned of the British plan as it would affect Brunei's security and survival. This led him to promulgate the 1959 Constitution as he wanted to defend the position of the monarch and the monarchy. Since the Sultan was not attracted in the British plan to associate Brunei with the two Northern Borneo territories, the plan met with failure. Later, there was the Malaysian plan which was announced by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, which was aimed at establishing a federation of Malaysia that would consist of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. The Sultan was careful towards the plan. The Brunei's People Party, however, was contrary to the plan from its beginning. The Sultan did also not agree the Malaysian plan straightaway. The Sultan abandoned the plan mainly because he wanted to secure the position of the monarch and the monarchy. Nonetheless, after Brunei's rejection of Malaysia in 1963, Britain was enduring its effort to bring Brunei within the federation of Malaysia at least by 1965.

KEY WORD: Britain, Sultan of Brunei, decolonize, Northern Borneo territories, Malaysian plan, and Brunei's People Party.

IKHTISAR: "Brunei dan Dasar Dekolonisasi British, 1950 – 1966". Artikel ini adalah mengenai rancangan jangka panjang British untuk melepaskan negeri yang berada dibawah perlindungannya, iaitu Brunei diantara tahun 1950 dan 1966. Sultan Brunei bimbang rancangan Britain ini akan memberi kesan kepada keselamatan dan survival Brunei. Ini membuatkan Sultan Brunei menggubal Perlembagaan Brunei pada tahun 1959, kerana baginda mahu melindungi kedudukan raja dan kesultanan Brunei. Oleh kerana Sultan Brunei tidak berminat dengan rancangan British, rancangan itu telah mengalami kegagalan. Kemudian disusuli pula dengan Rancangan Malaysia yang telah diumumkan oleh Tunku Abdul Rahman, Perdana Menteri Persekutuan Tanah Melayu, yang bertujuan untuk menubuhkan Persekutuan Malaysia yang terdiri daripada Persekutuan Tanah Melayu, Singapura, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. Sultan Brunei mengambil langkah berhati-hati terhadap rancangan ini. Akan tetapi Parti Rakyat Brunei tidak bersetuju dengan rancangan itu daripada mula lagi. Sultan Brunei pun tidak bersetuju menerima Rancangan Malaysia sertamerta. Sultan Brunei menolak Rancangan Malaysia kerana ia mahu menjaga kedudukan Sultan dan juga kesultanan Brunei. Namun, selepas penolakan Brunei terhadap Malaysia pada tahun 1963, British tetap berusaha untuk memasukkan Brunei ke dalam federasi Malaysia, sekurang-kurangnya pada tahun 1965.

KATA KUNCI: British, Sultan Brunei, melepaskan negeri di bawah perlindungan, wilayah Utara Borneo, rancangan Malaysia, dan Parti Rakyat Brunei.

INTRODUCTION

This article will briefly delineate Britain's long-term policy to decolonize Brunei between 1950 and 1966. To

begin with, this article will briefly delineate Britain's plan to associate Brunei closely with the two Northern Borneo territories and the problems this

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posed for Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III (Haji Jibah, 1983). This article will argue that the Sultan was apprehensive of the British plan as it would affect Brunei's security and survival. This article will show that one of the reasons why the Sultan promulgated the Constitution in 1959 was that he wanted to safeguard the position of the monarch and the monarchy. Since the Sultan was not interested in the British plan to associate Brunei with the two Northern Borneo territories, the plan met with failure.

The article will also briefly delineate the Malaysian plan which was introduced by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, and which was aimed at forming a federation of Malaysia that would consist of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei; it will discuss the problems this posed for the Sultan. This article will show that when the Malayan Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, announced his plan to federate Malaya with Brunei, the two Northern Borneo territories and Singapore, the Sultan was cautious towards the plan. In spite of this, he was prepared to study the *pros and cons* (pro and contrary) of the Malaysian Plan, before a decision was finally made in July 1963. The PRB (*Parti Rakyat Brunei* or Brunei's People Party), however, was against the plan from its inception. This opposition later culminated in the outbreak of the 1962 rebellion in Brunei.

Although the 1962 rebellion showed the vulnerability of the Sultanate without British protection, the Sultan did not accept the Malaysian plan straightaway. The Sultan recommenced Brunei's negotiations with Malaya over the Malaysian terms, but eventually gave up the plan. The Sultan abandoned the plan mainly because he wanted to secure the position of the monarch and the monarchy. The Sultan, however, was hoping that Britain would continue its protection over the Sultanate, if

possible indefinitely (Saunders, 2002). This article will show that (after Brunei's rejection of Malaysia in 1963), Britain was continuing its effort to bring Brunei within the federation of Malaysia at least by 1965.

BRITISH DECOLONISATION POLICY

Britain's plan to decolonise Brunei as well as Malaya, Singapore, and their Northern Borneo territories, Sarawak and Sabah, emerged after the end of the Second World War (1939-1945). Although Britain had no intention of decolonizing Brunei (its protectorate), Malaya, Singapore, and the two Northern Borneo territories immediately, Britain had a long-term policy towards these colonies and protectorate (Pathak, 1988). Britain's policy was to unite Brunei, Sarawak, and Sabah, before they were merged with Malaya and then granted independence (Horton, 1984:42). The main reason why Britain planned to unite the three Northern Borneo territories with Malaya was that it wanted to protect them from their potentially acquisitive neighbour, Indonesia, and to help to level the social and economic inequalities in the three Northern Borneo territories (Hussainmiya, 1995:224).

Malcolm MacDonald, who was appointed as Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia, executed the task to associate the Northern Borneo territories closely before they were merged with Malaya. In the case of Brunei, Anthony Abell, the Governor of Sarawak and High Commissioner for Brunei, was delegated to carry out the plan. In his announcement, Anthony Abell wished to see Brunei develop a closer co-operation with its neighbours – Sarawak and North Borneo (*Borneo Bulletin*, 13/7/1957).

Initially, the co-operation among the three Borneo territories took the form of governors' conferences which were held every six months. The aim of the

conferences was to “plan for greater co-ordination in policy and administration of matters of common interest” (*Straits Times*, 23/4/1953). At the conference on 23 April 1953, an announcement was made that a decision had been taken to form a standing conference of the heads of government of the three Northern Borneo territories with the aim to “maintain the closest possible harmony of policy among them” (*Straits Times*, 23/4/1953).

Following the conference, the *Straits Times* newspaper reported that the meeting was held as a step towards the formation of the federation of the three Northern Borneo territories (*Straits Times*, 23/4/1953). In its editorial of 24 April 1953, the same newspaper commented that the conference was the seed of the federation (*Straits Times*, 24/4/1953); but the Sultan promptly denied that it was a step towards the establishment of the federation (Simandjuntak, 1969:122). According to the Brunei government’s report, the Sultan had “never thought about the unification nor did they wish to unite or federate Brunei with other states” (*Berita Brunei*, 16/3/1956).

Indeed from the outset, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien was apprehensive of Britain’s plan to associate Brunei closely with Sarawak and North Borneo, because he realised that it could affect the security and the survival of the Sultanate. In this regard, he was concerned that the plan would reduce his status from that of an absolute monarch to a constitutional monarch (Haji Ahmad, 1989:60). Besides, the Sultan and the aristocrats were worried that if Brunei were closely associated with Sarawak and North Borneo, Brunei’s status would be reduced from a protectorate to a colony (Ranjit Singh, 1984:143-144). This was despite Anthony Abell’s assurance to the Bruneians that the arrangement would not affect Brunei’s status as a protected state with a British High Commissioner

(*The Sarawak Gazette*, 1/6/1948).

Furthermore, the Sultan and the aristocrats were apprehensive that if Brunei were closely associated with Sarawak and North Borneo, the Chinese in Sarawak and North Borneo would dominate the Malays in Brunei (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:143). In addition, they were concerned that there would be an influx of immigrants from Sarawak and North Borneo to the Sultanate. Moreover, they were sceptical that the Muslims in Brunei and the Islamic religion would be adversely affected if Brunei were to be closely associated with Sarawak and North Borneo, who were mostly non-Muslims (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:21).

Besides, the Sultan and the aristocrats were alarmed that Brunei’s wealth would be used by the central administration to subsidize the development of Sarawak and North Borneo (Ranjit Singh, 1984:140). This was despite the Governor of North Borneo’s assurance to the Sultan that Brunei’s wealth would not be shared with Sarawak and North Borneo (Ranjit Singh, 1984:127). The Sultan and the aristocrats were also concerned that the Bruneians would be administratively dominated by the people of Sarawak, as Brunei had insufficient skilled powers to run the administration of the country (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:18). Therefore, it is obvious that the Sultan and the aristocrats were apprehensive of the British plan as they believed that it would affect Brunei’s protectorate status, the status of the monarch, Brunei’s economic wealth, its administration, the Malay race, and the Islamic religion.

Although the Sultan and the aristocrats doubted Britain’s plan to associate their country closely with Sarawak and North Borneo, Malcolm MacDonald and Anthony Abell continued to pursue the plan. In 1954, Malcolm MacDonald suggested that all British territories in

Southeast Asia should be formed into a federation (Ranjit Singh, 1984:127). At this time, not only the Bruneians doubted the British plan to unite the Borneo territories; the people of Sarawak and North Borneo were also having reservations about such a plan (Simandjuntak, 1969:120). In order to put a stop to Britain's plan to associate Brunei with the two Northern Borneo territories, the Sultan ignored the Colonial Office's proposal and made his own way to promulgate the Constitution which was aimed at safeguarding the positions of the monarch, the monarchy, the Malay race, and the Islamic religion which the Sultan and the Bruneians were concerned would be affected if Brunei were to be closely associated with Sarawak and North Borneo (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:17).

When Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin announced his desire to grant Brunei its first written Constitution, Anthony Abell welcomed the Sultan's decision, because he was hoping that he would be able to influence the Sultan to limit the power of the monarch. He was also hoping to retain the power of the Resident and to increase the authority of the High Commissioner by establishing reserve powers built into the Constitution (Hussainmiya, 1995:148). Furthermore, he thought it was time that Brunei re-assessed the functions of the State Council and possibly substituted it with new institutions. This was because to him, the present State Council had become anachronistic and obsolete (Hussainmiya, 2000:14).

The Sultan, however, did not want to give any real power to the Resident or the High Commissioner, but wanted all administrative powers presently vested in the Resident to be transferred to a *Mentri Besar* or Chief Minister, who would be a Brunei Malay and who would hold office at the Sultan's pleasure. He would also appoint a Brunei Malay State Secretary, who would act as the government's official spokesman,

and a number of other Malay officials. The British Resident would become the British Advisor, who was to offer "*nasihat*" (good advice) to the Sultan and his administration, and his appointment was to be approved by the Sultan-in-Council.

The powers of the High Commissioner would also be transferred to the Sultan-in-Council, where he would retain the right to advise the Sultan-in-Council (Hussainmiya, 1995:146-148). Anthony Abell, however, was not satisfied with the Sultan's arrangement regarding the issues of the Resident and the reserve powers of the High Commissioner. Consequently, these issues became an obstacle between the Sultan and the High Commissioner which subsequently delayed the promulgation of the Constitution.

Anthony Abell's dissatisfaction over the Sultan's arrangement was also shared by the PRB (*Parti Rakyat Brunei* or Brunei's People Party). The PRB led by Azahari sought national leadership to pass through the rapid democratization of governmental institutions. The PRB, formed in 1956, wanted the implementation of a democratic system of government in Brunei with the Sultan as a constitutional monarchy. In its memorandum to the British government in 1957, the PRB requested the British to hold free and democratic elections in Brunei. It wanted at least 75 per cent of the members of the proposed legislature to be elected by adult suffrage and the party, which commanded the majority in the house, to form the government (Haji Ahmad, 1987; and Jamil al-Sufri, 1992). It also sought to form a "Union or Federation" of the three territories of Brunei, Sarawak, and Sabah, with the Sultan of Brunei – Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III – becoming the constitutional head of the state (Haji Jibah, 1983; and Menon, 1988).

Although the PRB shared the same plan as Britain to form the federation of Brunei, Sarawak, and North Borneo,

the High Commissioner did not support the PRB. This was because the ultimate decision to form the federation should come from the Sultan, not the PRB. It was, therefore, the duty of Anthony Abell to persuade the Sultan to unite Brunei with Sarawak and North Borneo; he was, however, unable to do so as he could not convince the Sultan that his country's wealth would not be used to develop Sarawak and North Borneo, and that his country's status would not be altered from a protectorate to a colony.

In 1957, in his bid to prevail upon the Sultan to accept the proposal for a closer association, Anthony Abell proposed that the Colonial Office return the island of Labuan and Limbang to Brunei (Hussainmiya, 1995:229). Anthony Abell also proposed that the Colonial Office cease Brunei's administrative link with Sarawak which had been in operation since 1948 and make the Sultan the head of the Islamic faith in the three territories (Hussainmiya, 1995:227). In addition, he suggested the establishment of the office of Governor-General who would represent the British government in North Borneo and Sarawak, and act as High Commissioner in Brunei (Hussainmiya, 1995:228). The Colonial Office, however, rejected these proposals aimed at winning over the Sultan just for the sake of getting his agreement to the closer association (Hussainmiya, 1995:229).

With the independence of Malaya in 1957, however, Britain's plan to merge the Borneo territories with Malaya and Singapore into a unit before it was granted independence was shattered. When the Alliance of the UMNO (United Malays National Organization) and the MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) and later the MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) emerged victorious in 1955 Malayan elections, they demanded the acceleration of Malaya's independence from the British government. Consequently, the British had to fulfil

their demand (Frey, Pruessen & Yong, 2003:118) to grant Malaya independence in 1957.

Sir Robert Scott (1955-1960), who replaced Malcolm MacDonald as the Commissioner-General, however, had a new plan for the Borneo territories. He proposed to unite the Borneo territories urgently and to speed up the political progress among the territories should independent Malaya adopt the plan to absorb the Borneo territories into its fold (Hussainmiya, 1995:231). The Sultan was, however, persistent in rejecting any proposal which aimed to unite Brunei with the two Northern Borneo territories. When the Secretary of State proposed immediate talks with Sarawak and North Borneo, the Sultan rejected the proposal (Hussainmiya, 1995:231).

The Sultan's continuous rejection of Britain's plan to associate Brunei closely with the two Northern Borneo territories led Anthony Abell and Sir Roland Turnbull, the Governors of North Borneo, to instigate a plan to establish a loose federation, where the three states would continue their existence, retaining autonomy over their own revenue and expenditure (Ranjit Singh, 1984:139). The Central government would control their defence, external relations, communications, and internal security, but the Sultan persistently rejected the proposal. According to the *Borneo Bulletin's* report on 15 February 1958, members of Brunei's State Council opposed Brunei's federation with other territories (*Borneo Bulletin*, 15/2/1958).

In 1958, when the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia was quoted as saying (at the ninth Inter-Territorial Conference held in Brunei) that the conference pointed the way to a closer political association (*Borneo Bulletin*, 5/4/1958), the Sultan unremittingly announced that the Conference did not mean that the three territories would become a federation (*Borneo Bulletin*, 26/4/1958). He also announced that Brunei was not a colony and

that it was important to preserve the country's position with patience and determination (Ranjit Singh, 1984:140).

With the promulgation of Brunei's Constitution in September 1959, the Sultan was in a much more secure position as the latter successfully strengthened, enhanced, and safeguarded the power of the monarch and the monarchy. Although initially Anthony Abell did not welcome the Sultan's constitutional proposal, he eventually accepted it almost unchanged. This was mainly because of the Sultan's intransigence to give in to Britain's wishes (Hussainmiya, 1995: 207).

With the promulgation of the Constitution, the 1905/1906 Agreement was revoked and replaced by the 1959 Agreement, the post of the Resident was abolished and the High Commissioner took the place of the Resident. The administrations of Brunei and Sarawak were divorced and Brunei achieved internal self-government. The British, however, retained complete control over Brunei's external affairs and defence, and this was stated in the Article 3 of the 1959 Agreement.

Following the promulgation of Brunei's Constitution, the British began to toy with the idea of merging Sarawak and North Borneo without Brunei. Lord Selkirk announced that he favoured the federation of the two territories as a step towards their self-government (*Borneo Bulletin*, 24/9/1960). However, the plan was not pursued as the two territories were not economically able to stand on their own without Brunei (Ranjit Singh, 1984:155). Moreover, the association of North Borneo and Sarawak would be considered as unworkable to the British if Brunei were not part of the association (Frey, Pruessen & Yong, 2003:148). As a result, Britain began to look to independent Malaya in order to solve its problems over its Northern Borneo territories, including Brunei.

BRUNEI AND THE MALAYSIAN PLAN

In 1958, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, voiced his plan to unite Malaya with the three Northern Borneo territories to the Colonial Office. The idea of the unification of Malaya and the Northern Borneo territories had been under discussion since 1956 (Andaya & Andaya, 2001:283). It became significant to the Malayan leaders when they realized that it was necessary to unite Malaya with Singapore. In fact, the idea emerged after several discussions with Singapore's leaders, including Lee Kuan Yew. The latter and his party, the People's Action Party (PAP), became the main promoter of the merger with the federation (Frey, Pruessen & Yong eds., 2003:148).

In the early 1950s, the Malayan leaders refused to federate with Singapore as they were apprehensive that Singapore's predominantly Chinese population would overwhelm the predominantly Malay population of Malaya. In this case, the Chinese would be the largest single community, comprising 43 per cent of the total population compared with 41 per cent Malays (Turnbull, 1989:272). Moreover, the Malayan leaders were anxious that Singapore's economic interests would conflict with those of Malaya and that Malayan politics would be radicalized through contact with Singapore's left-wing parties (Andaya & Andaya, 2001:203).

However, since the development of Communist activities in Singapore alarmed the Malayan leaders, they began to reconsider merging Singapore with Malaya. This was because they were concerned that an independent Singapore would come under the control of the Communists, which would affect the position of Malaya. The Malayan leaders, therefore, wanted to assist the non-Communist leader, Lee Kuan Yew of PAP (People's Action Party), in order to achieve independence

within a federation (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:32). Nevertheless, the Malayan leaders judged that if Singapore was to be brought into the federation, they also needed to bring the Northern Borneo territories within Malaya to balance Singapore's predominantly Chinese population with the Malays of Malaya and the three Northern Borneo territories.

In Brunei's case, apart from its crucial function of balancing the Malay population with the Chinese population in Singapore, Brunei's merger with Malaya, Singapore, and the two Borneo territories could also enhance the security of the region against any Communist activities. Tunku Abdul Rahman was also interested in bringing Brunei within the federation of Malaysia as it could provide bigger markets and create more job opportunities for the people of Brunei (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:39).

Furthermore, Tunku Abdul Rahman was confident that if Brunei joined the federation, the latter could safeguard the survival of the Sultanate. In this case, Brunei's dynasty would be protected within the Federal Constitution which "would contain effective safeguards for the position of the Ruler" (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:39). Nevertheless, the Sultan would only be a constitutional monarch. Moreover, if Brunei joined the Federation, Brunei could economically assist the development of Sarawak and North Borneo (Abu Bakar, 1981:122) and Malaysia as a whole (Frey, Pruessen & Yong eds., 2003:158).

The Malayan plan to federate Malaya with Singapore and the three Northern Borneo territories was accepted in principle by Britain, as the plan would help to solve Britain's problems with decolonizing the three Northern Borneo territories (Frey, Pruessen & Yong eds., 2003:144). To the Colonial Office, individual independence for these territories was not viable as these countries would be exposed to danger

(Frey, Pruessen & Yong eds., 2003:148). The Commonwealth Office was particularly worried over the Communist threat in the Borneo territories. The Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) in Sarawak had been heavily infiltrated by Communist elements and furthermore it had connections with the PRB, *Parti Rakyat Brunei* or Brunei People Party (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:36).

Moreover, the Colonial Office was worried that Brunei would be a target for Indonesian conspiracy and internal sedition. In Britain's view, Brunei would not be able to defend itself against any internal and external threats, but if Brunei joined the federation, Brunei would benefit from the central government's forces as well as British forces. If the Federation of Malaysia was formed, the existing defence agreement that Malaya had with Britain (the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement [AMDA] of 1957) would be extended to the Northern Borneo territories (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:35).

Therefore, from Britain's perspective, the best solution for Brunei's future security was to join the Federation of Malaysia. The Colonial Office consequently supported the idea and even pressed the Sultan to join Malaysia as it would be dangerous for Brunei to stay alone (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:129-130). Moreover, the decolonization of Brunei became an even more pressing matter for the Colonial Office as in December 1960, the United Nations General Assembly had passed a resolution – the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples – where the colonial powers were urged to take immediate measures to transfer all powers to the peoples of their colonies.¹

The Colonial Office nevertheless warned Tunku Abdul Rahman against any premature announcement of the

¹See, for example, file on "UNGA [United Nations General Assembly] Resolution, No.1514, XV, 14 December 1960".

federation as it would cause political chaos in the Northern Borneo territories. Lord Selkirk warned the Federal Government of Malaya's Prime Minister not to rush the scheme too quickly, as unrest could occur throughout Northern Borneo (Mackie, 1974:63; and Matthew, 2002:67). In early 1960, however, Tunku Abdul Rahman took the initiative by visiting Sarawak and North Borneo; and on 27 May 1961, he eventually made his idea for the Federation of Malaysia public, when he made an address to the Foreign Correspondents Association of South-East Asia in Singapore.²

The Tunku Abdul Rahman's speech had immediate and widespread consequences in Sarawak and North Borneo. Although it was widely welcomed in Sarawak, the latter suggested that it should be united first with North Borneo. However, the Sarawak and North Borneo territories' feelings toward the federation hardened as they were not in favour of a proposal for the absorption of Sarawak and North Borneo with the same status as the existing States (*ibidem* with footnote 2). In Brunei, the Sultan received the Tunku Abdul Rahman's speech with caution. Although Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien had had a favourable attitude towards Malaya prior to Tunku Abdul Rahman's announcement of the plan, the Sultan was nevertheless cautious over the Tunku's proposal.

In the 1950s, the Sultan showed a favourable attitude towards Malaya as he wanted to avoid the issue of the Northern Borneo federation. When Malaya became independent in 1957, Brunei's relation with Malaya improved as the Sultan wanted to demonstrate to Britain that he preferred Brunei to be associated with independent state than with the British colonies: Sarawak and North Borneo (Hussainmiya, 1995:233). After Brunei achieved

internal self-government in 1959, the rapport between Brunei and Malaya became formidable as Brunei sought Malayan officials to fill the important posts in the administration of the state, which had previously been held by the British (Hussainmiya, 1995:239). In 1958, the Brunei State Council approved a \$100 million loan to Malaya following a personal approach by Tunku Abdul Rahman to the Sultan (Hussainmiya, 1995:234). An exchange of visits between the leaders of the two countries also took place. As a result of Brunei's close relationship with Malaya, the British plan to unite Brunei with Sarawak and North Borneo was undermined.

As mentioned before, when Tunku Abdul Rahman announced the plan for the formation of Malaysia in May 1961, the Sultan was cautious. When the Eighth Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) was held in Singapore in July 1961, Brunei did not send any observers (Hussainmiya, 1995:254). At this conference, the principle of merger was approved and a formal agreement in principle was announced (Turnbull, 1989:272).

Although the Sultan's attitude towards Tunku Abdul Rahman's announcement was guarded, he was aware of Brunei's weaknesses if Britain were to end its military protection over Brunei. Since 1906, Brunei had depended on British military protection for its security and survival. The 1906 Agreement that Brunei had with Britain brought Brunei under full British protection. Even though Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III was cautious towards the plan, he was prepared to examine the *pros and cons* (pro and contrary) of joining Malaysia. In addition, the Sultan planned to seek favourable terms from Malaya that would bring advantages and benefits to the people of Brunei and the country. If the terms were not favourable to Brunei, it would not enter

²File on "FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office], 51/154, Origins and Formation of Malaysia, 10 July 1970".

Malaysia (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:53).

Nevertheless, the PRB (*Parti Rakyat Brunei* or Brunei's People Party) opposed the Malaysian Plan from its inception, since it would jeopardise its aim to form the NKKU (*Negara Kesatuan Kalimantan Utara* or Unitary State of the North Kalimantan) under the "Sri Mahkota Negara" as the Sultan of Brunei would be called. According to Haji Zaini Haji Ahmad, the party's organizer, it was the aim of the PRB to restore the sovereignty of the Sultan of Brunei over his former dominions Sarawak and Sabah (Haji Ahmad, 1987:17). Thus, any move to unite the Northern Borneo territories with another country would fail in its attempt to integrate the three territories and to restore Brunei's sovereignty over Sarawak and Sabah (Haji Ahmad, 1987:22).

In order to upstage the Malaysian Plan, the PRB mobilised support from the political leaders of Sarawak and Sabah, where it successfully gained cooperation from the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and the United Kadazan Organisation of North Borneo, which were also anti-Malaysia. On 9 July 1962, the PRB, SUPP, and the United Kadazan Organisation of North Borneo formally established the United Borneo Front (Haji Ahmad, 1987:22).

In addition, the PRB gained support from the Indonesian leaders, who gave moral backing to the PRB. Aside from moral support, members of TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* or Indonesian National Army) were also known to have trained TNKU (*Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara* or North Kalimantan National Army) members secretly as early as July 1962 (Haji Ahmad, 1987:47). The reason for Sukarno's espousal of the PRB's struggle was the powerful influence of the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* or Indonesian Communist Party), within Sukarno's cabinet. The PKI shored up Azahari's anti-Malaysia cause, which led to the 1962 rebellion (Poulgrain, 1998). The

PKI supported Azahari not because it wanted to see the creation of the NKKU, but to destroy the Malaysian Federation and set up its own power base in the Borneo territories. Sukarno, who wanted the PKI's continuous support, backed the PKI's policy by supporting Azahari (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:204).

Within Brunei and the adjacent areas (such as Limbang and Lawas), the PRB had won a large number of followers who had become increasingly anti-Malaysia. Even before the Malaysian Plan was proposed, there were already widespread anti-Malayan feelings among the people of Brunei. They resented the presence in Brunei of the Malaysians, who were enlisted by the Brunei government to fill several key positions that had previously been held by British officers, following Brunei's achievement of internal self-government in 1959 (Hussainmiya, 1995:255-258). These ill feelings towards the Malaysians deteriorated after Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister of Malaya, announced the Malaysian Plan in May 1961.

The Sultan was well aware that the people of Brunei were anti-Malayan and that they supported the PRB because of its vociferous opposition to the Malaysian Plan. Consequently, the Sultan was under pressure. According to B.A. Hussainmiya, "the Sultan faced the toughest decision of his career" (Hussainmiya, 1995:276). On one side, there were the British, who urged him to join Malaysia; and on the other side, there was the PRB, which had successfully mobilised mass opinion against the Malaysian Plan (Hussainmiya, 1995:276), and wanted Brunei to form a federation with Sarawak and Sabah, which the Sultan was totally against.

On this issue, the Sultan had to play for time to enable him to consider the advantages and disadvantages of joining Malaysia. According to Muhammad Hadi Abdullah, the Malaysian proposal

presented an option to the Sultan to balance pressure posed by the people and the British; by manipulating the issue, the Sultan could tackle and then crush the PRB (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:25-26).

The Malaysian plan was, however, not a straightforward issue, since it had coincided with Brunei's first district council elections. According to the 1959 Constitution, elections to the district councils were to be held two years after its commencement. In September 1960, the Brunei government announced that these elections would be held in August 1961 the following year. However, when the time of the elections was approaching, the Sultan postponed them indefinitely (Hussainmiya, 1995:261). During this time, the Sultan encouraged the formation of political parties in an attempt to erode the political strength of the PRB (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:65); and as a result of this, two political parties emerged – the Brunei National Organisation (BNO) and the Brunei United Party (BUP). Both the BNO and BUP were pro-Malaysian Plan. Nonetheless, neither of these parties was able to attract large numbers of people to challenge the PRB, which had attracted the majority of the people of Brunei (Hussainmiya, 1995:265).

Although the Sultan was losing the support of his people, he did not give in to the PRB's wishes, as the motives of the PRB were contradictory to his stance. Moreover, he still wanted to explore the benefits of Brunei joining Malaysia. On 5 December 1961, the Sultan issued a statement that the idea of the Malaysian plan was "attractive", because of the social and cultural affirmatives between the two countries (Haji Ahmad, 1989:22). In February 1962, Brunei delegates joined Singapore, Sarawak, and North Borneo in the signing of the "Memorandum on Malaysia", which unanimously approved the Malaysian plan (Hussainmiya, 1995:265). Consequently, the PRB

verbally attacked the Brunei delegation for signing the documents, saying that joining Malaysia was contrary to the wishes of the people (*Borneo Bulletin*, 24/2/1962).

Indeed, during the hearing of the Brunei-Malaysia Commission of January 1962, the majority of the people in Brunei opposed Malaysia and supported the formation of the NKKU (*Negara Kesatuan Kalimantan Utara* or Unitary State of the North Kalimantan). The Brunei government, however, did not publish the report on the Brunei-Malaysia Commission, and only gave the impression that the people of Brunei had accepted Malaysia in principle (Haji Ahmad, 1989:25). During a session of the Brunei Legislative Council held on 18 July 1962, the Sultan announced that the people had accepted the Malaysian concept "in principle" (Brackman, 1966:139). This was followed by a move made by the Acting Chief Minister, Dato Marsal Maun, to support the royal speech, and the motion was adopted, which clarified the pro-Malaysian position of the Brunei government (*Borneo Bulletin*, 21/7/1962). The Sultan obtained a mandate from the Legislative Council to negotiate with the British and Malaysian governments on the terms of Brunei's entry into Malaysia.

This development disappointed the PRB. Nevertheless, the PRB pinned its hope on the coming of the District Council election to be held in August 1962. To the PRB, the election was significant in order to achieve its aim of preventing Brunei from entering Malaysia. If they won the election, the district councillors elected to the Legislative Council could present a motion to block Brunei's entry into Malaysia. When the District Council election was held on 30 and 31 August 1962, the PRB adopted manifestos which among other issues included independence for Brunei by 1963; the rejection of Malaysia and the formation

of a Federation of North Borneo; and internal economic, administrative, and educational reform (Haji Ahmad, 1987:25).

The election resulted in a landslide victory for the PRB, which won fifty-four out of a possible fifty-five seats, with the remaining seat going to an independent that later joined the PRB. The PRB victory proved the undisputed popularity of the party and also the endorsement of the people's opposition to the Malaysian plan. In September 1962, when the new Legislative Council was formed, the party sought to table a motion "blocking" the formation of Malaysia. As the Council feared suffering defeats in the debates, it postponed the Legislative Council meeting to 5 December 1962 (Simadjuntak, 1969:151).

Before the Legislative Council meeting was held, the PRB submitted a motion to the Brunei government to be tabled at the forthcoming meeting. The motion demanded that the British government return Sarawak and North Borneo to the sovereignty of the Brunei Sultan; that the British government federate the three Borneo territories; that Brunei be kept out of Malaysia and that Brunei be granted independence by 1963 (*Borneo Bulletin*, 8/12/1962).

The Sultan, who was against the PRB motion, rejected the motion to be tabled at the forthcoming meeting by giving the excuse that the motion involved the British government and had nothing to do with the government of Brunei (Ranjit Singh, 1984:172). This disappointed Azahari who commented, "when we received that, I knew we could not stop Malaysia by constitutional means, we had no alternative, we decided to strike" (*Straits Times*, 19/1/1963). On 8 December 1962, the rebellion broke out.

The 1962 rebellion was a major challenge to the Sultan as the rebels openly threatened his position and the country's security. When Azahari, who was in Manila (on his way to New York to seek the United Nations'

recognition for the government of the NKKU), announced that the Sultan had declared the independence within the Commonwealth of a state that comprised the three Northern Borneo territories; the Sultan denied this promptly in a broadcast (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:186). Azahari and Zaini's mission to the UN, however, failed to materialise as their visa applications were rejected by the American Embassy in Manila (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:220-221).

During the rebellion, the Sultan could not handle the situation efficiently and effectively. The TNKU, the militant wing of the PRB, was everywhere. The oilfields at Seria, much of Brunei Town and the rest of the state and parts of the Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Sarawak, including Limbang, were overrun by the rebels. The country's police force could not quell such a large-scale rebellion. Moreover, Brunei's army had just been created and was undergoing training in Malaya, and the British forces were not present in Brunei at that time. Under the 1959 Agreement, although the internal security and defence of the state were under British responsibility, the Sultan did not allow any British security exercises on Brunei's soil (*Borneo Bulletin*, 1/8/1962). Despite this, when the rebellion broke out, Britain immediately despatched its army to Brunei to crush the rebellion.

Although the 1962 rebellion, and the indirect involvement of Indonesia in the rebellion, showed the vulnerability of the Sultanate, this did not persuade the Sultan to accept the Malaysian Plan straight away. Similarly, although the people of Brunei were against the Malaysian Plan, this did not make the Sultan directly abandon the plan. The 1962 rebellion did not stop the Sultan further considering the *pros and cons* (pro and contrary) of joining Malaysia, and soon after the end of the 1962 rebellion, in January 1963, two Brunei officials were despatched to Kuala Lumpur to hold preliminary talks with

the Malayan government.

In the meetings, which were held between 5 February and 3 March 1963, issues such as Brunei's finances, the Sultan's position in the council of rulers, the special rights and privileges of the people of Brunei, and the representation of Brunei in the federal government were discussed thoroughly by both governments. However, none of the issues discussed in the meetings satisfied the Sultan.

During the discussions, the Malayan side insisted that the control of Brunei's oil revenues should be passed to the federal government ten years after Brunei's entry into Malaysia, whereas the Sultan wanted to retain Brunei's control over any revenue and income relating to oil in perpetuity. The Malayan government also wanted the right to tax immediately any new oil and mineral finds discovered after the Sultanate joined Malaysia, whereas the Sultan maintained that Brunei should retain such revenue. The Malayan government additionally wanted the Sultan's contributions of \$40 million annually to the federal government to be compulsory, while the Sultan wanted it to be voluntary.

There was also the issue of precedence. According to the Malayan government, the Sultan's ranking among the rulers would be the lowest, based upon the date of joining the council of rulers and not from the time he ascended the throne. Previously, during the preliminary meeting between Brunei and the Malayan governments (in July 1962), the Malayan government had assured the Sultan that precedence was in accordance with the date of accession to the throne and not dependent upon the date of joining the council of rulers.

Although the terms were further discussed in June 1963, these issues remained unsolved, as Tunku Abdul Rahman refused to give in to Brunei's terms and the Sultan refused to accept the Malayan terms. The failure

to reach any consensus became one of the main reasons why the Sultan refused to join Malaysia in 1963. Indeed, the Sultan had already stated in his correspondence to Tunku Abdul Rahman between July 1961 and October 1963 that Brunei should only join the federation if the Malayan government could accept all Brunei's terms (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:137).

However, there was also a suggestion that Brunei refused to join Malaysia as the Brunei Shell Petroleum Company influenced the Sultan not to join the federation. During the Sultan's meeting with the Malayan government in Kuala Lumpur, the Brunei Shell Petroleum Company sent a telegram indicating a large commercial discovery of oil at Southwest Ampa Field. The Company warned the Sultan that if Brunei joined Malaysia, the control and management of Brunei's oil resources would be merged with the federation. According to B.A. Hamzah, the telegram was sent purposely to the Sultan in order to influence him to stay out of Malaysia (Hamzah, 1991:225-226).

Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was disappointed with Brunei's decision not to enter Malaysia, claimed that discussions broke down after agreement had been reached on all matters only when the Sultan raised the question of his precedence (as it was too late for Tunku Abdul Rahman to consult the council of rulers). In March 1963, the Conference of Rulers had already decided that the precedence and the position of the Sultan of Brunei should relate to the date of Brunei's accession to Malaysia, so his name would be the last on the election list to be appointed as a *Yang Dipertuan Agong* of the new Federation of Malaysia.

Tunku Abdul Rahman's allegation, however, was strongly denied by the Sultan, who stated that the main reason for Brunei not joining Malaysia was that Malaya had failed to accept "Brunei terms" (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:129). In

this regard, the Sultan probably thought that his status as a ruler of a self-governing state was better than as a member of Malaysia's government with fewer responsibilities (Hussainmiya, 1995:321). Moreover, the Sultan would not want to exchange his absolute power for that of a constitutional monarch. This, however, was not mentioned during the meeting between the two governments. According to Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Sultan might possibly have thought he could keep his power as an absolute monarch if Brunei joined the Federation (cited in Hadi Abdullah, 2002:161).

In addition, Brunei's wealth had always been a sensitive issue for the Sultanate. The fear that it would have to be shared among the other two British Borneo territories was one of the reasons why the Sultan was not interested in the British plan to associate Brunei with Sarawak and Sabah in the 1950s. When the Malayan government insisted that it would control Brunei's oil revenue after ten years and would tax any new oil discovered after Brunei joined Malaysia, it looked as if the federal government of Malaysia wanted to control Brunei's oil wealth. Brunei would not surrender its oil wealth to the federal government of Malaysia, because that would leave it with nothing, since Brunei's economy depended on its oil revenues.

Finally, the Sultan would not want to give away Brunei's identity as a separate kingdom, which the previous Sultans had striven to retain since 1800, by becoming part of Malaysia. As D.S. Ranjit Singh notes:

Bearing in mind the proud historic heritage of having preserved the identity of their kingdom for centuries, the Bruneian authorities did not feel inclined to reduce the status of their country to a mere state in the Federation of Malaysia [...]. All Brunei would be a loser by joining the Federation of Malaysia (Ranjit Singh, 1984:197).

According to Muhammad Hadi Abdullah, the Sultan was never interested in joining Malaysia. He suggested that "the idea of accepting, in principle, was simply a political maneuver and diplomatic approach on the part of the Sultan to ensure for the survival of the Brunei Sultanate in its then form as a Malay Islamic Monarchy under the British protection" (cited in Hadi Abdullah, 2002:140). He further added that the differences over the issues of revenue, finance, taxes, and precedence were simply explanations for the Sultan to reject the idea of joining Malaysia (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:141).

According to a British report, the Sultan showed no regret at all for not entering Malaysia since he had the support of his people, who were mainly anti-Malaysia.³ The Sultan insisted that the question of Brunei's entry into Malaysia was closed and that there would be no point in any subsequent meeting between himself and Tunku Abdul Rahman or representatives of the two governments (*ibidem* with footnote 3). He further stated that should there be any question of re-opening the issue of Brunei's entry into Malaysia in the future, negotiations would have to begin from scratch, that is, without regard to any previous negotiations on the subject, adding that, "no one could tell what the position would be in a decade's time" (*ibidem* with footnote 3). From this, it was clear that the Sultan's mind was more than ever unreceptive to the idea of entering Malaysia.

The Sultan was actually satisfied with the present arrangement with the British government and wanted to maintain British protection if possible indefinitely. While the final meetings on Malaysia were taking place in London in July 1963, the Sultan had already indicated that he wished to discuss the future relationship of his state with Britain and had referred

³See, for example, file on "DO [Dominion Office], 229/8, Outlook for Brunei, 24 October 1963".

to the possibility of “strengthening Brunei’s defence treaty with the United Kingdom”.⁴ He also hoped that the British government would “continue to honour the existing agreement for the defence of Brunei” (cited in *Borneo Bulletin*, 23/6/1963). However, the British government could not keep on protecting Brunei, because its partial independence would be increasingly difficult to defend by the UK (United Kingdom) representatives at the UN (United Nations).

In 1962, the UN General Assembly established the Special Committee on Decolonization (the Special Committee of 24 on Decolonization) to monitor the implementation of the Declaration (the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples of 1960). The establishment of the Special Committee of Twenty-Four on Decolonization put pressure on Britain to relinquish its remaining responsibilities towards Brunei (Haji Ismail, 1991).

Furthermore, both the British and the Malaysian governments did not want to see Brunei left to stand on its own, as that would pose political and military problems for the British and Malaysian interests over the security of the new federation. Both governments were apprehensive that an independent Brunei without British protection would be a security risk to Sabah and Sarawak, and the Federation of Malaysia as a whole (Bartlett, 1972 and 1978). For example, if an uprising recurred in Brunei, it would probably spread to Sabah and Sarawak; if that happened, Malaysia would almost certainly have to deal with this matter on its own.

Moreover, the British government was concerned that Brunei might become the target of Indonesian deception and internal insurrection;⁵ whereas if it were

⁴File on “FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office], 371/169703, 11 July 1963, Telegram from Mackintosh to Secretary of State, 18 July 1963”.

⁵See file on “FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office], 15/288, Britain’s Medium- and Long-Term

part of Malaysia, Brunei would not be a target of Indonesia. In addition, the wealth of Brunei could be used for the defence and development of Sabah and Sarawak and the rest of the Federation.⁶

As Arthur Bottomley, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, said that the Malaysians would in certain circumstances like to have Brunei in Malaysia, or at least in much closer association than at present. They could certainly find a good use for Brunei’s oil revenues.⁷ Also, if Brunei chose to become independent outside of the federation, the Malaysian government was concerned that Sabah and Sarawak would probably decide to separate from Malaysia and become independent.⁸ In both cases, they could destroy the stability of the federation as a whole; if Sabah and Sarawak opted to become independent that would be the end of the federation.

Thus, in order to ensure the security of the Federation, Brunei should be brought into Malaysia. The British, who did not intend to force the Sultan to accept the Malaysian proposal, adopted a new policy whereby Britain would try to influence the Sultan to join Malaysia at least by 1965. The adoption of the policy also aimed to avoid any allegation that Britain was trying to maintain a re-colonisation policy in Brunei (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:137).

Initially, the British government hoped to see continuous co-operation from Malaysia in seconding Brunei its officers in various fields of administration even after Brunei’s rejection of Malaysia in 1963. By giving Brunei this type of co-operation, the British government hoped that Brunei would become closer to and eventually

Policy towards Brunei, 8 November 1967”.

⁶File on “DO [Dominion Office], 39/89, Talks with the Sultan of Brunei, November 1969 – Brief No.9”.

⁷See file on “DO [Dominion Office], 169/547, A. Bottomley to A.H. Reed, 8 July 1966”.

⁸File on “FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office], 15/288, Britain’s Medium- and Long-Term Policy towards Brunei, 8 November 1967”.

enter Malaysia. Tunku Abdul Rahman, however, demanded that the Brunei government return the Malaysian officers to Malaysia, as he wished to teach Brunei a lesson for not joining the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:249-250). Tunku Abdul Rahman hoped that by recalling the officers, their positions would be substituted by British expatriates. When this happened, he expected that it would stimulate the people of Brunei to rise against the British in Brunei, push the British to grant Brunei independence, and drive the Bruneians to seek membership of Malaysia.⁹

Tunku Abdul Rahman's action in recalling Malaysia's seconded officers from Brunei did indeed impel the Sultan to obtain British assistance in providing Brunei with technical and professional services. However, still seeking close cooperation between Malaysia and Brunei, the British government encouraged the Sultan to employ officers from Malaysia (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:259). Although the Sultan claimed that he would review the position of the Malaysian officers already in Brunei and intended to retain those who were sufficiently experienced, he still chose to recruit officers from Britain rather than from Malaysia (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:257). Moreover, the Tunku Abdul Rahman's motive backfired. Although more British officers were needed to replace the Malaysian officers, the people of Brunei had actually become more anti-Malaysia than anti-British (Hadi Abdullah, 2002:251). Britain's efforts to bring Brunei within Malaysia by 1965 were, therefore, unsuccessful.

CONCLUSION

From this article, it has been shown that the challenges and problems faced by the Sultanate (with regard to its security and survival) had existed prior

to 1966. The British plan to associate Brunei closely with their Northern Borneo territories, namely Sarawak and North Borneo, was a challenge to the Sultanate as it could lead Brunei's status to be reduced from a protectorate to a colony, and the Sultan's status to be decreased from an absolute monarch to a constitutional monarch. Moreover, the Sultanate's burgeoning oil would probably have to be shared with Sarawak and North Borneo. This article has also shown that one of the reasons why the Sultan promulgated the Constitution was to safeguard and strengthen the power of the monarch and the monarchy, as well as the Bruneian Malays and the Islamic religion.

Since the Sultan was not interested to closely associate Brunei with the two Northern Borneo territories, Britain's plan to see the formation of the federation of the three Northern Borneo territories collapsed. Britain's hoped, however, that independent Malaya would solve the British problem over its Northern Borneo territories. Britain did not want to grant these territories individual independence as they were underdeveloped and prone to internal and external threats. When the Malayan Prime Minister proposed the formation of the Federation of Malaysia consisting of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo, and Brunei, Britain supported the proposal as this would assist it in decolonizing its three Northern Borneo territories.

The Sultan, although showing a favourable attitude towards Malaya, was cautious toward such a plan. He was initially prepared to study the *pros and cons* (pro and contrary) of Brunei joining Malaysia, before a decision was made in July 1963. However, the PRB (*Parti Rakyat Brunei* or Brunei's People Party) vigorously opposed the plan from the start and its opposition subsequently led to the outbreak of the 1962 rebellion. The rebellion, viewed by

⁹See file on "DO [Dominion Office], 169/547, A. Bottomley to A.H. Reed, 25 October 1966".

the Sultan as a threat to the security of the monarch and the monarchy, was successfully crushed by Britain which was responsible for Brunei's internal security. Although the rebellion showed the weakness of the Sultanate without British protection, the Sultan did not accept the Malaysian Plan straight away. In this regard, the Sultan still wanted to discuss details of the terms with Malaysian leaders.

The Sultan, however, eventually gave up the Malaysian Plan as he did not want Brunei to lose its sovereignty to Malaysia. The Sultan was, however, hoping that Britain would continue its protection over Brunei if possible indefinitely. This article has shown that after Brunei's rejection of Malaysia, the British government continued its efforts to bring Brunei within Malaysia at least by 1965. Britain's efforts were, however, unsuccessful as the Sultan refused to employ Malaysian officers, whom the British suggested and hoped would bring Brunei closer to Malaysia and eventually persuade Brunei to join the latter.

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Gambar: Pusat Sejarah Brunei

Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III of Brunei Darussalam

(Source: www.google.com, 31/8/2014)

The Sultan was apprehensive of the British plan as it would affect Brunei's security and survival. One of the reasons why the Sultan promulgated the Constitution in 1959 was that he wanted to safeguard the position of the monarch and the monarchy. Since the Sultan was not interested in the British plan to associate Brunei with the two Northern Borneo territories, Sabah and Sarawak, the plan met with failure.