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**TENGGU ABDUL RAHMAN
AND MALAYSIA'S
FOREIGN POLICY
1963-1970**



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ABSTRACT

TENGGU ABDUL RAHMAN AND MALAYSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY 1963 — 1970

Malaysia is a unique monarchy where parliamentary democracy seems fully established, with free elections held regularly. Upon this democratic base, the Malays have built an impressive model of economic development. They were lucky because the British left them a prosperous country, Malaya, which became independent on 31 August 1957. The cornerstone of Malaya's foreign policy was pro-West and anti-communist. The Malays enlarged the territorial entity with British help, to become Malaysia in 1963, incorporating Sarawak, Sabah, the remaining British colonies in Borneo, and Singapore. Singapore seceded in 1965. Brunei, which became independent in 1984 decided to stay out of Malaysia at the last moment.

Malaysia was ruled by the Cambridge-educated Malay Prince, Tengku Abdul Rahman (St Catharine's 1922-1925, B.A. in history) from 1957 until he was hastened into retirement (following vicious racial violence in May 1969) in 1970. Under his leadership, like Malaya's, Malaysia's foreign policy was pro-West which in Tengku's idiom essentially meant pro-British and Commonwealth. It depended on Britain and the Commonwealth for trade, commerce, education, training and defence assistance. Tengku was so anti-communist that the country had no diplomatic relations with any communist country until 1967 when circumstances demanded it. The foundation of Tengku's foreign policy was the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Treaty Agreement (AMDA) which provided, first Malaya and then Malaysia, with the defence umbrella the country needed.

When Malaysia, sponsored by the Anglo-Malaysian alliance, was mooted, Indonesia, whose territory adjoined the involved territories initially welcomed the idea, but after the Parti Komunis Indonesia (PKI) denounced the formation of Malaysia as a 'neo colonialist plot' on the very frontiers of Indonesia, Sukarno launched Indonesian Confrontation against Malaysia before Malaysia was even formed. Indonesia's 'undeclared war' on Malaysia was a traumatic experience for the Malays who were closely related with the Indonesians in race, religion, language and culture. And both faced common risks: communism and the affluent immigrant Chinese. The three year old war which Sukarno euphemistically called 'Confrontation' was Malaysia's only serious foreign relations problem. Malay diplomacy was severely tested. However, it overcame the ordeal. It was a great relief when the Confrontation ended in 1966 following a political upheaval in Indonesia which replaced Sukarno with General Suharto.

Indonesia's Confrontation with Malaysia was less than a war but something more than a diplomatic dispute. Thus 'Malaysia' became an international issue even before it actually came into being.

Malaysia's troubled birth was further complicated by the hostility of the

second of its three big neighbours, the Philippines, which claimed Sabah as its territory alleging that Sabah was leased, not ceded by the Sultan of Sulu to the British. The Philippines asserted that Sabah should be part of its territory because the Sultan of Sulu's sovereignty had passed on to it. The Philippine claim is legally weak because both Spain and the United States when they ruled the Philippines acknowledged British sovereignty over Sabah. Nevertheless, the Philippine claim to Sabah strained the Anglo-Malay alliance. Malaysia broke diplomatic relations with Indonesia and the Philippines when both countries refused to recognise it.

After Confrontation broke out, Malaysia found itself in desperate need of friends in the Third World and among Muslim countries. Malaysia's traditional allies, Britain, Australia and New Zealand loyally stood by Malaysia; more so Britain (Malaysia's Anchor Power). At the height of Confrontation there were 50,000 British troops alone in Malaysia to protect and defend it against populous Indonesia with a 500,000-strong Soviet-supplied armed force. In the Third World Indonesia was more influential than Malaysia. In consequence many countries supported Indonesia rather than Malaysia. Malaysia's craving for 'diplomatic and political support' of the Afro-Asian and Muslim countries led to the country's first shift in its foreign policy: while maintaining close ties with its traditional allies, Malaysia made and influenced friends in the Third World. It succeeded, to Indonesia's surprise.

After the Confrontation ended, Malaysia made a second shift in its foreign policy: it cultivated the non-aligned countries and in the process Malaysia established diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, then with the Soviet Union. It continued to broaden its diplomatic and commercial base.

The Tengku held the Federation of Malaysia together against Sukarno's challenge but failed to keep Singapore in the Federation. As will be seen the Prince deliberately planned the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. The separation of Singapore was caused in the main by the antagonisms and suspicions between the Malays and the Chinese which were portrayed by two contrasting Cantabrigians: the aristocratic Tengku and the intellectual and plebeian Singapore Chinese Lee Kuan Yew (Fitzwilliam 1946-1949). They made racial integration impossible.

The separation of Singapore; the reconciliation with Indonesia and the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Philippines in 1966, the violent race riots in May 1969 and the embryonic Islamic renaissance in Malaysia introduced new elements in Malaysia foreign policy, all of which contributed initially to the weakening of the Anglo-Malay link. The long-term effect of these new forces was the decline in Anglo-Malaysian relations.

The British decision to withdraw from East of Suez, British military and economic decline, the obsession with the EEC and American decision to reduce its commitment in Indo-China reflected the trend towards a new international order in South East Asia which in turn forced Malaysia, under the new Prime Minister,