

**MALAYSIA'S RELATIONS WITH SINGAPORE
AND INDONESIA UNDER NAJIB RAZAK'S
ADMINISTRATION**

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UMS

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ABSTRACT

Ties of history, culture and economic interdependence have bound Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia's long-term relationship. Although there have been ups and downs in Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations, Malaysia's relationship with both countries has remained strong. Over the years, the conduct and approaches of Malaysia's foreign relations have changed due to changes in domestic and external factors. Thus, this study focuses on the main issues and factors that influenced the Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations from the year 2009 to 2018. The similarities and differences between Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations were also analysed. Library resources were used and semi-structured interviews with former minister, academic experts and diplomats were carried out to gain information. Neoclassical realism combines internal and external variables, which acted as determinants to explain the behaviour of the country's foreign policies. It also emphasises the influence of a political leadership act. Thus, neoclassical realism theory was used to determine the domestic factor, an external factor and leadership factor that plays an extensive role in shaping Malaysia's relations towards Singapore and Indonesia. This study found that the unresolved and main issues, such as the water issue and the maids' issue affect Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations respectively. The findings also indicate that main factors such as deep interdependence, culture, alliance and the prime minister's leadership style influence Malaysia's relations with Singapore and Indonesia.

Keywords: Malaysia's foreign relations; Singapore; Indonesia; Neoclassical realism.

ABSTRAK

HUBUNGAN MALAYSIA DENGAN SINGAPURA DAN INDONESIA

DI BAWAH PENTADBIRAN NAJIB RAZAK

Hubungan sejarah, budaya, dan saling kebergantungan dalam bidang ekonomi telah mewujudkan hubungan jangka panjang Malaysia-Singapura dan Malaysia-Indonesia. Walaupun terdapat beberapa masalah timbul dalam hubungan Malaysia-Singapura dan Malaysia-Indonesia, hubungan Malaysia dengan kedua-dua negara tersebut tetap kukuh. Selama bertahun-tahun, tingkah laku dan pendekatan hubungan luar Malaysia telah berubah disebabkan oleh perubahan faktor domestik dan luaran. Oleh itu, kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada isu dan faktor utama yang mempengaruhi hubungan Malaysia-Singapura dan Malaysia-Indonesia dari tahun 2009 hingga 2018. Persamaan dan perbezaan antara hubungan Malaysia-Singapura dan Malaysia-Indonesia juga dianalisis. Sumber perpustakaan digunakan dan temubual separa berstruktur dengan mantan menteri, pakar akademik dan diplomat telah dijalankan untuk mendapatkan maklumat. Neoclassical realism menggabungkan pemboleh ubah dalaman dan luaran, yang bertindak sebagai penentu untuk menjelaskan tingkah laku dasar luar negara. Ia juga menekankan pengaruh tindakan kepemimpinan politik. Oleh itu, teori neoclassical realism digunakan untuk menentukan faktor domestik, faktor luaran, dan faktor kepemimpinan yang berperanan luas dalam membentuk hubungan Malaysia dengan Singapura dan Indonesia. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa isu utama yang tidak dapat diselesaikan, seperti isu air dan isu pembantu rumah masing-masing mempengaruhi hubungan Malaysia-Singapura dan Malaysia-Indonesia. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa faktor utama seperti saling bergantung yang mendalam, budaya, pakatan dan gaya kepemimpinan perdana menteri mempengaruhi hubungan Malaysia dengan Singapura dan Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Hubungan luar negara Malaysia; Singapura; Indonesia; Neoclassical realism.

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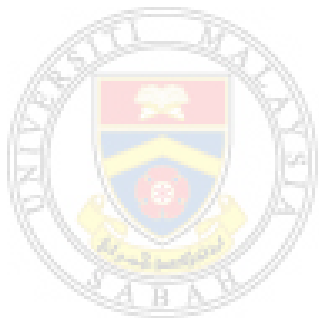
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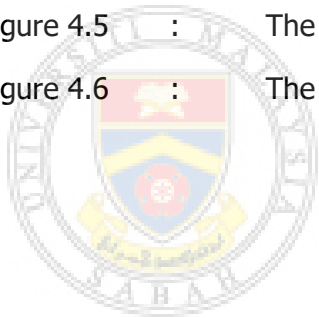
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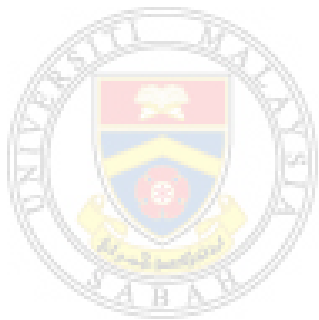
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABIF	-	ASEAN Banking Integration Framework
ANZUS Treaty	-	Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty
ASEAN	-	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATM	-	Malaysian Armed Forces / Angkatan Tentera Malaysia
BNM	-	Central Bank of Malaysia / Bank Negara Malaysia
CAS	-	College of Arts and Sciences
CIQ	-	Customs, Immigration and Quarantine
CLC	-	Community Learning Centers
COLGIS	-	College of Law, Government and International Studies
CPOPC	-	Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries
EMGS	-	Education Malaysia Global Services
ETP	-	Economic Transformation Programme
EU	-	European Union
EP	-	European Parliament
FPDA	-	Five Power Defence Arrangements
GBC	-	General Border Committee Malaysia-Indonesia
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GLC	-	Government-Linked Companies
GSGSG	-	Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government
HSBC	-	Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited
HSR	-	High-Speed Rail

ICJ	-	International Court of Justice
IGC	-	Inter-Governmental Committee
ISD	-	Internal Security Department (Singapore)
ISIS	-	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KD	-	Royal Ship / Kapal Diraja
KTMB	-	Malayan Railways Limited / Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad
MAB	-	Malaysia Airlines Berhad
MAMA	-	Malaysian Maid Employers Association
MAS	-	Monetary Authority of Singapore
MAS	-	Malaysia Airlines
MCA	-	Malayan Chinese Association
MITI	-	Ministry of International Trade and Industry
MoU	-	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	-	Member of Parliament
MSB	-	Malaysian Special Branch
MSC	-	Malaysian Solidarity Convention
NKEAs	-	National Key Economic Areas
OCBC	-	Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation
PAP	-	People's Action Party
PAPA	-	Malaysian Association of Foreign Maid Agencies / Persatuan Agensi Pembantu Rumah Asing Malaysia
PCA	-	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PKI	-	Communist Party of Indonesia / Partai Komunis Indonesia

PoA	-	Points of Agreement
PROTON	-	National Automobile Company / Perusahaan OTomobil Nasional
PRC	-	People's Republic of China
PT ACL	-	PT Adiperkasa Citra Lestari
RTS	-	Rapid Transit System
SAF	-	Singapore Armed Forces
SAR	-	Search And Rescue
SIA	-	Singapore Airlines
SLCP	-	School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy
SMRT	-	Singapore Mass Rapid Transit
SoIS	-	School of International Studies
STAINU	-	Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic Religious High School / Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Nahdlatul Ulama
TDM	-	Malaysian Army / Tentera Darat Malaysia
TEL	-	Thomson-East Coast Line
TKI	-	Indonesian Migrant Workers / Tenaga Kerja Indonesia
TLDM	-	Royal Malaysian Navy / Tentera Laut Diraja Malaysia
TNI	-	Indonesian National Armed Forces / Tentara Nasional Indonesia
TNI-AD	-	Indonesian National Armed Forces - Army / Tentara Nasional Indonesia Angkatan Darat
UKM	-	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UMNO	-	United Malays National Organisation / Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

- US** - United States
- USIM** - Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
- UUM** - Universiti Utara Malaysia
- WTCP** - Woodlands Train Checkpoint



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Malaysia continues to succeed globally because of its exemplary foreign policy. Foreign policy is an approach or strategy implemented by a country's government to meet its national interests by establishing relations with external parties (Smith, Hadfield & Dunne, 2013). The relationship between a state and another state is essential to the country's preservation, security, and prosperity. Most countries in the world today depend on one another in various aspects, such as politics, economics, security and technology.

Bilateral relations are formed when two states acknowledge each other as sovereign states and establish diplomatic ties. Bilateral relations also happen when there are historical, political, economic and cultural connections between two states. When two states have a close relationship, collaboration occurs, shares a common interest, and strengthens their engagement (Rana, 2020). Bilateralism is the most important aspect of a nation to ensure the long-term development of the country's economy. The bilateral relation is said to be more effective and easier to negotiate as only two countries are involved in discussing issues that may arise between these two (Rusdi Omar & Mas Juliana Mukhtaruddin, 2010). A state establishes diplomatic relations with other states to ensure world peace and stability, meet each other economic needs, preserve its national interest and resolve global challenges and issues.

The aim of extending relations with other countries is to protect the interests of a nation in terms of security, economic stability, tourism, culture, education and vocational training. Therefore, establish a good relationship with the countries that adopt safe and friendly policies is the main principle held by the Malaysian government regardless of their ideology or political systems. Malaysia's foreign policy has been shaped by three key factors: its strategic location in Southeast Asia, its status as a trading nation, and its unique demography. The core principles of Malaysia's foreign policy have been maintained since 1957. However, several foreign policy approaches have changed over the years due to domestic and external factors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2018). Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for formulating Malaysia's foreign relations with other countries, the Prime Minister usually determines the direction of Malaysia's foreign policy with the assistance of the Cabinet. Malaysia's foreign policy aims to promote and safeguard the national economic interest (Ahmad Kamil Jaafar, 2004).

Malaysia's foreign policy has been continuously independent, principled, and pragmatic since independence, based on the values of peace, humanity, justice, and equity. The main objective of Malaysia's foreign policy has been to safeguard the country's sovereignty and national interests in the international arena as well as foster good relations and strengthen cooperation with other countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2018). Furthermore, it also addresses political, economic, security and social developments and challenges on the world stage (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 1957). Therefore, Malaysia establishes relations with the countries that can contribute to the country's economic development. However, Malaysia remains committed to deepening the external relations by building economic ties with neighbouring countries such as Singapore and Indonesia to be globally competitive regardless of any changes in government.

This study aims to discuss Malaysia's relations with Singapore and Indonesia from the year 2009 to 2018. This study also analyses the similarities and differences between Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations in terms

of internal, external and leadership factors. The characteristics of a country such as Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, their leaders and attitudes towards foreign relations differ. Therefore, this study is able to view why Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia respond to bilateral relations differently.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Today, Malaysia and Singapore are among the two most admired countries in Southeast Asia and set an example to many neighbouring countries. Although Malaysia-Singapore's relations history shows that it has faced many crises and issues, both established and maintained a good relationship. History shows that the deep political and economic differences between the governments of Singapore and Malaysia have led to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 (Chan Heng Chee, 1969). However, the separation did not stop the two countries from showing potential through their cooperation in many fields in these modern times. From 2009 to 2018, we could see that Malaysia and Singapore had never missed opportunities to work together for mutual benefit. Besides, both countries took the initiative and managed to overcome challenges that arose between them.

Even so, there are still unsettled issues that often affect the good relations between these two countries. As a result, these unresolved bilateral issues between Malaysia and Singapore often become sensational news in the media of both countries. Consequently, it gives an inaccurate impression in the eyes of both countries' people and the government. Not only that, such issues may affect long-term bilateral relations and current projects if not addressed promptly and adequately. Although Malaysia and Singapore are committed to solving the problems, still, up-to-date some issues remain unresolved.

Malaysia and Indonesia have gone through a phase of diplomatic relations that is unique. Similarities, such as geographical area, history, culture, and even

brotherhood, enabled them to develop such relationships (Elly Yuliawati, 2015). Although the history of Malaysia-Indonesia relations is not the same as Malaysia-Singapore relations, it owns a set of experiences throughout history. After the leadership changes from President Sukarno to President Suharto, Indonesia took a stand to end the confrontation in 1966 and begin a new chapter with Malaysia. Besides, Malaysia and Indonesia were able to resolve issues that arose between them, where restorations of political and economic relations took place after the confrontation. Also, it has been a significant milestone for Malaysia and Indonesia as the changes in relations have helped enhance regional stability (Mohd Noor Mat Yazid, 2013).

Malaysia's relations with Indonesia are marked by friendship and cordiality. From 2009 to 2018, it can be seen that Malaysia and Indonesia have been working closely, where economic cooperation has greatly benefitted both sides. However, some problems that are not solved entirely still arise and affect the good relationship, which has been maintained for years. We could see that both Malaysia and Indonesia were able to resolve some issues that arose through bilateral discussions without the intervention of third parties. However, the certain issue becomes more challenging to solve, although the two countries sit together and discuss finding a way out.

Since all the previously mentioned countries have historical and cultural affinities and based on the past experiences of these countries, this study would like to understand why the bilateral issues that sparked between these countries could not be resolved in stages. Moreover, although it does not affect bilateral relations, the tensions that occur are enough to be the reason why the issue between Malaysia and Singapore as well as Malaysia and Indonesia deserve to be highlighted. Interestingly, the tensions did not affect the friendly relationship between (government-to-government). In fact, the relationship between people (people-to-people) is somewhat affected due to the vast coverage of the issues between the countries in the mainstream media.

Hence, this study would like to identify the main issues that have not been settled, often arise and affect Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations and also explain the main factors that led the involved countries to work together and maintain good relations even though there are issues that are yet to be settled.

Dato' Sri Najib Razak's term as the Prime Minister of Malaysia was from 3 April 2009 to 9 May 2018 (Cabinet, Constitution and Inter-Governmental Relations Division, Prime Minister's Department, 2021). During his era, bilateral diplomacy was said to be a priority in Malaysian foreign policy. He emphasised the importance of forging bilateral ties (bilateral diplomacy) with countries that are Malaysia's "trading partners" (Rusdi Omar & Mas Juliana Mukhtaruddin, 2010).

Dato' Sri Najib stated that Malaysia and Singapore's bilateral relationship was the best in Malaysian history (Dato' Sri Najib Razak, 2015). He also indicated that the jousting between Malaysia and Singapore has ended under his leadership and does not wish to return to the era of "confrontational diplomacy" (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2018a). Most of the bilateral issues that had been plaguing the two nations' relations were overcome once the Malayan Railways Limited (KTMB) railway issue was resolved (Kesavapany, 2017). As a result, both governments were able to consider good possibilities for collaboration, and both parties were able to achieve a win-win situation.

Furthermore, Dato' Sri Najib described Malaysia-Indonesia relations as "kinship" that may be compared to the Malay saying "*air yang dicincang tak akan putus*" (meaning 'blood is thicker than water') (The Borneo Post, 21 September 2017). Although Malaysia and Indonesia had experienced bitter-sweet moments in their relationship, ties had grown stronger. However, although the two nations have a solid traditional basis of connections, Dato' Sri Najib emphasised that the needs of the times require Malaysia and Indonesia to devise more realistic and mutually beneficial approaches (Rohani Abdul Ghani & Zulhilmi Paidi, 2010). In addition, Dato' Sri Najib stated that issues such as the maritime border issue and the arrest of Malaysian fishermen by the Indonesian authorities between the two

countries were resolved amicably and did not affect relations between them (Berita RTM, 2016).

Therefore, a study of Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations from 2009 to 2018 is necessary to analyse the similarities and differences in Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations under Dato' Sri Najib Razak administration. It will be able to identify the measures or approaches that the Malaysian government has taken under Dato' Sri Najib's leadership in addressing certain issues.

1.3 Literature Review

Since the independence of these three countries, several scholars have conducted studies on the ups and downs of Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia bilateral relations using various approaches.

The study of Ganesan (1998) explains the relationship between Singapore and Malaysia until the separation of the federation in 1965. In this context, Singapore has failed to play an important role in politics, citizenship, technology and services through bilateral relations. The writing of Antolik (1990) discusses the impact of Singapore's separation from Malaysia on bilateral relations between the two countries. Following the separation, various disputes have taken place in connection with Singapore's actions in security, politics and economics that threaten its relations with Southeast Asian countries. The cause of the disagreement between Malaysia-Singapore was policy differences in relation to the rights of the indigenous Malays in Malaysia and the rights of the Chinese in Singapore.

In the case of confrontation, various views have arisen to explain the factors that caused it. For instance, Kahin (1964) argues that nationalism is one of

the most dominant factors during the internal political conflict between the communists and the military that has made Indonesians oppose the formation of Malaysia. Meanwhile, Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud (2000) stated that the formation of Malaysia was the reason President Sukarno launched a confrontation policy towards Malaysia in 1963. The leadership style and political values of President Sukarno played a prominent role in the Malaysia-Indonesia conflict. According to Mackie (1974), President Sukarno's aggressive attitude has influenced the attitude of his people to protest against the establishment of Malaysia. In addition, as stated by Kahin, Sukarno's attitude is also highly influenced by the internal political conflict between communist and anti-communist groups.

Sah-Hadiyatan Ismail (2016) discussed the circumstances and the intervention of the major powers, especially the United States (US), in their attempts to end the conflict. The US feared that the conflict would threaten the stability of Southeast Asia. Therefore, the US indirectly links with Malaysia through Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty). In 1951, Australia and New Zealand signed a defence agreement, ANZUS Treaty with the US. Under the ANZUS agreement, the United States to assist Australia and New Zealand in the event of national security is threatened. According to the agreement, the United States is responsible for assist Australia and New Zealand, while Australia and New Zealand are responsible for assisting Britain and Malaysia (Sah-Hadiyatan Ismail, 2016). It shows that the international political situation also plays a very important role in the region.

Furthermore, there are other studies on Malaysia-Singapore and Malaysia-Indonesia relations, where the studies conducted by these scholars have contributed to this study from many perspectives. Mohd Noor Mat Yazid (2007) broadly discussed his assumptions such as leadership, internal politics and external factors (systemic), where these three factors play an important role in shaping the foreign policy of both countries before and after the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation. However, the study state that external factors play a dominant role in influencing bilateral relations compares to leadership and internal factors. The

study of Ahmed (2020) also strongly shows that external determinates sometimes play a more influential role and sometimes internal determinates can have a great influence. The main external factors that determine the foreign policy of a state are the international system or power structure, international law, international organisations, alliances, and military strength or arms race (Ahmed, 2020).

The study of Nurliana Suhaini and Aimi Khairunnisa (2016) focuses on the causes of the confrontation crisis and discovers diplomatic approaches taken by Malaysia to end the conflicts. Malaysia had used negotiation and discussion as a way to end Indonesia's confrontation against Malaysia in 1964. Prior to the conflict, many diplomatic efforts were undertaken to resolve the issue but were unsuccessful. The conflict is due to the stance of a different country. The study stated that a country like Malaysia needs the involvement of several big powers to solve a complicated situation. Their role also can be turned into a watchdog. However, when General Suharto became the President of Indonesia, he and his government have decided to end the confrontation. It shows that changes in government led to a reevaluation of foreign policy. Moreover, it also shows that it strongly affects the systemic factor.

Mohd Noor Mat Yazid (2013) stated that the new phase of Indonesia-Malaysia relations started when domestic politics and economic conditions began to develop in Indonesia. During Suharto's presidency, his new government began ties with Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. It shows that Indonesia's domestic politics have influenced its foreign policy. The strong leadership and stable domestic political situation have made Indonesia's foreign policy to be more successful. Good relations between Indonesia and Malaysia were due to the new direction of foreign policy. Besides, leaders' perceptions of domestic politics also affect foreign policy decisions and bilateral relations. Moreover, changes in domestic politics are not free from the systemic level.

Ali Maksum (2019) used the theory of defensive realism to analyse the Malaysia-Indonesia relations after the President Suharto era. He argues that