

Konfrontasi was not fought in vain

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MALAYSIA recently celebrated its 64th Independence Day on Aug 31, albeit mutedly due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. Malaysia Day falls tomorrow.

However, the formation of Malaysia was parlous and the young state fought a "small undeclared war" to preserve its sovereignty, known as the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, or Konfrontasi.

It started as soon as Malaysia, consisting of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, was formed on Sept 16, 1963.

Indonesia under president Sukarno opposed the formation of Malaysia. He saw it as a British strategy, covertly supported by the United States, to contain Indonesia's geopolitical ambitions in the region.

The Philippines was also against the formation of Malaysia as it claimed parts of Sabah, and broke off diplomatic relations while Sukarno launched a "Ganyang Malaysia" campaign, utilising military and international perception-shaping operations.

The first major combat action of the Konfrontasi, the Battle of Long Jawai, was on Sept 28, 1963.

Twenty-one Malaysian border scouts, six British Gurkhas and two police field force personnel



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were attacked by 200 Indonesian soldiers at Long Jawai outpost, 48km from the Sarawak-Kalimantan border.

The British-Malaysian force was defeated and the Indonesians executed 10 captured Malaysian border scouts. The Indonesian military continued cross-border raids in Sarawak and Sabah from Kalimantan through the porous mountainous and jungle borders. This was countered by Malaysian security forces, aided by a strong contingent of Commonwealth forces, mostly from Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

The Malaysian and Commonwealth forces used similar counterinsurgency tactics and operational concepts employed during the Malayan Emergency, due to the similar topographical nature of Borneo and the small-scale raiding nature of the

campaign.

One was codenamed Claret, which involved dangerous cross-border intelligence-gathering missions and later, track-and-ambush operations in Indonesia's Kalimantan.

The British 22nd Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) (and an Australian SAS squadron and a troop from New Zealand SAS) conducted numerous cross-border operations in support of Claret. These operations are still studied at military staff colleges around the world.

Indonesia also attempted to open a second front by launching commando raids on Peninsular Malaysia from mid-1964, amphibious raids on coastal areas of Johor and Singapore on Aug 17, 1964, and parachuting in commandos on Sept 2 to conduct subversion and sabotage attacks.

These were disrupted and destroyed by Malaysian and Commonwealth forces.

Malaysia also conducted a whirlwind of diplomatic visits between 1964 and 1965, to gather support for the newly formed country, led by the then deputy prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, and Singapore chief minister, Lee Kuan Yew.

This contributed to the foundation of contemporary



Then deputy prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein greeting Indonesian foreign minister Dr Adam Malik at Subang Airport on Aug 12, 1966, two months after the end of Konfrontasi. FILE PIC

Malaysia's grand strategy of utilising diplomacy to resolve international issues peacefully.

Meanwhile, Sukarno was replaced by Suharto at the end of 1965 after a failed coup. The Konfrontasi lasted until 1966, when Suharto decided to explore options in ending the conflict.

Indonesia and Malaysia held peace talks leading to the conclusion of the Konfrontasi with the signing of a peace treaty in Bangkok on May 28, 1966. During the Konfrontasi, Malaysian and Commonwealth security forces lost 114 men.

The end of Konfrontasi led to the formation of Asean in 1967. Asean enabled three of its five pioneer members, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, to reconcile relations. Asean now includes all Southeast Asian states, and has performed well in managing regional economic and security issues. Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia are close partners today.

The three nations launched the

Trilateral Maritime Patrol in June 2017, enabling Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines to conduct joint sea and air patrols in the Sulu Sea to counter kidnappings and piracy.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore also initiated the Malacca Strait Sea Patrol in 2004, which was later became the Malacca Strait Patrol, with Thailand officially joining in 2008.

Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart (1895-1970), the military strategist who wrote *Strategy* (first edition in 1941; second revised edition in 1954), had posited that: "The object of war is a better state of peace."

The Konfrontasi was not fought in vain. It catalysed a peaceful, prosperous and cohesive South-east Asia today.

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