

Sabah (Malaysia) – Australia Relations: An Historical Observation

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this paper is to examine the historical development of the relations between the state of Sabah (Malaysia) and Australia. These two political entities share a lot in common due to their historical past. They have both known one another since the 18th century. Notably, both countries had a British colonial background that has been founded by private explorers from England. Nonetheless, they experienced different fates from the start of the 20th century. Unlike Sabah, Australia became the permanent residence to thousands of Anglo-Saxon immigrants. The colonization process of this ethnic group eventually became the dividing line between Australia and Sabah as well as other countries within the East Asian region. However, the long-standing relationship between Sabah and Australia manifests that the foundation of the relationship is strong hence shall be further strengthened. This is an early attempt to trace the historical connections between Sabah (Malaysia) and Australia. Hence, further research is necessary in order to appreciate and further strengthen their relationship for mutual benefits.*

KEY WORDS: *Sabah, Australia, historical development, relations of two nations, and relationship for mutual benefits.*

INTRODUCTION

The historical connections between Sabah and Australia have long been established, especially beginning from the era of the Malay Sultanates to the era of the North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC), the Second World War era, and the Malaysian era. The long-standing relationship between Sabah and Australia manifests that the foundation of the relationship is strong hence shall be further strengthened.

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the historical development of the relations between the state of Sabah (Malaysia) and Australia.¹ These two political entities share a lot in common due to their historical past. They have both known one another since the 18th century. Notably, both countries had a British colonial background that has been founded by private explorers from England. Nonetheless, they experienced different fates from the start of the 20th century.

Unlike Sabah, Australia became the permanent residence to thousands of Anglo-Saxon immigrants. The colonization process of this ethnic group eventually became the dividing line between Australia and Sabah as well as other countries within the East Asian region. In fact, the original name for Australia, or as it was better known during the 19th century, was “Austral Asia” (*The British North Borneo Herald*, 1/4/1892:111; Siboro, 1996:8-23; Suarez, 2004; and Welsh, 2004). Upon obtaining independence from the British in 1901, its existing name became of use.

Sabah,² on the other hand, was also conquered by the same imperial power yet only to the extent of being a temporary employment placement for Anglo-Saxon officers in the administration of North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC) and the British Colony. Moreover, Sabah gained its independence through the concept of “federation of colonies”, which was a merging of the Malayan Federation, Singapore, and Sarawak to form the Malaysian Federation in 1963.

Such concept of federation was an experience and example observed after Australia, that was a proud achievement among its citizenry which constituted six ex-British colonies to merge and form the independent Australian Federation in 1901. In sharing a common historical past, it has made it possible for the existence of positive relations between Sabah (Malaysia) and Australia to the present day.

Hence, this article shall generally discuss the early relationship of these two political entities from the era of the Malays Sultanate up to the Malaysian era.

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²Before 1881, Sabah was then known as “Northern Borneo”. Since 1881, during the administration of the North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC), Sabah was known as North Borneo. Since 1963, when Malaysia was formed, it changed its name to Sabah.

THE ERA OF MALAY SULTANATE

Not much is known of Sabah – Australia relations during the trade era before the 19th century. In other words, abundance of records has been found to give some sort of lead and solid knowledge about the activities between Sabah – Australia during that era. At that time, Sabah was a colonised state between two Malay Sultanates, namely the Brunei and the Sulu Sultanate. Much of the earlier records found which were written by Arab, Chinese, and European explorers verify the truth of this fact.

Australia was a continent that became known in the historical limelight as early as the 17th century, specifically through the notes of the Spaniards and the Dutch. In the 17th century, the Spaniards upon learning the existence of Borneo knew of its geographic setting, and the Australian continent, while the Dutch concentrated more on the north of the Philippines archipelago. The Dutch was also interested in focusing on the Javanese archipelago (now known as Indonesia).

Based on the formal report of the East India Dutch Company or VOC (*Vereneegde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) in 1638, the discovery of a new continent in the south of Java known as *Australische* has been verified. At the same time, the Dutch had also known of Sabah as part of Dutch-Borneo (now known as Kalimantan). Subsequently, Sabah became known as North Borneo after the find of a British sailor, Captain William Ambrosia Cowley.

In October 1685, Captain William Ambrosia Cowley made a brief stop at the Banggi Island, which was a small island in the northern coast of Sabah. According to his notes, he surmised his finding as the following:

In the month of October, we had the wind at northeast. Then, we sailed between the island of Luconia and China. The first land that we made was Palawan, an island lying northwest or thereabouts from Borneo, where we were amongst dangerous lands for eight days. At length, we got into a small island lying at the north end of Borneo to water and fit our ship and get some victuals. There, we got our ship on shore and got our guns on shore and stood upon our defense, for the Indians were afraid of our color; they having never seen a white man before but we could get no victuals but mussels and one wild hog and one great snake 17 feet long. After about 14 days, we made commerce with the Indians and then they brought us fish enough (Cowley, 1686).

Nevertheless, Captain William Ambrosia Cowley's discovery failed to attract serious notice from the British government as a consequence of the succession of the throne to King James II (1633-1701). Besides, Captain William Ambrosia Cowley missed conveying the message of his finding

during his voyage from Virginia (1684) to England (1686) to King Charles II. King Charles II had died before the return of Captain William Ambrosia Cowley to England in October 1686.

After the death of King James II, the British government once again started concentrating on exploring and expanding their empire in foreign grounds. This brought to the discovery by Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808) and his good friend, James Rennell (1742-1830), to the northern coast of Borneo in 1761. With Alexander Dalrymple's persuasion, the areas of north Borneo or Sabah began getting serious attention from the British government. This was also partly due to the increase in export activities from the Great Britain to China, specifically the produce of woollen goods.

For the first time, British formed a trade relationship with China in 1699 that is 14 years after the Manchu Dynasty opened the port in Canton and Macau for trade with Europe (Fry, 1970). The northern territory in China was a crucial market for woollen goods. Yet, as long as all foreign trade has to pass through the emporium in Canton, which was subjected to scrutiny by the Emperor's corrupt officers, thus making this territory in North China remote and inaccessible. Hence, the British had to avoid Canton and build their own emporium in the region instead.

To overcome the troubling situation, Alexander Dalrymple had put forth a suggestion known as the Sulu Scheme that eventually won the faith of the British. Alexander Dalrymple believed that the Sulu Scheme could provide possible solutions to overcome the existing trade problems faced by the British in China. Should this scheme be put into practise, the trade with China would no more be controlled by corrupt Emperors in Canton (Fry, 1970).

Frictions could be prevented in the future. British manufacturers would be able to obtain access in the northern territory of China as well. As a matter of fact, its involvement within the country trade that is profitable to India, Eastern Archipelago, and China may also solve the financial predicament of the East India Chartered Company. A wise experimental decision as such on Sulu would result in an increase in trade and profit East India Chartered Company immensely. The British was also looking for a strategic location to set up an emporium as a centre to gather all trade produce in the South East Asian region for the lucrative Chinese market.

In his explanation related to the stand of the British regarding this matter, Howard Tyrrell Fry stated as follows:

If an emporium was established in this central position, an end would be seen to the prevailing stagnation and trade would be drawn from all part. Woollens and other manufactured goods and metals would come from Britain. From India would flow in those sub-standard cotton piece goods for which there had previously been no market [...]. While an eastern settlement would thus provide a market for British and Indian manufacturers, from these islands would come those products for which there was always a ready market in China-bird's nests, *agal-agal*, pearls, camphor, sandal wood, gold-pepper, and so on. These would soon draw Chinese merchants, who in return would bring the teas, silks, and porcelain so highly prized in Europe (Fry, 1970).

Such importance was the driving force for the exploration and find of Alexander Dalrymple in the coastal areas of Sulu Sea in Northern Borneo. The acquiescence, he obtained from the Sultan of Sulu on 28 January 1761, made trade possible in these coastal areas. Eventually, he also managed to coax the previous Sultan of Sulu, Alimud Din I (Don Fernando I) who was in the detention of the Spaniards in Manila, to sign an agreement on 20 November 1761 (Fry, 1970).

That sheet of agreement allowed the British to choose any location to build factories and settlements on any island within the Sulu Region. Chinese immigrants were permitted to join these settlements on condition they obtain British citizenship. The agreement also meant that the East India Chartered Company had the exclusive privileged freedom for trade in all the ports under the dominion of the Sulu Sultan (Fry, 1970).

In 1770, Alexander Dalrymple primed the Chart of Felicia and Plan of the Balambangan Island (see chart 1) and was presented to King George III, 1760-1820 (ANU, 2006a). It motivated the East India Chartered Company to build a new settlement or a trade base on the Balambangan Island in year 1773. The strategically well-scrutinised opening of a new settlement on Balambangan Island was a crucial experiment in realising the aspirations of building an emporium in the Eastern Archipelago. This would also allow the British to actively participate in the spice, clove, cinnamon, and pepper trade which was a much anticipated trade in the Sulu Islands.

The high quality clove-peels could be obtained from the Marudu Bay in Northern Borneo. It was expected as well those distant markets namely Malaya, Siam, Cambodia, and Cochin China to the west, remote areas of China, Korean, and Japanese markets in the north, and New Guinean and Australian markets in the south could be reached from Sulu (Fry, 1970:45). However, this settlement came under pirate attack two years later and was completely destroyed. As a consequence, the East India Chartered Company left the settlement for good and, later, built a new one in Penang in the year 1786.

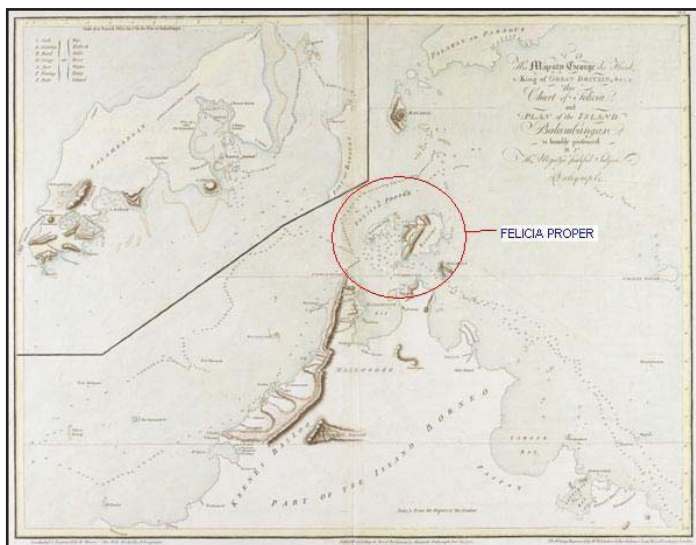


Chart 1:

Felicia Proper and Plan of the Balambangan Island by Alexander Dalrymple in 1770
(Source: Thomas Suarez, 2004).

At about the same time, Captain James Cook (1728-1779) sailed from England and found the Australian continent. His discovery was named "New South Wales", making it the first British colony in Australia. Captain James Cook set sail from England in August 1768 on the *Endeavour* to Rio de Janeiro and Tahiti, then to New Zealand and the east coast of Australia known as "New Holland" at that time.

Notably, Captain James Cook had gained useful information about the region from the notes of Alexander Dalrymple in year 1762 (ANU, 2006a). In translating some Spanish documents, whether it was seized in Manila or presented by the Governor of Mindanao, Don Manuel Galves, Alexander Dalrymple had found the evidence of sailing passage in the south of New Guinea, now known as "Torres Strait". That discovery encouraged Alexander Dalrymple to publish a book which gained wide acclaim on his assertion over the existence of an unknown continent in the south at that time (ANU, 2006a).

Ironically, the information and Alexander Dalrymple's efforts on publicity for the book seemed to have benefitted Captain James Cook. Presumably, Captain James Cook led a sailing voyage to the Southern Pacific that eventually brought to the finding in 1770 and mapped the east coastal line of Australia (ANU, 2006b). It has to be noted that Alexander Dalrymple was

already in search of a continent called the Southern Continent. Therefore, he was acutely disappointed as Captain James Cook led the expedition as the commander in charge to locate the Australian continent (Moreland & Bannister, 1983:38-39 and 172-173).

This explanation attempts to provide an overview of the Sabah – Australia relations prior to the British colonisation in the region. The stories of the two explorers and their findings, especially Alexander Dalrymple's and Captain James Cook's had presented an important lead to the traditional historical flow of mankind between Sabah and Australia.

Most intriguingly, Alexander Dalrymple's discovery of the Spanish written records in the 16th century became an essential guide to the wide span of British exploration in the region. With the information gathered from Chinese and Bugise traders, Alexander Dalrymple found a sail passage through Torres Straits (<http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk/scotgaz/people/famousfirst577.html>, 4/5/2012). This explains clearly the indirect past relationship shared between Sabah and Australia, specifically through country trade between China, India, and the Eastern Archipelago. Torres Straits, in fact, had become the trade passage for Chinese and Bugise traders.

In Borneo, there were two *thalassocracies* or maritime empires, namely the Brunei and Sulu Sultanate that depended heavily on trade activities in the 15th and 16th centuries (Bala, 2005). These empires were the markets for foreign produces from East and West. Distinctly, these empires offered a range of local goods that constantly fulfilled the Chinese market, to name a few, bird's nest, *agal-agal*, pearls, camphor, sandal wood, gold pepper, and so on. This resulted in the arrival of Chinese traders who sought business dealings with these empires and they brought along tea, silk, and porcelain jars that were priceless items in Western and European markets.

Realising this, the British hatched a plan to start a settlement on the Balambangan Island. On August 1761, Alexander Dalrymple noted in Sulu aptly describe this:

[...] the Chinese from *Amoy* offered to contract to deliver there, three junk cargoes of tea, by the middle of April following, and ten or more in September. Sulu was already a port of call for these junks, and so was Borneo proper, so that these seas were well known to them, a most important consideration in opening a new settlement for trade (cited by Fry, 1970:49).

It had also been noted from Bugise traders who dominated the southern coastal trade that other products like sea-slug, cloves, and nutmegs from Sallywatty Island, as well as bird's nest, tortoise shell, and pearl oysters

from Waygiou were obtained. Aside from these, gold was obtained from Australia. It was believed that the Bugise traders played the primary role in finding and supplying gold to the Brunei and Sulu empires' markets till Western domination dawned in the 19th century (Fry, 1970:52).

The presence of West, namely British, in this region as early as the 17th century paved possibilities to track traditional trade paths from the Suluan and Bruneian empire till the southern coasts to the Australian continent and New Zealand. Duly, this is the consequence of Captain William Mynors efforts in helming the *Royal Mary* from England across the Indian Ocean until he found and named the Christmas Islands in 1643. Later, Captain William Dampier who led the ship, *Cygnets*, managed to explore the island in March 1688.

The next crucial record to understand Sabah – Australia relationship was produced by a British explorer, Daniel Beekman, in early 18th century. He had documented his sail experience from Borneo to the southern coast, namely the Christmas Islands, in his book entitled *A Voyage to and from the Island of Borneo in the East Indies*, which was published in 1718 (cited by McAleer, 2010). In short, the basis of Sabah – Australia relationship can be traced even before the colonisation of the British began in the region.

THE ERA OF NORTH BORNEO CHARTERED COMPANY (NBCC)

In 1881, Sabah was formally colonised by NBCC (North Borneo Chartered Company) which continued till 1941. The NBCC government has been noted to maintain the existing Sabah – Australia relationship, specifically in trade that has been inherited from the Bruneian and Suluan empires.

The NBCC official report stated the cruciality of the relationship with Australia, namely in the aspect of trade. The following statement from the NBCC government after conquering Sabah for 10 years explains this:

We have always maintained that as time goes on our interests will be more and more bound up with those of Australia. As population there grows, so will the demand for Sugar, Manila Hemp, Coffer, Indian Rubber, and the numerous other products we can raise; while from time to time direct Australian steamers, like the Tai Yuen in December last, look in at Sandakan to remind us that we are within five days steam of Port Darwin and but twelve away from Queensland (*The British North Borneo Herald*, 1/4/1892:110).

Australia, on the other hand, especially the northern territories, produced coffee, tea, sugar, cotton, and many other products. Oddly, both Sabah and Australia faced challenges in acquiring cheap labour to manufacture their respective products. This brought the two closer, especially since they were

looking for a solution to overcome labour shortage from China and Java.

The customary relations in trade between Sabah and Australia continued to expand in the following years. The rapid increase in formal trade activities between Australia and Hong Kong in early 20th century, simultaneously improved the trade activities in Sabah. This is because Sabah, namely Sandakan harbour, was strategically wedged in the trade network that became a prime stopover for every steam ship between Australia and Hong Kong.

Alongside this, there was also the relationship that existed based on religious aspect, through the works of Christian missionaries such as the *Borneo Evangelical Mission* (BEM) at the dawn of the Second World War (1939-1945). BEM was the brainchild of three missionaries from Melbourne, Australia, namely Hudson Southwell, Frank Davidson, and Carey Tolley that saw the birth of BEM in Australia in 1928 (Southwell, 1999).

BEM had specific aspirations to spread Christianity among the local people in the remote areas of Borneo. Approximately 10 years after their religious works in Sarawak, specifically in the area of Limbang, BEM started to expand itself to Sabah in 1937. Their primary contribution is the formation of a missionary body known as the Borneo Bible Council or SIB (*Sidang Injil Borneo*) which was formally inaugurated in 1959. SIB extensively expanded in Sabah and Sarawak, especially in becoming a famous religious institution amongst the multi-ethnic locals who were not Muslims (Bala, 1994).

THE ERA OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1939-1945)

In early 1942, the whole of Sabah was occupied by Japanese army. Naturally, the relationship between Sabah and Australia was interrupted for about four years. Upon realising the importance of Sabah, not only in the aspect of trade but also politics and its strategic location, Australia offered its military assistance to Sabah in its fight against Japan in 1945.

It is worth mentioning that Australia had begun to assist in the battle against Japan in the South East Asian region even before the attack of Pearl Harbour. To note, Australia had sent its air force, *No.1 Squadron*, to impede Japanese attack against Kota Bahru, Kelantan. Nevertheless, the Japanese army had landed two hours before the arrival of Australian task force.

Australia had also sent the armed force, *8th Division*, to Johor on January 14, 1942. There were many other borders in Peninsular Malaya, including Sarawak and Sabah, where Australian forces have been placed. Hence, the assistance given by Australia to Malaysia, specifically Sabah, during the plight of World War II was enormous.

The Australian army experienced a bitter defeat in their efforts to defend and free Malaysia from the clutches of Japan. There were about 18,000 first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and 1,100 Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) that were sent to Peninsular Malaya. It was estimated that more than 1,800 men and 33 women in the armed forces of Australia went missing during these stages. About 15,000 soldiers had been detained.

The Japanese treatment towards the Australians was deplorable that caused the death of one third of these soldiers before the war came to an end. One such infamous incident happened at the POW (Prisoners of War) camp in Sandakan and the death march to Ranau, Sabah. About 2,428 of soldiers from the Allied Forces, who consisted of 641 British and 1,787 Australian soldiers, were detained in the camp in Sandakan.

Between the period of July 18, 1942 and August 15, 1945, only six Australian soldiers survived the Second World War; the others were either killed by Japanese military or died of acute diseases or were starved to death in the Prisoners of War (POW) camp or died during the death march from Sandakan to Ranau, covering the distance of 250 kilometres (160 miles).

When the campaign of “Free South East Asia” was commenced, the Allied Forces sent approximately 29,000 members of the army to Labuan. Most of them were from the Australian 9th Division Brigade, who landed on the Bay of Brunei on June 10, 1945. The battle in Labuan caused the lives of 34 Australian soldiers, from a total of 138 deceased soldiers in the efforts to free Labuan and Sarawak.

THE BRITISH COLONIAL ERA

As soon as the defeated Japanese army retreated, the Allied Forces surrendered all administration of the British colony to the British soldiers. In 1946, the ruling of Sabah and Sarawak was given to the British government with the major intend to redevelop the colonies that have been destroyed during the war.

This period marked the peace enjoyed in Sabah and Sarawak. Even so, not much could be found to explain further regarding Sabah – Australia relations during those early stages. Instead, some records have been found to shed some light on Australia’s involvement in the security of West Malaysia.

In 1946, the Australian government negotiated with the Great Britain and New Zealand towards achieving a joint defence within the region of Peninsular Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji. Such an agreement was achieved three years later, known through its acronym, ANZAM (Australia, New Zealand, and Malayan), which was established as a forum for strategic planning (Camilleri, 2001:36-38; and Pugsley,

2003). This is because Peninsular Malaya, including Singapore, was in an unstable situation due to the trouble caused by the insurgence of Malayan Communist Party or PKM (*Parti Komunis Malaya*). The state of emergency was declared in 1948 and was halted only in 1960.

Following the demands from the British government, Australia started yet another phase of its commitment in the security aspect of West Malaysia in April 1950 (Dennis & Grey, 1996:22). In particular, Australia reacted almost immediately by sending air military force, No.1 Squadron RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) and armed forces to Singapore in the following year (Hakimah Ahmad Sidek, 2009:27).

One distinct contribution of the Australian army is the achievement of the *Operation Termite* in July 1954 that destroyed 181 communist camps in Peninsular Malaya. Australia, then, sent the *2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR)* to Penang in October 1955. These armed forces crossed the borders in January 1956 and managed to defeat the communist *guerrillas* in Perak. Many other forms of assistance through its battalion were supplied by Australia and attained numerous accomplishments against communist in Peninsular Malaya (Hakimah Ahmad Sidek, 2009:28-33).



Photo 1:
Lincoln Bomber A73-33, No.1 Squadron RAAF
on a Bombing Mission over the Malayan Jungle.
(Source: *Australian War Memorial*, 2010)

In truth, the formal diplomatic relations between Malaysia, namely Peninsular Malaya, and Australia only began when the Australian High

Commission was formed in Kuala Lumpur in 1955. Malaysia was, then, known as Malayan government or British Malaya due to its status as the Crown Colony (Guillemand, 1934:394-402).

In 1957, Malaya gained its independence and, then, in 1963 known as the Federation of Malaya. Australia was one of the first fifteen foreign countries to establish diplomatic relations with the Federation of Malaya following its independence. Even then, Australia still maintained a cooperative stand in its fight against communist in the region. Within 13 years of its involvement in the campaign against communist in Malaya, a total of 39 Australian soldiers deceased, 27 of them suffered from injuries.

In Sabah, including Sarawak, the involvement of Australia did not occur in the aspect of security during this era. Australia is believed to have assisted the British government in introducing various forms of progress in technical skills, especially in the development of local human capital.

In 1950, the Australian government had suggested a joint concept of economic development for developing countries in the South Asian and South East Asian region. This concept was later known as the *Colombo Plan* (Lowe & Oakman eds., 2004:43 and 463). Since 1952, many technical experts from Australia were sent to Sabah.³ The development of an extensive technical cooperation programme had indeed been one of the notable achievements of the *Colombo Plan*. The technical cooperation programme had been an integral part of the *Colombo Plan* since 1950 (*The Colombo Plan*, 1956).

Aside from that, this programme also enabled Sabahans to obtain sponsorship to acquire technical training and, further, their education to the tertiary level in foreign countries,⁴ especially in Australia and New Zealand (*Daily Express*, 10/1/1964:5). As a matter of fact, to mark the presence of numerous Australian workforces in Sabah, a social association was formed in Sandakan on November 15, 1948 called the *Australian Association of North Borneo*. Its first President was H. Parnell, M.BE.⁵ This association was an important reminder of the military assistance provided by Australia to Sabah during World War II (1939-1945).

³See, for example, "C442/51: "G.C. Whiteley's Letter to Sir Ralph Hone, Dated 02 January 1952" in *Secretariat's File*. Jesselton: Sabah State Archive.

⁴See also "No.3040/52/1: Letter of L.W. Jones to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Canberra, Date 17 January 1953" in *Secretariat's File*. Jesselton: Sabah State Archive; and "B103/1/KRC/BB: Letter of Office of High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Canberra to Chief Secretary of North Borneo, Jesselton, Dated 26 February 1953" in *Secretariat's File*. Jesselton: Sabah State Archive.

⁵See "R.S. 9001/44: Australian Association of Sabah (North Borneo) Letter to the Registrar of Societies, Jesselton, Dated 30 April 1951" in *National Archive of Malaysia*.

THE MALAYSIAN ERA

A closer relation between Sabah and Australia can be observed during the confrontational era of Indonesia – Malaysia during the years of 1963-1966. The conflicts of war between the two nations involved military forces from Australia and the Great Britain. Australia's interest in the conflict was in favour of Malaysia due to its commitment towards ANZAM (Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia), especially in the efforts against the spread of Communism and for the sake of Australia's national security.⁶

This relationship was also the extension of the cooperative initiative between British Malaya and Australia in strategic and security fields since 1948. In the month of May of the same year, a unanimous agreement was achieved between the Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, which is when these three nations agreed to share security defences of British colonies in the South East Asian region, including Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei (Wah, 1976:18-19; and Abd Aziz, 1999:3-4).

In 1949, Australia participated in the negotiation for Indonesia's independence. This, naturally, brought to the close relationship between the two nations. However, it turned sour when President Soekarno commenced affiliations with the Communist nation, China (Leifer *et al.*, 2006:147). The commitment shown by Australia in the operation against Kalimantan and West Malaysia was based on the Far East CSR (Center of Strategic Reserve) membership (Subritzky, 2000:27).

When Malaya gained its independence in 1957, the status of ANZAM was restructured in accordance to the existing needs. This gradually resulted in the formation of a new allied association known as the Anglo-Malayan Defence Arrangement (AMDA) on October 12, 1957. The involvement of Australia as well as New Zealand as associate members in AMDA enabled them to acquire strategic benefits through security intensives, namely in practising frontline defence mechanisms to halt Communism in the Asian region.

When news about the Federation of Malaysia was announced, Indonesia was utterly against it. As a result, in 1963 the hostility ended in war. At the beginning, Australia took the stand of not supplying any form of military assistance to the conflict. Yet, when President Soekarno took West Irian by force on 15 August 1962, the Australian government's concern grew as it was facing the possibility of Indonesia using West Irian to threaten its security, especially its interests in Papua and New Guinea.

⁶See, for example, "Australia's Strategic Position – Report by the Defence Committee, 4 February 1963" in <http://www.defence.gov.au/strategicbasis/pdf/1963.pdf> [accessed in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: 25 May 2012].

On 16 September 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was formed with the strong support from Australia and the United Nations. As a matter of fact, the former Australian Governor-General, Sir William McKell, helped in the drafting of the Malaysian Constitution. Almost immediately, then, Australia sent its military aid to Peninsular Malaysia when Indonesia launched two attacks in Labis and Pontian, Johor, in the months of September and October in 1964. The Australian task force from the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) successfully prevented Indonesia from conquering the area. Subsequently, in January 1965, Australia duly agreed to place its task force in Borneo.

The first Australian battalion from 3 RAR landed in Borneo in the month of March in 1965 and served in Sarawak until late July. During this period, the Australian regiment operated extensively in the areas surrounding both borders. They fought against the Indonesian army four times. Then, the 3 RAR was replaced by 28th Brigade, 4 RAR, which was also placed in Sarawak from April till August 1966.



Photo 2:
Member of the 4 RAR Cleaning a Bren Gun at a Camp
Near Sarawak/Kalimantan Border in 1966.
(Source: *Australian War Memorial*, 2010)

Besides that, the Australian government sent the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) as well to safeguard the coastal and air areas in Borneo. Meanwhile, the HMAS (Her Majesty's Australian Ship) forces of the Royal Australian Navy from Sydney, Australia were sent to Jesselton (now known as Kota Kinabalu) with officers, military tanks, ammunition, and weapons. In general, RAN had sent numerous ships such as the *Hawk*, *Gull*, *Curlew*, *Snipe*, *Teal*, *Ibis*, *Duchess*, *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, and *Derwent* to guard the Malaysian waters (Hakimah Ahmad Sidek, 2009:41-46).

When Indonesia sent its troop to invade the eastern borders of Sebatik Island, nearby Tawau, in Sabah on 28 Jun 1965, the Australian regiment fought against them, namely the *HMAS Yarra* began a non-stop fire that forced the Indonesian army to retreat (Hakimah Ahmad Sidek, 2009). Eventually, the negotiation between Indonesia and Malaysia ended the confrontation as both nations signed a peace agreement in Bangkok in August 1966. Throughout the confrontational years, about 23 Australian soldiers died.

As the Indonesia – Malaysia confrontation ended, the Australian government still upheld its commitment with regards to security measures, especially through AMDA. The AMDA's dedication only stopped when it was abolished in 1971 due to lack of financial support and insufficient military resource (Abd Aziz, 1999:5-7). This also implied that the involvement of British forces have formally ended within the region.

Moreover, the military aid supplied by Australia during the Malaysia – Indonesia confrontation became the primary contributing factor to the withdrawal of British from the region, especially due to the escalating costs in financing such aids (Abdullah Baginda, 1992:48). This, in turn, allowed Malaysia to form a security alliance within the region. This effort proved to be rewarding as it resulted in the formation of Five Power Defense Arrangements in 1971 (Abd Aziz, 1999:15).

The contribution by Australia in providing security assistance was enormous, specifically when Sabah and Malaya endured the Second World War (1939-1945) and during the Indonesia – Malaysia confrontation (1963-1966) as well. In addition, to honour the support and contribution of the Australian army in Sabah, a joint military association comprising soldiers from Australia and New Zealand was formed and named as *Australian and New Zealand Army Associations* or known through its acronym as ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps); a secondary school was built in Kota Kinabalu in the year of 1969 using that name as well.

The school became known as the *Anzac College*. The primary aim of this school was to have a building to commemorate the close bond and comradeship between the people of Sabah and the ANZAC soldiers who fought alongside one another during the war. In 1974, the ANZAC acronym was changed to SANZAC (Sabah, Australia, and New Zealand Army Corps) and this school became a government school with its new name SMK (*Sekolah Menengah Kerajaan*) SANZAC or the SANZAC Government Secondary School.⁷

The above explanation has surmised the background of the relationship between Sabah and Australia that exists till today. This relationship has existed thus far on mutual interests in various fields (*Sabah Times*, 8/6/1966:12).

In the beginning, it was based on exploration and trade activities during the years before the 19th century. Then, it was rooted on strategic interests and security needs within the region against the Japanese preoccupation, followed by the spread of Communism. At present, the relations between Sabah and Australia has expanded through numerous areas of interests which include the parliamentary system, legislation and jurisdiction, and as members of Commonwealth.

People-to-people relationship in business ventures such as the the Malaysia-Australia Business Council and the Australia-Malaysia Business Council (Coppel, 2005); constant negotiation in various policy making deals at the Foreign Ministry level and Australia-Malaysia Joint Trade Committee in 1986 (Coppel, 2005); collaboration in defense and security through Five Power Defense Arrangements in 1971;⁸ and Malaysia-Australia Joint Defense Programme in 1992 (Albar, 2006).

Economically, Malaysia is the third largest business associate to Australia and the eighth biggest among ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries, or eleventh largest amongst world nations. Malaysia is the twelfth largest import nation to Australia.⁹ It is anticipated that in the dawn of the 21st century, closer ties between Australia and Malaysia, as

⁷See, for example, "The History of SMK Sanzac" in <http://www.sabah.edu.my/SMSN-ZC/sejarah.htm> [accessed in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: 2 May 2012].

⁸See also "Media Release: Five Power Defence Meeting" by Defence Ministers & Parliamentary Secretary (Australia). Available also at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/minister/Mooretpl.cfm?CurrentId=192> [accessed in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: 24 March 2012].

⁹See, for example, "Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Trade: Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee" in *The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia: Australia's relationship with Malaysia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007. Available also at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/malaysia/report/fullreport.pdf> [accessed in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: 24 March 2012].

well as other nations within the South East Asian region, would be focused on economic collaborations rather than military expansion. This is based on Australia's primary foreign policy (Whitnam, 1979:2).

The close relationship between Australia and Malaysia can also be explained through migratory fact, whereby a total of 120,053 Malaysians were residing in Australia in the year of 2008 (DFAT, 2010). It is estimated that it is an increase of 11.6 percent compared to year 2006. In the tourism industry, there were about 171,000 tourists from Malaysia in year 2008 (DFAT, 2010). This places Malaysia as the second largest tourist resource to Australia after Singapore in the South East Asian region.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, we have attempted to examine the historical development of the relationship between the state of Sabah (Malaysia) and Australia. These two political entities share a lot in common due to their historical past of British colonial background that has been founded by private explorers from England.

It is interesting to note that the historical connections between Sabah and Australia have long been established, especially beginning from the era of the Malay Sultanates to the era of the North Borneo Chartered Company (NBCC), the Second World War era, and the Malaysian era. The long-standing relationship between Sabah and Australia manifests that the foundation of the relationship is strong hence shall be further strengthened. Having said that, further research is necessary in order to appreciate and further strengthen their relationship for mutual benefits.

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