



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A region in dispute: Racialized anticommunism and Manila's role in the origins of Konfrontasi, 1961–63

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Abstract

Prior scholarship has treated the Philippines as an outside party to the conflict over the formation of Malaysia, known as Konfrontasi, which has been dealt with as a dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia. This article demonstrates the centrality of the Macapagal administration to the origins of Konfrontasi. Treating Manila as a core actor gives new insight into Konfrontasi, which can be best understood as a regional conflict over the racial and social shape of island Southeast Asia in the final stages of decolonization. Racialized anticommunism, expressed through the forcible redivision of the region to ensure social stability, emerges as the preoccupation of all the state actors promoting and opposing the formation of Malaysia. At the same time, an examination of developments in the Philippines and the actions of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) gives new insight into the critical function of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) in this affair.

Keywords: Konfrontasi; racialized anticommunism; Philippines; Malaysia; Indonesia

Introduction

The first half of the 1960s in island Southeast Asia was marked by regional tensions, which boiled over into armed conflict, over formation of Malaysia—events that became known as Konfrontasi. J. A. C. Mackie opens his 1974 book, which remains the most detailed scholarly examination of Konfrontasi, by informing the reader that:

It has unfortunately been necessary, for reasons of length, to exclude or minimize discussion of several aspects of the problem which deserved much closer attention, such as the role of the Philippines in the dispute and the nuances of British, Australian, American and Russian policy. Their importance is undeniable, but I have felt it more fruitful to stress the domestic background on both sides rather than treat the

conflict merely as part of a larger international chess-game with a circumscribed set of rules and relationships.¹

Subsequent scholarship followed the pattern established by Mackie, and the Philippines has thus been viewed as an external actor to what has been conceived of as a national dispute between two rivals: Indonesia and Malaysia.² The Philippines was treated in a manner akin to Australia or Russia—an interested actor certainly but not a rival claimant and central figure in the eruption of the conflict.

The Philippines was in fact a leading actor in the origins of Konfrontasi. Re-examining the events of 1961–63 by treating Manila as a central participant in the genesis of the dispute, alongside Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore, reveals that what was at stake in Konfrontasi was, in the final analysis, not a dispute between two rival nations but a regional conflict over the future racial and political shape of island Southeast Asia during the final stages of decolonization. It was a struggle to define the social character of the region, to draw borders, and coordinate relations as a means of containing and controlling social unrest, which was fuelled by the volatility of decolonization, soaring prices, and intense labour struggles. The rival visions of island Southeast Asia represented competing perspectives on how best to stabilize the process of decolonization, preserve existing social relations, and prevent the spread of communism.

Using newspaper accounts of the period, declassified government documents, and publications associated with the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), I reconstruct Manila's part in the dispute. I demonstrate that it was Manila, and not Jakarta, that instigated the opposition to Malaysia, playing an instrumental role in the Brunei revolt that precipitated the larger conflict.

Prior scholarship has largely depicted Konfrontasi as the complex and confused result of the aggressive actions of Sukarno and the heavy-handed manner of the British in dealing with the affair. In every instance there is a partial logic at play. Rather than a region contested by similar but rival interests, we see national particularities. Certainly at times Sukarno played a directly provocative role in the conflict, but Konfrontasi was far more than a product of the irredentism of Jakarta and its volatile leader.

Focusing on the Philippines' role in the developments draws out an underlying continuity in the motives of all of the rival actors contending with each other over the future geographic and political shape of the region. Sukarno balanced precariously astride the rival forces of the military and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)—the largest communist party in the world outside the communist bloc. Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party (PAP), reduced to a majority of one in

¹J. A. C. Mackie, *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia dispute, 1963–1966* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. vii, emphasis added.

²Matthew Jones, *Conflict and confrontation in South East Asia, 1961–1965: Britain, the United States, Indonesia and the creation of Malaysia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) is the most significant book-length work to return to the topic. A number of scholars, including Jones, have brought to the fore the role of Manila at certain points, particularly in raising the Sabah claim and organizing the Manila Summit, but always as something of an outsider to the conflict and never with an eye to the role of Philippine domestic politics and anticommunism in the dispute.

parliament by the breakaway Barisan Sosialis, struggled to retain power in Singapore. Tunku Abdul Rahman sought to strengthen his hold on Malaya by incorporating the Borneo Territories in the proposed Federation of Malaysia. Macapagal saw establishing Manila's control over Sabah as the key to containing the threat of communism. The actions of each participant in the dispute were ultimately focused on different ways of resolving a mounting social crisis that threatened to undermine the region's tenuous political stability.

The final stages of formal decolonization in island Southeast Asia, the taking of West Papua, and the formation of Malaysia precipitated a struggle over the region's future shape.³ The rival claimants sought to draw borders that would stabilize their own rule and to use the struggle over territorial boundaries to divert social unrest outwards. Every state actor in the conflict attempted by these means to contain the Chinese working population of Malaya and Singapore whom they saw as the potential bearers of communism, an ideological contamination that threatened to give political shape to mounting social unrest. The forcible redivision of the region as a means of securing social stability, in either the sanctioned process of decolonization or the various regional challenges to it, was the fundamental function of Konfrontasi, and racialized anticommunism its central preoccupation.

My argument builds upon the work of Wen-Qing Ngoei who demonstrated how the 'Anti-Chinese Anticommunism' of Britain and the United States shaped the decolonization of Southeast Asia.⁴ I extend and modify his explanation in fundamental ways. First, Ngoei made only passing mention of the role of the Philippines. Including the Philippines reveals the ubiquity of racialized anticommunism as the driving political motive in this process. Second, and more critically, my choice of the term 'racialized', rather than 'anti-Chinese', both expands and sharpens our understanding of the function of anticommunism in decolonization. Ngoei is certainly correct that there was a substantial anti-Chinese element to the anticommunism of the decolonization period in Southeast Asia. My account, however, reveals that there were other racial elements involved, particularly in the attempt to cobble together a regional Malay identity under the auspices of Maphilindo. These pan-Malay initiatives constituted a racialized anticommunism just as much as did an explicitly anti-Chinese agenda. These racial animosities and initiatives were not a particular type of anticommunism, but the outgrowth and elaboration of global anticommunism under specific historical circumstances.

Leading up to Konfrontasi, the PKI played a critical role in the events, and here again incorporating Manila into our analysis clarifies matters. The social function of the PKP was tied to and resembled that of its enormously influential sister party. Both parties worked to contain domestic unrest and channel mass support behind their elite allies, Sukarno and Macapagal, in the name of opposition to Malaysia. While in Manila the drama was conducted in disguise and staged through proxies, and in Indonesia it was performed openly, nonetheless Macapagal's relations with the PKP closely resembled

³Portuguese-controlled East Timor would remain a last vestige in the region of direct European colonial rule for another decade.

⁴Wen-Qing Ngoei, *Arc of containment: Britain, the United States, and anticommunism in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 49ff.

those of Sukarno—and through him the Indonesian military—with the PKI. Examining the PKP's support for Macapagal provides new insight into the PKI's relations with Sukarno.

The entire affair was marked by painful ironies—alliances with communist parties to control the spread of communism, conflict to ensure stability—and ended in disaster. The political strategies pursued in *Konfrontasi* were inherently volatile and short-lived. The reversal of fortune that culminated in the decimation of the PKI in 1965–66 and the removal of Sukarno from power was first signalled by Manila's dramatic shift to open hostility to Indonesia in 1964. The Philippines was instrumental in the origins of this conflict. Attention to this fact reveals the regional character of the dispute and the racialized anticommunism that underpinned it.

The formation of Malaysia and the question of Sabah

The affair known as *Konfrontasi* expressed the problems of decolonization in the context of a mounting social crisis. Britain was attempting to dispose of its colonies and territories, seeking to stem the flow of money east of Suez while retaining its interests and military bases.⁵ The challenge London faced in transitioning its Malayan and Bornean territories was to invent a national shape that could contain the social unrest that threatened to jeopardize the continuity of its interests in the region and provide political stability.

The expansion of the Federation of Malaya, the 11 states of the Malay peninsula that had been independent since 1957, to form the Federation of Malaysia, bringing Singapore and the Bornean territories into a single national unit, seemed a viable solution. However, London confronted the problem that the Bornean territories had never been integrated with the rest of British colonial rule in the region. This was compounded by the fact that the residents of the Bornean territories were, in their majority, not Malay but comprised various indigenous groups, such as Dayak and Kadazan. British assessments of public sentiment recognized that joining the Federation of Malaysia was an unpopular proposal.⁶

The idea of Malaysia had been bandied about for some time, but it was the political crisis in Singapore that set a timer on the affair.⁷ Political unrest in Singapore, concentrated in the largely Chinese working population, had taken increasingly sharp form in the late 1950s. The trade union apparatus had tied this unrest to the People's Action Party (PAP), but by 1961 there had been a falling out between the English-language moderates of the PAP, represented above all by Lee Kuan Yew, and the Chinese-language working class majority. The PAP split in a by-election, with the radical wing backing David Marshall and the Workers Party. These factions broke entirely

⁵Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 246; Pamela Sodhy, 'Malaysian-American relations during Indonesia's confrontation against Malaysia, 1963–66', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1988, p. 113.

⁶Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 80.

⁷It was not initially the preferred strategy of Britain. Kahin writes, 'Until 1961 Britain tended to favor separate political evolution for the Borneo territories' (George McT. Kahin, 'Malaysia and Indonesia', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1964, p. 254).

with the PAP in 1961 to found Barisan Sosialis. Lee was left with a rump party that controlled 26 out of 51 seats in parliament and he knew that if the political terrain was not fundamentally altered before the election of 1964, the PAP would lose its hold on power.⁸

Lee Kuan Yew saw merger with Malaya as a means of diluting the radical wing and retaining the PAP's political rule in Singapore. Tunku Abdul Rahman, at the head of the Federation of Malaya, however, feared that the Chinese population, which he associated with the threat of communism, would dominate the resulting nation. If Borneo was included in this expanded federation, however, the non-Chinese would outnumber the Chinese. The Malayan Ministry of External Affairs summed up this conception as follows: 'Unless therefore we could commit Borneo territories without reservation to Greater Malaysia ... they could see no alternative to allowing Singapore to go Communist.'⁹

The difficulty rested with Lee arranging support in Singapore for the merger. In November 1961, he presented a white paper on the proposed merger to the Singapore Assembly. Barisan Sosialis walked out in protest at the fact that Singapore would not receive proportionate representation in the Federation. In March 1962, a referendum bill on the potential merger in Singapore was introduced. Voters were to be given three options—a vote for three different forms of merger, with no possibility of voting to reject the Federation. Lee declared that blank ballots cast would constitute a vote to accept the white paper as it had been drafted.¹⁰

Despite wranglings between the British government, the Tunku, and Lee, they were in agreement that the expanded federation had to be established before the scheduled 1963 review of the Singapore Constitution. The Cabinet Defense Committee wrote that:

If Greater Malaysia was not in sight before the review of the Singapore Constitution due in 1963 ... we should probably have to suspend the Constitution, perhaps for an indefinite period.... we should be very ill-placed in Singapore (or Malaya) if we had to maintain our position in circumstances of local hostility.¹¹

The British and Malayan governments agreed that Malaysia would come into existence on 31 August 1963, but would be implemented sooner if the PAP seemed about to collapse.¹²

These initial events present the basic themes of the entirety of the struggle over the shape of island Southeast Asia in *Konfrontasi*: expansionism and the redivision of the region were seen as the remedy to social unrest and a mechanism for containing the Chinese working population. None of the issues could be resolved through democratic means while preserving existing power relations. The elite redrawing of the map of island Southeast Asia, whether through the creation of the Federation of Malaysia or the opposition to it in *Konfrontasi*, was an attempt to circumvent popular opinion

⁸Gareth Curless, "'The people need civil liberties": Trade unions and contested decolonization in Singapore', *Labor History*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2016, pp. 61–62; Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 69.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰Milton E. Osborne, *Malaysia and Singapore* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, 1964), pp. 25–28.

¹¹Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 75.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 94.

and stabilize the existing social order. An examination of the long-sidelined role of the Philippines in the ensuing crisis reveals that these concerns were not exclusive to Malaya and Singapore but were in fact the fixation of every actor in the affair.

Macapagal and the period of nationalist independence

Diosdado Macapagal took office in 1962 under extraordinary circumstances that irrevocably altered the first two years of his administration. A political scandal involving the American businessman Harry Stonehill's secret deal with Macapagal to buy off one of the rival presidential candidates led to a temporary souring in relations between the incoming Macapagal administration and Washington.¹³ Although Macapagal had long been known as a favourite of the United States, as a result of this rift, Manila pursued an independent foreign policy for the first two years of his administration. Looking to consolidate his political strength, Macapagal sought to maintain his position of nationalist independence until after the November 1963 mid-term election. At the heart of the independent streak of the Macapagal administration lay Manila's relations with Sukarno and opposition to Malaysia. The executive's decision to take up the Philippine claim to North Borneo, or Sabah, came in the same meeting with legislative leaders at the Manila Hotel in which the United States' refusal to pay the war damage claims of the Philippines was discussed, perhaps the sharpest public expression of the tensions between Manila and Washington. The nationalist prestige of the Macapagal administration was badly damaged and needed to be recovered by redoubled assertions of nationalism.¹⁴

The Philippine claim to Sabah was based on the proprietary claim of the Sulu sultanate to a substantial portion of North Borneo and a portion of Indonesia. The sultan of Brunei ceded territorial control of Sabah to the Sulu sultanate in 1662 and the sultan of Sulu in turn transferred the land to a group of British businessmen in 1878 in exchange for an annual payment. The sultan's continuing claim to Sabah was rooted in the translation of the word '*pajak*' in the 1878 treaty, which the British claimed meant 'to cede' and the sultan, 'to lease'. The matter was further complicated by the fact that in same year the sultan of Sulu relinquished his sovereign rights to all his possessions to Spain, and in 1885 the Spanish signed the Madrid Protocol transferring all territorial claims in Borneo to the British North Borneo Company. In the end the British and Philippine claims amounted to rival assertions of sovereignty over the North Bornean people.¹⁵

Macapagal was well acquainted with the claim to Sabah. In 1946 he had resurrected the Philippine claim, dating from the American period, to the Turtle Islands and in the process he studied the larger claim to North Borneo.¹⁶ In April 1950, he

¹³I detail the blowback from the Harry Stonehill scandal and its political impact in Joseph Scalice, 'Crisis of revolutionary leadership: Martial law and the Communist parties of the Philippines, 1957–1974', PhD thesis, UC Berkeley, 2017, pp. 136–44.

¹⁴Lela G. Noble, *Philippine policy toward Sabah: A claim to independence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), p. 59.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 57, sums up the tenuous argument for Philippine sovereignty: 'The heirs owned the territory; the government—somehow—had sovereignty over it; therefore the government should support the heirs' efforts.'

¹⁶Greg Poulgrain, *The genesis of Konfrontasi: Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, 1945–1965* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information; Research Development Centre, 2014), p. 240.

introduced a resolution in the legislature calling for the government to ‘negotiate with the British on the return of North Borneo to Philippine sovereignty’, but the measure did not pass the Senate.¹⁷ Macapagal became chair of the Foreign Relations Committee and in this capacity he ‘twice introduced resolutions urging the government to back what were at the time only unofficial claims to North Borneo’.¹⁸ As Macapagal took office as president there was the ‘acceleration of a desultory press campaign on the [North Borneo claim]’.¹⁹ On 30 December 1961, as Macapagal prepared for his inauguration, the *Philippines Free Press*, the country’s leading newsweekly, ran an article by Nap Rama with the headline ‘North Borneo Belongs to Us’. Rama had been supplied with a set of documents about the North Borneo claim by Nicasio (Nick) Osmeña and the Kiram Corporation, who came to figure prominently in the opening of opposition to the formation of Malaysia.²⁰

The Brunei Revolt and the Philippine claim to Sabah

The event that opened the hostilities of Konfrontasi was the Brunei Revolt of December 1962.²¹ The revolt was characterized by Mackie as ‘a trivial, almost Gilbertian, little uprising’.²² What is most noteworthy is that A. M. Azahari, leader of the revolt, was in Manila at the time. The nerve centre of the rebellion was not in Brunei at all, nor had the scheme been cooked up there. A central role was played by Nick Osmeña and the Kiram Corporation in the Philippines.

Nick Osmeña was aptly described by the British Colonial Office as the ‘ne’er-do-well son of a former Philippine President’.²³ A society dandy, he had tried his hand at politics but seems to have found get-rich-quick schemes more to his liking. He sold worthless stocks during the Depression and was convicted of swindling. In 1945, he was arrested by the American Counter-Intelligence Corps for treason on charges of “pimping” ... for the Japanese officials’, but, as with many of the well-to-do families of collaborators, the charges were later dropped.²⁴ His schemes took him around the globe and he was in Havana when the Batista government collapsed.²⁵

As the British announced their plans to form the Federation of Malaysia, Osmeña saw in the sultan of Sulu’s proprietary claim to Sabah a potential windfall. He secured power of attorney from the family and founded the Kiram Corporation.²⁶ Working in collaboration with a White Russian, Stanislaus de Lazovert, notorious for claiming to have taken part in the killing of Rasputin, Osmeña attempted to run a shakedown

¹⁷Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 104.

¹⁸Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Office of Current Intelligence, ‘The Philippines under Macapagal’, 1963, p. 2. OCI No. 0277/63C. Partially declassified, 24 August 2006.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Noble, *Philippine policy toward Sabah*, p. 48; Poulgrain, *The genesis of Konfrontasi*, p. 245.

²¹Details on events in Brunei can be found in *ibid.* and Eileen Chanin, *Limbang rebellion: 7 days in December 1962* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013).

²²Mackie, *Konfrontasi*, p. 111.

²³Poulgrain, *The genesis of Konfrontasi*, p. 242.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵*Manila Times* (MT), 22 Jun 1963, p. 12-A.

²⁶*Confidential US State Department central files, Philippine Republic, 1955–63* (CUSDP), 796.00(W)/4-1862, p. 2.

scheme, offering not to dispute the formation of Malaysia in exchange for a cash pay-out on the sultan's claim.²⁷ The Colonial Office termed it a 'mixture of blackmail and confidence trickery'.²⁸

While the imminent transfer of the Bornean territories to the proposed Federation of Malaysia presented Osmeña with a business opportunity, it confronted A. M. Azahari, head of the Partai Rakyat Brunei (PRB), with the danger of losing his political influence. Azahari was a member of the ruling aristocracy in the small, oil-rich protectorate and had risen to political prominence when he oversaw the founding of the PRB in 1956.²⁹ When elections were held for a Legislative Council in August 1962, the PRB won all 16 available seats. The incorporation of Brunei, as a small state alongside Sarawak and North Borneo, into what he claimed would be the Chinese-dominated Federation of Malaysia would reduce his constituency and political power base to a negligible, provincial concern.³⁰

Azahari was not opposed to merger but to the terms on which the British were carrying it out. He had founded the PRB after attending the founding congress of the Partai Rakyat Malaya in November 1955, as a fraternal party with an objective of establishing, in opposition to the region's Chinese, a "Malay Homeland" comprising the Federation, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo'.³¹ When the PRB held its first congress in April 1957, it 'instructed its executive to find ways of bringing together the three territories of North Borneo into a federation based on the historic sovereignty of the Brunei Sultanate'.³² For Azahari this was the remedy to his predicament: the formation of the unitary state of Kalimantan Utara under the sovereignty of the Brunei sultanate prior to the creation of the Federation of Malaysia would provide him with a significant political constituency within the new nation.

Thwarted in his attempts to negotiate directly with the British Colonial Office, Osmeña reached out to Azahari to pursue a new means of implementing his profiteering scheme. In November 1962, he secured a commitment from both the heirs of the sultan of Sulu and the Manila government of Macapagal to relinquish the Philippine claim to Sabah to the sultan of Brunei if Kalimantan Utara was successfully created.³³ For the Sulu sultanate, Kalimantan Utara would represent the beginning of the restoration of the regional power of the sultanates; for Macapagal, as we will see, such a territorial formation would represent a barrier against the perceived threat of the communism of the Chinese population in Singapore and Malaya.

To hammer out the details, Osmeña invited Azahari to the Philippines in late 1962 and Azahari travelled with his leading adviser, Ahmad Zaini, to Manila at the end of October with the official support of Macapagal.³⁴ While in Manila Azahari met with

²⁷Poulgrain, *The genesis of Konfrontasi*, p. 243.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 292.

²⁹Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 96.

³⁰Graham Saunders, *A history of Brunei* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 44, 147.

³¹Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, 'The advocacy of Malaysia—before 1961', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1973, p. 725.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 727.

³³Noble, *Philippine policy toward Sabah*, p. 98.

³⁴Howard P. Jones, *Indonesia: The possible dream* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 267; Arnold C. Brackman, *Southeast Asia's second front: The power struggle in the Malay archipelago* (London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 142, 145.

Emmanuel Pelaez, who was both vice-president of the Philippines and secretary of foreign affairs. Azahari and Zaini remained in Manila through most of November, meeting regularly with government officials, including the legal adviser to the president, Hermenegildo Atienza, and the speaker of the House of Representatives, Cornelio Villareal.³⁵ On 21 November, as Sukarno arrived in Manila to confer with Macapagal and Pelaez on the subject of the Philippine claim to North Borneo, Azahari delivered a speech, along with Nick Osmeña, at the University of the East. The *Manila Times* summarized the speech in an editorial the next day. Azahari called for the Philippines to support a unitary state of North Borneo, Brunei, and Sarawak as 'the best means of containing communism in Asia':

With a large Chinese population, whose future sympathies are bound to lie more and more with Communist China, the proposed Malaysian federation would be an invitation rather than a bar to the communist infiltration, Mr. Azahari believes. On the other hand, he says, a unitary North Borneo government would not only ward off communism from its own door but protect the Philippine backdoor against infiltration as well. Philippine government officials are reported to be sympathetic to the views of Mr. Azahari.³⁶

Azahari briefly departed the Philippines for Singapore but returned to Manila on 6 December. On the 8th the revolt broke out in Brunei. The initial press coverage in the Philippines was overwhelmingly positive. The banner headline of the *Manila Chronicle* read 'Borneo Rebels Claim Victory'. All of the affairs of the revolutionary leadership in Manila were conducted from the hotel suites of Nick Osmeña, who arranged a press conference on the evening of 8 December. Azahari, Zaini, Osmeña, and presidential legal adviser, Atienza, were photographed together with the caption, 'Brains of the Brunei Revolt'.³⁷ Azahari issued a brief manifesto expressing 'The desire to promote close economic, military and cultural relations with the Philippines and work for the realization of President Macapagal's proposed Confederation of Malaysia'.³⁸ Azahari provided no details about this proposed Confederation. The *Chronicle* added that 'It was understood that Azahari had given a pledge to recognize [the sultan of Sulu's proprietary] rights when order is restored in Kalimantan.' Azahari announced that he had declared martial law and that all armed forces in Borneo should 'send all their communications to him through Nick Osmeña'.³⁹ Osmeña was given the title of 'special advisor' to what the press referred to as 'the revolutionary government'.⁴⁰ Azahari was provided with a security detail by the Philippine military.⁴¹

Things quickly fell apart. Within two days it was apparent that the revolt could not hold out against the British forces. Azahari had presented the revolt as being in support

³⁵Poulgrain, *The genesis of Konfrontasi*, pp. 248, 253.

³⁶MT, 22 Nov 1962, p. 4-A.

³⁷MT, 9 Dec 1962, p. 16-A.

³⁸*Manila Chronicle* (hereafter MC), 9 Dec 1962, p. 10.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰MT, 10 Dec 1962, p. 8-A.

⁴¹MT, 13 Dec 1962, p. 1; 14 Dec, p. 12-A.

of the Brunei sultan, who was widely unpopular, and who had declared his support for the British and his opposition to the revolt.⁴² On the evening of 9 December, the US ambassador to the Philippines, William E. Stevenson, paid a call to Macapagal in the presidential palace of Malacañang, where they discussed the situation in Brunei for an hour. Pelaez then issued a press statement denying 'any official association with the leaders of the Brunei revolt who are currently in Manila'.⁴³

Despite the new official government policy of distance from Azahari, the press and other political figures continued a campaign of support. House Speaker pro tempore, Salipada Pendatun, declared his support for Kalimantan Utara.⁴⁴ For nearly two weeks press coverage continued to speak of the revolt as 'a genuine, nationalist-inspired war of independence'.⁴⁵ The motives behind the widespread enthusiasm in ruling circles for what was a rather slight and decidedly short-lived local upheaval was expressed most clearly in a column by the influential journalist I. P. Soliongco:

For with Singapore and Malaya united, the slight preponderance of Malaysians in Malaya over the Chinese would be more than offset by the teeming majority of Singapore Chinese over the rest of the Singapore population. It is this impending dominance of the Chinese in the emerging federation and the now common belief that the ultimate loyalty of Lee Kwan [sic] Yew, or, for that matter of any Chinese political leader in any uncommitted Asian nations, is to a powerful China rather than to the West which lie behind Mr. Azahari's fear. That fear, we must repeat, is that Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo would finally become a sphere of Chinese influence, at the very least. ...

What he is most fearful of, to put it in another way, is that Great Malaysia would develop into a Sudeten to China's Nazi Germany. He feels—and correctly, we believe—that Communist China must never be given any excuse to extend her grasping hand southward.⁴⁶

The revolt fizzled out and the British imposed order on the protectorate. In January, Azahari departed from the Philippines for Jakarta.⁴⁷ Osmeña was quietly sent to Japan by the Macapagal government, and died of liver difficulties in June 1963.⁴⁸

The initial opposition to Malaysia from Manila and the assertion of the Philippine claim to Sabah had originated out of the stung nationalist pride of the Macapagal administration when Washington had denied the country's war damages claims. The Brunei revolt, however, exposed a deeper concern in ruling circles surrounding the formation of Malaysia: a racialized anticommunism targeting the Malayan and, above all, Singaporean Chinese. The proposed Federation was seen as bringing this Chinese

⁴²Like all of the other elite actors involved, the sultan of Brunei was motivated by anti-Chinese concerns. He believed that 'closer union with Sarawak and North Borneo would increase Chinese influence, while the Malays within such a federation would be outnumbered by the combined Chinese and non-Malay indigenous peoples' (Saunders, *A History of Brunei*, p. 135).

⁴³MT, 10 Dec 1962, pp. 1, 8.

⁴⁴MC, 11 Dec 1962, p. 13.

⁴⁵MC, 15 Dec 1962, p. 1.

⁴⁶MC, 14 Dec 1962, p. 4.

⁴⁷Mackie, *Konfrontasi*, p. 118.

⁴⁸Poulgrain, *The genesis of Konfrontasi*, p. 292; MT, 22 Jun 1963, p. 12-A.

population, and with it the threat of communism, to the borders of the Philippines. Less than a week before the Brunei revolt, Foreign Affairs Secretary Pelaez had told the US ambassador in a private conversation that 'Malaysia would present a threat to Philippine security by permitting the mass immigration of Singapore Chinese to North Borneo.'⁴⁹ The formation of Kalimantan Utara through the Brunei revolt had proven quickly incapable of relieving the racialized foreign policy concerns of Manila. The Macapagal administration turned to open opposition to the imminent formation of Malaysia, seeking to use the territorial dispute over Sabah in North Borneo as a means of creating a buffer state against perceived Chinese communist influence.

On 28 January 1963, Macapagal delivered his state-of-the-nation address, in which he declared,

... if through arbitrary arrangement, the Borneo territory is placed under Malaya, the latter cannot likely insure for long the security of North Borneo for the free world. A profound and farsighted contemplation of the present and potential security posture in the whole region will conclusively support the judgment that the restoration of North Borneo as part of the territory of the Philippines would be the durable measure that could best insure against territorial disequilibrium and restlessness in the area and could constitute the firm and stabilizing factor to maintain and safeguard the security of the region.⁵⁰

Indonesia, the PKI, and the PKP

The origins of the open expression of what came to be known as *Konfrontasi* lay in Manila. In 1962, while the Macapagal administration was moving to lay claim to Sabah and while Osmeña and Azahari were plotting the Brunei revolt, Sukarno's administration expressed ambivalence to the formation of Malaysia, occasionally voicing desultory opposition.⁵¹ The contemporary assessment made by Frederick Bunnell on the timing of Indonesia's opposition to Malaysia remains accurate: 'Indonesia's strident propaganda against the formation of Malaysia arose only after the Brunei revolt of 8 December 1962.'⁵²

The revolt concocted in Manila presented Sukarno with a possible outlet for the mounting social crisis that threatened the stability of social relations in Indonesia and his own political rule. Sukarno had come to play an increasingly Bonapartist role, poised atop and balancing between the rival forces vying for power in Indonesian society, in particular the military and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). Matthew Jones aptly summarized Sukarno's position as follows: 'the delicate balancing act between the Army and the mass organization of the PKI that helped to sustain his personal authority as the arbiter of internal tensions required also the distraction of foreign campaigns...'⁵³ This social instability was exacerbated by geopolitical tensions, as

⁴⁹CUSDP, 796.00(W)/12-762, p. 2.

⁵⁰MT, 30 Jan 1963, p. 10-A.

⁵¹Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, pp. 98ff; Jones, *Indonesia*, p. 274.

⁵²Frederick Bunnell, 'Guided democracy foreign policy: 1960-65, President Sukarno moves from non-alignment to confrontation', *Indonesia*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1966, pp. 58-59.

⁵³Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 59.

Jakarta was torn in its non-aligned relations between the capitalist West, on the one hand, and China and the Soviet Union, on the other.⁵⁴ The conjoined and contradictory aspects of Sukarno's character—pragmatism and volatility—were an expression of the perilous position of the entirety of Indonesian society riven by competing forces. These tensions culminated, like a volcanic eruption, in the catastrophe of 1965.

Runaway inflation, caused in large measure by the need to print money to cover the enormous military budget, had sent prices skyrocketing. The price of rice trebled over the space of three months in 1961.⁵⁵ The crisis was compounded in 1963, when Sukarno signed an economic declaration in March agreeing to implement the conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which were put into effect in May. Hilsman described the result: 'The amount of rice and other food that had been distributed at subsidized prices were sharply reduced, and the costs of various public services were increased. Bus fares, for example, were doubled; rail fares trebled; and postal, telegraph, and telephone charges quadrupled.'⁵⁶

The campaign to secure West Papua had provided Sukarno with a means of rallying the support of both the military and the PKI, and a pretext for maintaining a condition of martial law. That campaign, however, had ended with the New York Agreement of August 1962.⁵⁷ Demobilizing the expansive ranks of the military presented a fraught challenge for Sukarno, while preventing the military from turning on the PKI presented another.

Konfrontasi resolved these dilemmas for Sukarno, again allowing him to direct all of the social hostilities in Indonesia outwards. While the PKI saw Konfrontasi as a means of strengthening relations with China as one of the 'New Emerging Forces' in the world and cementing ties with Sukarno, the military's perspective resembled that of Macapagal. They saw Malaysia as enhancing the threat of communism by bringing the Singaporean and Malayan Chinese working populations to the borders of Indonesia. Kahin described 'influential army officers' in Indonesia as being 'keenly apprehensive about what they conceive to be the threat of China and the overseas Chinese ... this fact needs to be emphasized if one is to understand their attitude ... towards Malaysia'.⁵⁸ Sukarno was able to rally both the army and the PKI behind the slogan 'Crush Malaysia'. Kahin wrote in 1964:

an external focus on Malaysia must be particularly welcome to top Indonesian Communist leaders who have been under considerable pressure within the Party for compromising too much with Sukarno's government and avoiding any

⁵⁴The Sino-Soviet split further sharpened tensions, with the Indonesian military developing relations with Moscow, which sold them arms, while the PKI was oriented towards Beijing. On relations between Indonesia and China, as well as the impact on the local Chinese population, see Taomo Zhou, *Migration in a time of revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁵⁵Brian Crozier, 'Indonesia: Retrospect and prospect', *The World Today*, vol. 18, no. 7, 1962, p. 301.

⁵⁶Roger Hilsman, *To move a nation: The politics of foreign policy in the administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1967), p. 387.

⁵⁷Daniel Lev, 'The political role of the army in Indonesia', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 4, 1964, pp. 362–63; David Webster, 'Self-determination abandoned: The road to the New York Agreement on West New Guinea (Papua), 1960–62', *Indonesia*, vol. 95, 2013.

⁵⁸Kahin, 'Malaysia and Indonesia', p. 264.

direct criticism of his domestic policies; focusing attention on the Malaysia issue enables them to sidestep pressures which might otherwise push them into such a frontal opposition to Sukarno and his government as to provoke retaliation.⁵⁹

Here as well the incorporation of the Philippines into our analysis of Konfrontasi clarifies matters: the role played by the PKI can be better understood by examining the actions of its sister party, the PKP. Over the course of 1963, as regional tensions sharpened into open conflict, the PKP used opposition to Malaysia to rally mass support behind Macapagal, to contain unrest in the Philippines, and to form a close working alliance with an anticommunist government. Macapagal decontrolled the peso in early 1962. By 1963, rising inflation, coupled with stagnant wages, had produced a marked increase in labour struggles and strikes. The PKP channelled the growing social unrest towards support for the president, allying the recently founded Lapiang Manggagawa (LM, Workers' Party), an independent workers' party with 150,000 members, with the ruling Liberal Party (LP) during a fiercely contested mid-term election.⁶⁰

The alliances with elite political figures formed by the PKI and PKP, to which they subordinated the mass unrest of the time, were an expression of the programme of Stalinism. The fundamental principles of this programme—socialism in one country, a two-stage revolution, and the bloc of four classes—were predicated on the argument that in countries with belated capitalist development, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, the task of the revolution was national and democratic in character and not yet socialist. A section of the capitalist class—termed the 'national bourgeoisie'—along with their political representatives, would therefore play a progressive role and support should thus be given to them in the revolutionary struggle.⁶¹

At the beginning of the 1960s the PKP was dormant and its leadership in hiding. The crushing of the Huk rebellion and the McCarthyite witch-hunting of the House Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA) had reduced the party to a shell of its former self. The rebirth of the party was facilitated by the PKI and a leading role was played by Jose Ma. Sison. A PKI member and graduate student at the University of the Philippines, Bakri Ilyas, had been instrumental in the political education of Jose Ma. Sison, who travelled to Indonesia at the beginning of 1962.⁶² PKP leader Jesus Lava later wrote that Sison was selected to 'represent our Party in talks with the Indonesian Party, then under the leadership of Comrade Aidit'.⁶³ The PKI saw in the confluence of two factors—the rift between Malacañang and Washington, and the mounting tensions over the formation of Malaysia—the opportunity for the Communist Party of the

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 263–64.

⁶⁰Joseph Scalice, 'A deliberately forgotten battle: The Lapiang Manggagawa and the Manila port strike of 1963', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 53, nos. 1–2, 2022, pp. 226–51.

⁶¹I expand on the programme of Stalinism and its centrality to the Sino-Soviet split in the Philippines in Joseph Scalice, 'The geopolitical alignments of diverging social interests: The Sino-Soviet split and the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, 1966–67', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2021, pp. 45–70.

⁶²Joseph Scalice, "'We are siding with Filipino capitalists': Nationalism and the political maturation of Jose Ma. Sison, 1959–61', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–39.

⁶³Jesus Lava, *Memoirs of a Communist* (Pasig: Anvil Publishing, 2002), p. 321.

Philippines to re-emerge and pressure the upper echelons of Philippine politics into the camp of the New Emerging Forces.

In December 1962, as the Brunei revolt occupied the front pages of the major dailies, the PKP gathered forces. At the instigation of the PKI, through its representative Bakri Ilyas, the party formed a five-member Executive Committee to guide its daily activity as it threw itself back into public political life. Two members of the committee, Sison and labour leader Ignacio Lacsina, would play an instrumental role in the developments of 1963.⁶⁴

The first step taken by the Executive Committee was an attempt to bring the support of the Filipino working class behind Azahari. On 17 December, Ignacio Lacsina announced in the *Evening News* that the labour union federation, Katipunan ng Manggagawang Pilipino (KMP) [Union of Filipino Workers], endorsed Azahari's rebellion and that he was making arrangements for Azahari to meet with the executive board of the KMP. The KMP, he declared, would be able to 'contribute a little to the rebel cause'.⁶⁵ He offered to send 1,100 men to fight in Brunei.⁶⁶ On 21 December, the *Manila Chronicle* reported that Azahari had accepted the offer of labour support for his rebellion: 'Filipino volunteers would be shipped to revolt-torn Brunei as soon as possible and trained at a secret military base, it was gathered.'⁶⁷ With the failure of the Brunei revolt, the party directed its efforts at ensuring the LM's support for Macapagal.

The orientation of the PKP to Macapagal and its quest to secure an alliance with him found expression in the pages of a new journal, the *Progressive Review*, which was controlled by the party and edited by Sison. The first issue was largely dedicated to the question of opposition to Malaysia, and it was with this focus that Sison wrote the opening commentary of the journal in March assessing the platform of the Macapagal administration. He presented Macapagal as being torn between rival sets of interests. Macapagal was allowing foreign investment into strategic sectors of the economy and this meant 'further foreign control of our whole national life'.⁶⁸ At the same time, Sison claimed, both Indonesia and the Philippines 'are determinedly opposed to the proposed Federation of Malaysia, cooked up by the British and supported by the US', and thus '[f]or the first time, a dynamic line of political differentiation has been clearly and significantly drawn up between the Indonesian and Philippine governments on the one hand and the Western powers on the other'.⁶⁹ He argued that 'both need to cooperate and consolidate their efforts in the face of formidable adversity'. Sison concluded by calling for opposition to Malaysia, which he described as 'an imperialist-colonialist

⁶⁴It is important to recognize the key role that Sison played in the policies of the PKP. As Sison went on to become the founder of the influential breakaway Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which split from the PKP along the lines of the Sino-Soviet dispute, he sought in his later accounts to cover over his earlier role and presented himself as a consistent opponent, rather than chief implementer, of the policies of the PKP (Scalice, 'The geopolitical alignments').

⁶⁵CUS DPR, 746H.00/12-1862.

⁶⁶MT, 18 Dec 1962, p. 14-A; 19 Dec, p. 20-A.

⁶⁷The British deployed destroyers to the Sulu Sea, where they accosted Philippine vessels to ensure that they were not sending reinforcements to the Brunei rebels (CUSDPR, 796.022/01-463).

⁶⁸Jose Ma. Sison, 'Commentary', *Progressive Review*, vol. 1, 1963, p. 11.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 13.

scheme'.⁷⁰ Macapagal could be pressured in a progressive direction, aligning Manila's interests with Jakarta in opposition to the dictates of imperialism.⁷¹

Having called for critical support for Macapagal, the leadership of the PKP, Sison and Lacsina in particular, began through subterfuge and backroom deals to work towards the merger of the LM with the ruling Liberal Party as a means of pressuring the Macapagal administration to ally more closely with Jakarta. Immediately after the formal founding of Lapiang Manggagawa in February 1963, Lacsina and Sison, along with Cipriano Cid, a prominent labour leader close to the PKP, entered into secret negotiations with Macapagal to establish the terms of the merger, hiding these negotiations from the membership of the organization. To gain Macapagal's support, the LM negotiating team backed strikes against Macapagal's political rivals and defused and undermined strikes that jeopardized the president's interests.⁷²

Macapagal, for his part, adopted the language of the 'left'. He began to use the phrase 'unfinished revolution', then much bandied about by Sukarno, who had himself adopted it as part of his alliance with the PKI. Macapagal spoke of the need for the 'common man' to complete the 'unfinished revolution' against 'imperialism', and denounced those who opposed this revolution as 'reactionaries'.⁷³ Sison trumpeted these speeches, publishing widely in the name of LM in support of Macapagal's policies, and with each publication displaying growing enthusiasm for the administration.⁷⁴

Manila Summit

Part of the threat feared by Macapagal was removed when Lee Kuan Yew and George Douglas-Hamilton, British commissioner in Singapore, staged Operation Coldstore in February 1963, arresting 133 left leaders in Singapore on trumped up charges of sedition, including members of the Malayan Communist Party and Barisan Sosialis.⁷⁵ Some of Macapagal's urgency was thus diminished, but his fears were not entirely allayed. The fundamental problem was not the leadership of Barisan Sosialis, but the social unrest that Macapagal, with racialized anticommunism, feared Malaysia would bring to the borders of the Philippines. Operation Coldstore, however, revealed that the Tunku and Lee Kuan Yew could be relied upon to suppress political threats in the Federation of Malaysia. What was thus essential was a regional body to coordinate anticommunist activity and ensure Malay dominance. This was to be the function of Maphilindo, a Malay confederation designed to contain the region's Chinese. Macapagal turned his attention to the convening of a summit in Manila to arrange the creation of Maphilindo. The first half of 1963 saw a flurry of official travel throughout

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 15.

⁷¹Sison repeated verbatim much of his editorial in an article which he published in June in the Hong Kong-based *Eastern World*, concluding that 'the trend towards closer and stronger relations between the Philippines and Indonesia is swift, steady and, it appears, irreversible' (Jose Ma. Sison, 'The Philippines and Malaysia', *Eastern World*, vol. XVII, no. 6, 1963, pp. 11, 12).

⁷²Scalice, 'A deliberately forgotten battle'.

⁷³See, for example, his land reform speech: MC, 9 Aug 1963, p. 17.

⁷⁴For example, Lapiang Manggagawa (LM), *Handbook on the Land Reform Code* (Manila: M. Colcol, 1963).

⁷⁵Poh S. K., Tan K. F. and Hong L. (eds), *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: Commemorating 50 years* (Kuala Lumpur: Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, 2013).

island Southeast Asia as delegations prepared the groundwork for the Manila Summit at the end of July.

A moving force behind these conceptions was Salvador Lopez, undersecretary of foreign affairs.⁷⁶ The sharpest period of Philippine opposition to Malaysia corresponded to his promotion to secretary of foreign affairs in July 1963 until his removal in April 1964. George Kahin wrote that in private meetings in August 1963, Lopez ‘emphasized that Macapagal’s concept of Maphilindo had been inspired “precisely by this problem of the Chinese,” and the desire to control them within Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo territories’.⁷⁷ Lopez cautioned that

Singapore is exploding and the power relationship between the Chinese and Malays in the projected area of Malaysia is changing. With the very narrow margin they have now—even with the addition of predominantly non-Chinese Borneo populations—how can the Malays long maintain political superiority, given the political sophistication and wealth, not to mention the increasing numbers, of the Chinese?⁷⁸

Both Macapagal and Lopez envisioned ‘using Maphilindo to control the Chinese’.⁷⁹ The fundamental concern of the Macapagal administration in the Manila Summit and the creation of Maphilindo thus had the same motivation as their initial support for the Brunei revolt: racialized anticommunism and the need to control the Malayan and Singaporean Chinese populations.⁸⁰ Sukarno expressed agreement with Macapagal on this point, telling the Philippine president in the lead up to the Manila Summit that ‘the time now had come when petty quarrels should be set aside in order to join forces in the face of a common Chinese enemy’.⁸¹ Sukarno’s role in this was volatile and complex, an expression of the fact that he rode astride both the military and the PKI. His alignment with Macapagal regarding the region’s Chinese articulated the conceptions of the military brass, while the ‘ambivalent alliance of Beijing and Jakarta’ resembled the perspective of the PKI.⁸²

Macapagal’s opposition to Malaysia by the middle of 1963 was posturing, and he now sought the resolution to his racialized anticommunist concerns through the formation of Maphilindo. He proposed an alternative which became the central thrust of the Manila Summit: rather than the Malaysian Federation, Azahari’s rebellion, or Manila’s claim to North Borneo, there should be a plebiscite of the population of North Borneo in favour of either the federation or independence. This proposal, when coupled with the creation of Maphilindo, could serve as a means of securing a buffer

⁷⁶On Lopez, see Lisandro Claudio, *Liberalism and the postcolony: Thinking the state in the 20th century Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2017), pp. 123 ff.

⁷⁷George McT. Kahin, *Southeast Asia: A testament* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 168.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰The racialized anticommunism of Maphilindo was known throughout the region. The US ambassador to Malaysia, James Bell, wrote in 1964, ‘Malaysian Chinese fear Maphilindo as a device to crush them’ (Sodhy, ‘Malaysia-American relations’, p. 117).

⁸¹Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with guns: Authoritarian development and US-Indonesian relations, 1960–68* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 118.

⁸²Zhou, *Migration in a time of revolution*, pp. 132 ff.

against the Chinese and saving face internationally while backing down from Manila's claim to Sabah.

The timetable established by the political crisis in Singapore, however, would not allow for even the pretence of a referendum. Final negotiations for the federation were held between Lee and the Tunku in London at the beginning of July, in gruelling sessions overseen by British minister of commonwealth affairs, Duncan Sandys. Terms were reached in a private meeting between Lee and the Tunku at the Ritz Hotel on 7 July and the details scribbled on the back of an envelope and signed by the Tunku. Malaysia was to be declared on 31 August regardless of the outcome or completion of a referendum.⁸³ Sensing both the opportunity and imminent crisis, President Kennedy wrote to Prime Minister Macmillan asking him to delay the 31 August declaration in order that Sukarno might be 'bought this cheaply'.⁸⁴

On the eve of the summit, the Macapagal administration was rocked by political scandal. On 13 July, Macapagal's opponents revealed his connections to the corruption of Harry Stonehill. Macapagal responded by deflecting the blame onto his vice president, Emmanuel Pelaez. With less than a week before the opening of the summit, Pelaez resigned as secretary of foreign affairs and Macapagal appointed Salvador Lopez, foremost representative of the policy of racialized anticommunism, to replace him. In this fraught context, in the third week of July, Sison published the second issue of the *Progressive Review*, which he headlined as 'A Special Indonesian Issue' and gave it over entirely to promoting Sukarno and his 'guided democracy'.⁸⁵ The issue featured a number of Sukarno's speeches and details on Philippine-Indonesian trade deals. The editorial statement declared,

Both Filipino and Indonesian peoples are faced admittedly with the same problems that obtain in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial situation ...

We may be able to learn from the revolutionary struggle of the Indonesian people and their active stand against political, economic and cultural imperialism.

The Indonesian Revolution, national and democratic in character at its first stage and socialist at its second stage ... inspires a national unity that is the integration of all progressive and patriotic forces and which can sweep away the old iniquities, the *exploitation de l'homme par l'homme*.⁸⁶

Sison, using the Stalinist programme of a two-stage revolution, depicted Sukarno as leading the Indonesian people against imperialism. Turning to Macapagal, he argued that 'although he has not yet clearly stated whether he is seeking new directions of

⁸³Mackie, *Konfrontasi*, p. 154.

⁸⁴Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 179. The Manila Summit occurred at a moment when Sukarno was aligning more closely with American interests. Toward the end of July, Sukarno was in Tokyo concluding a deal with Shell, Caltex, and Stanvac, which had been negotiated by the US State Department. The oil companies were delighted with the settlement (Hilsman, *To move a nation*, p. 390). Washington viewed this development as an indication of Sukarno making a decision to turn from the communist bloc to the West (Jones, *Conflict and confrontation*, p. 168).

⁸⁵*Philippine Collegian*, 31 Jul 1963, p. 7.

⁸⁶[Jose Ma. Sison], 'Editorial: The Philippines and Indonesia', *Progressive Review*, vol. 2, 1963, p. 1.

national action, President Diosdado Macapagal has, at least, provoked attention to the need for completing what he calls so aptly as the “Unfinished Revolution” ... With his bold conception of “Unfinished Revolution,” *he has convinced us that we are at the crossroads.*⁸⁷ The editorial concluded with the hope that not only would Macapagal follow Sukarno’s course in carrying forward the Unfinished Revolution, but that he would also create ‘an active and more effective Philippine-Indonesian cooperation that may still accelerate the retreat of imperialism from this part of the world’.⁸⁸

Coming out during the last stages of negotiations for the merger of the LM with the LP, this issue of *Progressive Review* publicly signalled that support for Jakarta’s policies vis-à-vis Malaysia was decisive in securing the support of the LM and the allied forces of the PKP. At the same time, Sison’s editorial laid the groundwork for giving full-throated endorsement to Macapagal. The 150,000 workers organized in the LM were a bulwark Macapagal desperately needed in July 1963. A bloody strike had broken out at the ports; a massive corruption scandal had erupted in the thick of a fiercely contested election; and his signature land reform bill was stalled in the legislature.⁸⁹

The Indonesian and Malaysian delegations arrived on 29 July, and the summit commenced on the 30th.⁹⁰ Over the course of several days, the participants reached a common agreement that they would accept the establishment of Malaysia provided ‘the support of the people of the Borneo territories’ was ascertained by ‘an independent and impartial authority’, which was to be overseen by the United Nations.⁹¹ On the day the summit began, the LM publicly announced its willingness to form a coalition with the LP, and the *Chronicle* stated that ‘negotiators are now going on to thresh out the remaining obstacles to the formalization of the coalition’.⁹²

On 4 August the Manila Summit was extended, as negotiators worked to secure a commitment from U Thant, secretary general of the United Nations, to oversee a referendum in North Borneo within the month. The initial plan had been to conduct a popular referendum on the issue, but the British Foreign Office would not consent to such an idea, and Sukarno, Macapagal, and the Tunku finally agreed to hold a UN survey of local leaders who had been elected in the past year, a plan the British Foreign Office would tolerate. Kahin writes,

Since ... mostly only leaders who had supported their British mentors’ plan for Malaysia won, the outcome of the UN survey that gave major weight to their opinions could be easily foreseen. But the process was such that Sukarno and Macapagal would be able to tell their people that not only had they been consulted in the process of Malaysia’s establishment, but that—and this was the

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 2, emphasis added.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Scalice, ‘A deliberately forgotten battle’.

⁹⁰Tunku Abdul Rahman and his entourage stayed at the Manila Hotel, as did all of Sukarno’s staff. Sukarno himself, however, stayed in the Villa Pacencia Mansion on Shaw Boulevard, the home of house speaker, Jose B. Laurel, son of Jose P. Laurel, president of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation (MC, 6 Aug 1963, p. 1). Throughout the Manila Summit, Sison was a regular guest in the Laurel home, and was seated next to Sukarno during brunch (Jose Ma. Sison and Ninotchka Rosca, *Jose Maria Sison: At home in the world—portrait of a revolutionary* [Manila: Ibon Books, 2004], p. 44).

⁹¹Kahin, *Southeast Asia*, p. 171.

⁹²MC, 31 Jul 1963, p. 12.

essential ingredient—the establishment of Malaysia came only *after* it had been ascertained that the peoples of North Borneo and Sarawak had been consulted and had agreed to this.⁹³

While the British Foreign Office agreed to the Manila Accord, the British minister of commonwealth affairs, Duncan Sandys, was intransigent—no one should instruct the British how best to dispose of their colonial possessions.

The summit concluded the next day with the publication of the Manila Declaration, Accord, and Statement. The Accord ‘represented the agreement of the Foreign Ministers ratified by the three heads of state. Its key point was that Indonesia and the Philippines would welcome the formation of Malaysia if the UN Secretary-General ascertained that the peoples of Sabah and Sarawak desired to be incorporated into Malaysia’.⁹⁴ The Statement established Maphilindo. The Declaration was the rhetorical flourish to the affair, which Macapagal hailed as an ‘Asian Declaration of Independence’, proclaiming Maphilindo’s opposition to ‘colonialism and imperialism in all its forms’. The US ambassador to Indonesia, Howard Jones, wrote that ‘much of it was pure Sukarno’.⁹⁵ Rahman departed that day, Sukarno the next.

On 6 August, Macapagal rode in his limousine to pick up Sukarno and personally escort him to the airport for his flight home to Jakarta. Having seen off Sukarno, Macapagal drove from the airport to the presidential yacht, named *The Chief*, and on board, he oversaw the signing of the LM-LP merger.⁹⁶ It was his first official act in the wake of the summit. The meeting lasted for three hours. At its conclusion, a brief document, which had been drafted by Lacsina, entitled ‘Agreement to Coalesce the Liberal Party and the Lapiang Manggagawa (Labor Party)’, was signed by Marcos, then president of the Liberal Party, and Cipriano Cid, president of the Lapiang Manggagawa.

Cesar de Leon, executive vice president of the National Association of Trade Unions (NATU), issued a public letter, stating that the labour organizations ‘composing Lapiang Manggagawa are unreservedly lending their support to the Macapagal Administration in the forthcoming elections’.⁹⁷ The LM leadership busily set about putting this into practice. On 22 August, Macapagal met for an extended lunch with the leadership of the Lapiang Manggagawa to discuss election work prior to his campaign foray into the Visayas.⁹⁸ Lacsina and Sison worked tirelessly to fulfil their obligations to Macapagal and to develop the influence of the PKP. In October and November, Lacsina

⁹³Kahin, *Southeast Asia*, p. 171, emphasis in original. The support of the North Bornean elite for merger was, like all of the other powers involved, based on anti-Chinese sentiment. The United National Kadazan Organization of Donald Stephens wrote in a memorandum to the Cobbold Commission in 1962, ‘If North Borneo gets self-government and independence within the foreseeable future by itself, the heirs when the British leave will be the Chinese ... it is only Malaysia which will guarantee that they (the indigenous people) have a chance of catching up with their so much more advanced Chinese brothers.’ Malaysia, it argued, would ‘extend special privileges ... to the native peoples’ (Herman Luping, *Sabah’s dilemma: The political history of Sabah 1960–1994* [Selangor: Percetakan Eshin, 1994], p. 46).

⁹⁴Jones, *Indonesia*, p. 283.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁹⁶MC, 7 Aug 1963, p. 4.

⁹⁷V. Cesar de Leon, ‘Why Philippine labor is supporting the Liberal administration’, Charles T. R. Bohannan Papers, Hoover Institute, 29/18, [1963].

⁹⁸MC, 23 Aug 1963.

travelled to Indonesia, where he assisted in the conclusion of a trade deal between Manila and Jakarta and strengthened ties with the PKI. Sison, meanwhile, busied himself with leading protests against Malaysia and drawing up propaganda to promote the 'revolutionary' land reform of Diosdado Macapagal.

The Federation

Both Sukarno and Macapagal were engaged in posturing opposition. The goal for the PKI and PKP was to bring Manila into the orbit of Jakarta. The machinations temporarily succeeded. The proximity, however, was concluded on the basis of the anti-communism of Malacañang. Its closeness to Sukarno resembled that of the military coterie whom Sukarno had assembled around him. Within a year, both Manila and the Indonesian military eyed the PKI and even Sukarno himself with a cold, murderous rage.

On 15 August, a diplomatic team representing Macapagal travelled to Jakarta for the 17 August Indonesian independence day celebration, kicking off negotiations for a trade deal between Jakarta and Manila, and preparing to set up a Maphilindo Secretariat which would be based in Manila.

The struggle over the redivision of the region to control social unrest was precipitated into open conflict by the intransigence of the British. Duncan Sandys, British minister of commonwealth relations, immediately set about sabotaging the UN assessment. He prevented members of the Indonesian delegation from participating on the grounds that they were 'Indonesian intelligence'; he claimed that facilities were limited; and he made junior members of the delegations sleep in tents. As a result of Sandys's actions, Indonesian and Philippine observers to the UN ascertainment were only present for three of the six days it was conducted.⁹⁹ Under intense pressure from both Sandys and Lee Kuan Yew, Rahman declared, prior to the completion of the ascertainment, that Malaysia would form on 16 September, telling the press that 'the position that Malaya has all along taken is that the ascertainment of the Secretary-General is not a condition which will determine whether Malaysia should be formed or not'. Sandys issued a similar declaration.¹⁰⁰ This was a political provocation. The ascertainment was a pro forma ritual to allow Macapagal and Sukarno to justify to the public their acquiescence to the formation of the federation. By thwarting the ascertainment and then deliberately thumbing their nose at the Manila Accord, Sandys and Rahman ensured an escalation of tensions. The US undersecretary of state, Roger Hilsman, wrote, 'For my part, I did not see how such a blatant insult could be ignored by the Indonesians and Filipinos.'¹⁰¹ Foreign Affairs Secretary Salvador Lopez was quoted in the *Philippines Free Press* describing Malaysia as carrying out 'unreasonable obstructions to the complete witnessing of the ascertainment operation', ... 'crowning disregard for the Manila Agreement' in 'the announcement, in the very midst of the ascertainment operation, that the new Federation of Malaysia would be proclaimed on 16 September, irrespective of the outcome of the ascertainment'.¹⁰²

⁹⁹Kahin, *Southeast Asia*, pp. 172–73.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁰¹Hilsman, *To move a nation*, p. 404.

¹⁰²*Philippines Free Press*, 12 Oct 1963, p. 1

On 16 September, as Kuala Lumpur declared Malaysia a nation, there were simultaneous protests against Malaysia in both Indonesia and the Philippines, which were coordinated by the PKI and the leadership of the PKP. Lacsina and Sison led an LM protest outside the Malayan and British embassies. The banners of the protesters read 'Maphilindo Sil' and 'Crush Malaysia'. The Lapiang Manggagawa issued a statement signed by the LM Secretariat, which stated that Malaysia had been formed 'in violation of the Maphilindo principle of "deliberation aimed at unanimity" (mushawara), without due regard to the inhabitants' right to self-determination as guaranteed by the UN Charter'.¹⁰³ They used the protests not merely to denounce Malaysia but to whip up support for Macapagal, stating

The Lapiang Manggagawa deplores the fact that some local elements, particularly the Nacionalista Party [the rival to Macapagal's Liberal Party], and their collaborators, have allowed themselves to be used to undermine and subvert the Philippine position on the Malaysia question. ...

The Lapiang Manggagawa, therefore, calls upon the Filipino people to rally behind the government's courageous effort to insure the national freedom of all peoples, particularly our neighbors in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁴

The *Philippine Collegian* reported that 'Some 150 placard bearing demonstrators were reported to have hurled rocks into the British Embassy compound, breaking a few windows at the servants quarters.'¹⁰⁵ Sison wrote a letter to the editor of the *Collegian* defending the protest against the 'old-spinster attitudes' of 'some of our official representatives' and claimed the protest was peaceful and 'highly intelligent, patriotic and honorable'.¹⁰⁶ On 17 September, Malaysia severed diplomatic ties with the Philippines; its ambassador departed the country and was seen off at the airport by the American and British ambassadors.

The 1963 midterm elections concluded in early November and the Macapagal administration reoriented itself. Macapagal travelled to Washington for the funeral of President Kennedy and shortly afterwards commenced discussions with the Johnson administration for the deployment of Philippine troops to Vietnam.¹⁰⁷ For the first four months of 1964, Macapagal continued to pursue ties with Indonesia and attempted to expand the influence of Maphilindo. These efforts became increasingly half-hearted, however. The restoration of intimate ties with Washington, the growing influence of the PKI, and the spiralling violence of Konfrontasi produced a reevaluation in Manila of

¹⁰³Lapiang Manggagawa (LM), 'Rally against foreign pressures! Rally to the defense of our national honor and dignity!', University of the Philippines, Diliman, Radical Papers Archive, 09/33.01, 1963.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵*Philippine Collegian*, 18 Sep 1963, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶Jose Ma. Sison, 'Peaceful, I say', *Philippine Collegian*, 25 Sep 1963, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷The discussion between Macapagal and the Johnson administration surrounding the deployment of Filipino troops to Vietnam can be traced in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-63. Volume XXIII, Southeast Asia* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1994). The shift in Manila's alignment corresponded to a shift in Washington, as the Johnson administration adopted a far harder line towards Jakarta than that of Kennedy (Matthew Jones, 'U.S. relations with Indonesia, the Kennedy-Johnson transition, and the Vietnam Connection, 1963-1965', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2002, pp. 249-81; Sodhy 'Malaysian-American relations', p. 125).

which country was the greatest regional threat to the Philippines. In April, Lopez was replaced as secretary of foreign affairs.

Relations with Indonesia soured and by the beginning of 1965 official political discourse in the Philippines spoke of Indonesia as an imminent military threat. The Philippine legislature conducted a witch-hunt of Indonesian immigrants as alleged 'communist spies' and thousands were deported, including Bakri Ilyas. The Philippine elite breathed a collective sigh of relief in late 1965 as Suharto crushed the PKI, removed its erstwhile ally from office, and took the reins of power.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Anticommunism was the unbroken thread of continuity between the Macapagal administration's racialized opposition to the formation of Malaysia and the subsequent sharpened tensions with Indonesia and alignment with Suharto's seizure of power. The social tensions that threatened the stability of the status quo for every one of the rival forces during the origins of Konfrontasi reached a dramatic, in some cases catastrophic, denouement. The conflict was largely low-level guerrilla warfare in the jungles of Borneo, with border incursions conducted by Indonesian and British forces, but included terror bombings, propaganda, and political destabilization.¹⁰⁹ The tensions that the conflict expressed, however, were far larger than its skirmishes. These soon found more explosive expression: race riots and political upheaval. Malaysia expelled Singapore in 1965. Half a million members of the PKI were slaughtered, and Sukarno was ousted from power.

The fleeting alignment of interests between the Macapagal and Sukarno governments in opposition to Malaysia in 1963 expressed the regional character of the origins of Konfrontasi. Island Southeast Asia was struggling to define itself during the final stages of decolonization. Everything was in flux. There was a ubiquity of social crisis and upheaval conjoined with a sense of multiple possible futures. Each of the regional actors—particularly Sukarno, the Tunku, Lee, and Macapagal—attempted to define the region in different ways as a means of controlling social unrest and preventing communism from giving this unrest an ideological form. By 1965, with the slaughter of the PKI, the region was transformed. It was no longer in flux; it was stable but fragmented, its national boundaries somewhat ossified. The stability expressed itself through individual rulers who remained in power for decades. Marcos was now president of the Philippines and would remain so for the next 20 years; Suharto ruled Indonesia; Lee was at the helm of Singapore.

Konfrontasi was thus a turning point in the region defining itself. Including the Philippines in our analysis as a core actor in the dispute, we get a better understanding of what was at stake, stepping back from the national particularities of Malaysia and Indonesia. What emerges as the central concern in the dispute is racialized anticommunism; it is the common refrain repeated by the Tunku, Macapagal, Azahari, and the

¹⁰⁸News coverage in the Philippines celebrated the crushing of the PKI. The *Manila Bulletin*, 17 Nov 1965, for example, ran a front-page photo of Indonesians digging what appears to be a mass grave and captioned the image 'Indon Reds. Getting a taste of their own medicine'.

¹⁰⁹On the conduct of Konfrontasi, see Mackie, *Konfrontasi*.

Indonesian military. It is taken up in the Philippine press and articulated by British and American diplomats. Each of the rival actors promoting and opposing Malaysia sought to stabilize a situation of mounting social crisis through redrawing of the borders of a decolonizing region, each with an eye to the Chinese and threat of communism.

Competing interests. None.

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