Chapter VI

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This chapter is concerned with a review of the problem of national security and stability of Malaysia as discussed in the pages of the preceding chapters and posit certain conclusions. Some questions which immediately come to mind are: To what extent is the security of Malaysia threatened by external sources? What links do these sources have with local Communist insurgents? What are the internal issues that pose a threat to Malaysia's security?

The chief sources of insecurity for Malaysia include China's policy and attitude to ASEAN, intra-regional fears and rivalries, internal subversion and China's support for the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), the backwardness of the Malaysian economy and the problem of rural poverty, the problem of racial disharmony, and, finally, fear of interference by the Big Powers. Thus some of the sources that pose a security threat to Malaysia are internal; the others, external. Sometimes a threat is a product of a combination of both internal and external sources.

Malaysia's perception of its security problem has a good deal to do with its geopolitical situation and the dynamics of the socio-economic forces in its domestic politics. It has a long coastline which is apparently exposed and vulnerable to external threat or aggression. Its far-flung territories, physically separated into two distinct geographical areas, complicate defence planning and
present problems of logistics and manpower development. Malaysia, therefore, cannot but build up its defence so as to ensure the safety of the coastline and the inviolability of its boundaries. Its strategic location at the centre of Southeast Asia makes it clear that a threat to its security would also affect the security of its neighbours and vice versa owing to geographical proximity and easy accessibility between them by land and sea. This is why it now seeks friendly relations with the countries in its neighbourhood. Not only has it sought friendly relations with its immediate neighbour Indonesia, but it has also actively co-operated regionally through ASEAN, which appears to have emerged as a major factor in its security (Chapter III and Chapter IV).

In terms of geography, economy, religion, population, and language, the Malaysian society presents much diversity and contrast. It is a multiracial society made up of Malays (46.9 per cent), Chinese (33.3 per cent), Indians (8.3 per cent), and other miscellaneous ethnic groups. Lack of ethnic homogeneity has proved to be a source of tension. Malay-Chinese antagonism has often erupted in the form of riots. These "communal" riots show that any attempt to exploit the sensitive question of race in a plural society like Malaysia's can very well endanger the security of the country. Thus it is not only the fear of an external attack that threatens the security of Malaysia. The weaknesses in its socio-political set-up in themselves constitute a serious problem for its internal security. For instance, in the General Elections
held in 1969 the Alliance Party (made up of the United Malays National Organization or UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association or MCA, and the Malaysian Indian Congress or MIC) suffered a setback in West Malaysia. It contested as many as 104 Parliamentary seats, but won only 66. Though it suffered setbacks both at the Federal and State levels, it continued to rule Malaysia. Some people sought to exploit the situation. They planted in the minds of the Malays the fear that the non-Malays would play a dominant role in Malaysian politics and that the interests of the Malays would be overlooked. This led to the most notorious racial riot ever in Kuala Lumpur, the Federal capital, on 13 May 1969. This riot is now known as the "May Thirteenth Riot". Though the riot was a product of racial tension, different observers have read other meanings into it. For example, Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was Prime Minister at the time of the riot, thinks that the flare-up was due to the Communists. In his memoirs entitled *Looking Back: Monday Musings and Memories*, he observes: "Everybody knew that the May 13 riot was started by the Communists and their sympathizers". Even then there is no doubt that he suspects the hand of Malay racialists; for a little before he relinquished office in the following year, he expressed the hope that his successor Tun Razak would weed out the racialist elements within the ruling combination of political parties. Inasmuch as diversity and social inequality give rise to tensions, Malaysia's future depends on its success in integrating the diverse ethnic groups into a united nation.
Another source of instability in Malaysia is the extra-regional loyalties of large numbers of Chinese and Indians towards China and India respectively. The Chinese and to a lesser extent the Indians have a tendency to look to their mother countries for inspiration. A large number of them also have economic links with their respective ethnic groups living beyond the borders of Malaysia. This comes in the way of their integration in the Malaysian society. Because of their numerical strength Malaysia cannot but take note of the attitudes and dispositions of China and India in formulating its foreign policy. The Chinese claim more attention than the Indians and for the following reasons: they are numerous; they are a force to be reckoned with in many Southeast Asian countries; China is assumed to be almost a Super Power. Although there seems to be no possibility of a direct external attack on Malaysia at the moment from any quarter, Malaysia considers China a source of threat to its security because of the latter's involvement (ideologically and otherwise) in the local Communist insurgencies and support for the MCP.

With a view to solving the problem of Communist insurgency and persuading China not to support the MCP, Tun Abdul Razak paid a visit to Peking in 1974, when he was the Prime Minister of Malaysia. This led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The problem of Communist insurgency, however, is yet to be solved; for China differentiates between party-to-party relations and state-to-state relations.
Malaysia has been governed by a coalition of nine parties called Barisan Nasional (or National Front) since 1974. The search for a viable political system that would ensure peace and stability in Malaysia led Tun Abdul Razak between 1970 and 1974 to team up with some of the opposition parties to form coalition Governments based on Barisan Nasional. The emergence of Barisan Nasional following the union of the erstwhile Alliance Party with some of the opposition parties is an important development in Malaysia’s political evolution since independence. Barisan Nasional, like its predecessor the Alliance Party, is a multi-communal front, with the UMNO playing the dominant role. Although the ruling front lacks political homogeneity, it is kept together by a common ideological aversion, viz anti-Communism. Co-operation for economic development and political stability are other aspects of their co-operation. Though the various constituents of Barisan Nasional function in similar style politically, they differ in their outlook and expectations. That they should differ over many things is inevitable; for the Malaysian society is a communally stratified society. Such differences are manifest not only in domestic policy but also in the foreign and defence policies of the country. There is no consensus even within the Malay community. For instance, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP; now called PAS) was opposed to the proposal for the formation of Malaysia as it was against the merger of Singapore in the larger federation. Sections of the PMIP, including its President, Dr Burhanuddin, and the Central Executive Committee
opposed the proposal for the formation of Malaysia. They were in favour of a much wider political union embracing Malaya, the Borneo territories, the Philippines, and Indonesia which they called Malaya Raya.

Within Barisan Nasional the constituent parties do exercise influence in policy-making, but the UMNO has always exercised the decisive influence in the formulation of policies, both foreign and defence.

The formation of the front was part of Razak's policy of ensuring Malaysia's internal security by reconciling some of the discordant elements and accommodating them in the Government and thereby restraining them from playing up the explosive issue of communalism. There are, however, certain inherent weaknesses in Barisan Nasional. Since each ethnic group organizes itself into a separate social organization, the cultural assimilation of the various groups never takes place. Barisan Nasional is obliged to resort to constant manipulation to protect its delicate balance against divisive forces. Any major split within Barisan Nasional is sure to rock the boat. As there is no alternative to Barisan Nasional at present, it might even endanger the entire political structure and facilitate a Communist take-over. In spite of their dogged struggle for over three decades the Communists have not succeeded in capturing power. However, the danger from the MCP has always been there. This constitutes the crux of the problem of internal security as seen by Malaysia's current ruling elites.
If we consider Malayan/Malaysian security in historical perspective, we shall find that after independence, the country being militarily weak, depended on its security on Britain and the Commonwealth. Britain maintained close economic and political links with Malaya and Singapore through the Commonwealth. Even after "Merdeka", it continued to train Malaya's armed forces and supply military equipment as in the pre-independence days. In view of its huge investments in Malaya during the colonial days, it had a stake in the security of Malaya. When the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed, Malaya, being still a British colony, came within the jurisdiction of the SEATO. As soon as it attained independence, however, it exercised its discretion in favour of not being a formal member of the SEATO. Instead it entered into a bilateral treaty called AMDA (Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement) with the United Kingdom. This provoked a controversy as to whether the terms of AMDA involved Malaya in the SEATO.

Britain's paramount concern in Southeast Asia in the fifties was the defence and security of Malaya against the MCP, which had launched a struggle against the colonial Government. In collaboration with Australia and New Zealand, therefore, it formed a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve containing naval, air, and army units, and garrisoned it in Malaya and Singapore.

Malaya attained independence in 1957. Internally, however, it continued to face a threat to its security from the MCP. The ruling elites of Malaysia feared a Communist
take-over. Their fear was reinforced by the Communist victories in North Vietnam and China.

In terms of military strength, all that Malaya had at the time of its independence was eight infantry battalions with a small number of auxiliary units. It had no naval or air force worth the name. This small armed force which it inherited lacked experience. Its ability to defend the country was seriously open to doubt. As we have seen, it was the British troops and the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve which provided security to Malaya during the critical days of struggle against the MCP. After the attainment of independence, therefore, Malaya sought to develop its defence forces with British aid and concluded the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA). AMDA was a defence guarantee given by the United Kingdom to Malaya/Malaysia against external threat or aggression. It also provided for mutual assistance.

During 1963-66 Indonesia's policy of confrontation posed a serious security threat to Malaysia. The proposal to form Malaysia by merging the British colonial territories of Sarawak, Sabah, and Singapore in Malaya provoked an international crisis. An important consideration behind the proposal to form Malaysia was that it would be easy to defend these territories against any Communist attempt to capture power. The leaders of the People's Action Party (PAP) of Singapore convinced the leaders of the Alliance Party of Kuala Lumpur that Malaysia would be an effective bulwark against the Communists. Indonesia, which then had
the support of the Soviet Union and China, however, fiercely criticized the Malaysia scheme and prepared to forestall its implementation even through military means.

Britain kept its pledge to defend Malaya/Malaysia in the face of Indonesia’s policy of confrontation. The British Gurkha troops, supported by aid from Australia and New Zealand, defended the Malaysian territories against Indonesian guerrillas. Malaysia survived the confrontation. Its size was, however, reduced following Singapore’s withdrawal from the federation in 1965.

Contrary to expectations, Indonesia’s policy of confrontation did not strengthen ties between the constituent units of Malaysia. This is clear from the developments which eventually led to Singapore’s withdrawal from the federation. In Sabah, Tun Mustapha came to power as a supporter of Malaysia and a critic of the concept of State autonomy, which his opponent Donald Stephens had been pleading for. However, after becoming the Chief Minister of the State, he took a different stand and showed insubordination to the Federal Government. Confrontation did not even promote racial unity between the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians. This was because, following ratification of the Bangkok Agreement of 1966, Adam Malik, giving expression to the feeling of racial affinity between the Malays of Malaysia and the people of his own country, said: "No one has won or lost. Victory goes to the Malay people, the great race in Southeast Asia, to which both Malaysia and Indonesia belong." This aggravated racial tension. The Chinese in Malaysia were
much perturbed by what they perceived as the prospect of an Indonesian-Malaysian rapprochement. Confrontation made a great impact on Malaysia’s concept of national and regional security — indeed much greater than it had made on Indonesia’s. Malaysia now realised the need to accord high priority to the question of developing its own defence. With the extension of national boundaries to Sarawak and Sabah, the possibilities of subversion too increased. This in its turn necessitated a considerable increase in the strength of the armed forces to provide security to the nation in the face of Communist insurgency. Besides, as we have discussed elsewhere in this study, the formation of Malaysia had not been all smooth. The process of creation of the new federation had been marked by political differences between the Federation of Malaya and the Borneo states, which presaged danger to the internal security situation. The Government of Malaysia was constrained to develop its armed forces and equip them sufficiently so as to enable them to deal with any emergency independently of the British and Commonwealth defence umbrella. The Labour Government of the United Kingdom decided in 1968 to withdraw militarily from areas east of Suez by the mid 1970s. In the event this British withdrawal came much earlier, in 1971 itself. AMDA too came to an end in 1971. It was replaced by 5-Power defence arrangement (Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom). It was a loose consultative framework for the external defence of Malaysia and Singapore. Apart from this, a 3-Power (Australia,
New Zealand, and the United Kingdom) arrangement - ANZUK - was established in November 1971. In fact it was the ANZUK which provided strength to the 5-Power defence arrangement (FPDA). FPDA serves the purpose of providing a psychological assurance to Western investors. Although it cannot be used to quell communal trouble, it gives a sense of security to the Malaysian Government as well.

Malaysia has also sought to co-operate with the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand in trying to harmonize their common interests with their national interests through regional co-operation. Its initiatives to forge closer association with its Southeast Asian neighbours found expression in the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, more popularly known as ASEAN. Earlier, Malaya had been a party to the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) and had subscribed to the idea of Maphilindo. In deciding to participate in the formation of regional organizations, Malaysia seems to have been motivated by the urge for group survival. Maphilindo (a loose confederation of Indonesia, Malaya, and the Philippines) came into being in the throes of Sukarnoist Indonesia's confrontation with Malaysia. The heads of Government of the three countries declared at the time of signing the Manila Agreement in 1963 that they acknowledged their primary responsibility to ensure that the stability and security of the Southeast Asian region was not disturbed or undermined by subversive elements of whatever kind.
Let us now turn to the motivations behind the decision of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand to come together and form ASEAN in 1967. It had become clear at that time that the Americans were not faring too well in Vietnam and that the attempt to contain Communism in the area by military means was far from being a success. The non-Communist states of Southeast Asia realized that the Western, particularly the American, military presence in the area was not likely to be maintained for long. They also realized that defence in the form of a military pact or alliance would not be adequate to meet the Communist challenge and that an alternative solution for the problems of the region needed to be found through co-operation among themselves. ASEAN was thus formed to meet this need of the five countries, which pledged to pool their resources to promote economic growth and development. In fostering regional co-operation ASEAN has also emphasized political co-operation, apart from its primary objective of economic and cultural co-operation. In fact, the main element in ASEAN to-day is political. As discussed earlier in Chapter IV of this study, Section E of the Declaration of the ASEAN Concord of 1976 clearly stresses the importance of continuing co-operation in security matters on a non-ASEAN basis in consonance with the needs and interests of one another.

The Western, particularly American, support for ASEAN is a key factor. This is evident from the joint communiqué issued in Washington by President Jimmy Carter of the United
States and Prime Minister Ohira of Japan after their summit meeting on 2 May 1979. Among other things they declared that their two countries had a "profound interest" in ensuring that there was peace in Southeast Asia. They also expressed their concern for stability in the region. Besides, they had a word of praise for what they called the "vitality" of ASEAN. They said that they were convinced of ASEAN's commitment to economic and social development and pledged their co-operation and assistance in the work that ASEAN was doing in the interest of regional solidarity and development.

The five ASEAN states are bound together by their common ideological aversion to Communism. They are all faced with the problem of Communist insurgencies. And yet they have taken care not to adopt any over anti-Communist foreign policy in order to avoid a confrontation with the Communist states of the region. Perhaps they feel that when even the mighty United States has failed to defeat Communism through military means, it would be foolhardy on their part to imagine that they could. ASEAN states, therefore, avoid anti-Communist foreign policies although they pursue anti-Communist policies in their respective domestic spheres.

As discussed elsewhere in this study, Malaysia has an internal security problem from the MCP in the northern border areas adjoining Thailand and in the State of Sarawak adjoining Kalimantan. In view of this, Malaysia and its ASEAN partners believe that the best way to fight the local Communists is to build up their internal economic strength along with national and regional resilience.
The major threat to the ASEAN states comes from internal subversion and local Communist insurgencies though China has always loomed large as a great and relatively harmful country capable of threatening them. Most of the Communist parties of Southeast Asia are more under the influence of Peking than of the Soviet Union. This is so because, apart from geographical proximity, there are about fifteen million overseas Chinese in this region. Many of these are "stateless" and are sympathetic to China. They are allegedly the channel of moral and material support for the local Communist insurgencies. Such a sweeping generalization about the overseas Chinese would, however, be misleading. Large numbers of them have proved their loyalties and have contributed their mite to the tasks of nation-building and economic development in the countries of their domicile.

However, whether it is the neutralization policy or the question of national security, Malaysia's main concern is China. The MGP is predominantly Chinese in its composition. The Chinese dominate almost all sectors of the economy in Malaysia. It is alleged that the inspiration for the Communist insurgencies in Malaysia is directly traceable to China.

Malaysia has, therefore, normalized its relations with China. Following Tun Razak's visit to Peking in May 1974 diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. China recognized Malaysia's independence and sovereignty.
As regards the alleged Chinese support for the Communist insurgencies in Malaysia, Prime Minister Tun Razak on his return from China stated that he had been assured by Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Chou En-lai that China regarded the Communist insurgencies purely as an internal affair of Malaysia and had said that the Government was free to deal with it in whatever manner it deemed fit.

The MCP, however, reacted sharply against Razak's visit to China. A Voice of Malayan Revolution broadcast on 25 May 1974 (on the eve of Razak's visit) said that peaceful co-existence meant maintenance of the social systems of the co-existing countries intact and that it did not apply to the struggle of the people concerned to change the existing systems. The Communist insurgents indulged in destruction of property in the wake of Tun Razak's visit. They sought to demonstrate thereby that the Sino-Malaysian raprochement had no effect on the MCP's strategy of armed struggle.

Malaysia, however, was the first of the ASEAN countries to normalize relations with China.

All ASEAN states are faced with similar threats to their security, though these threats may vary in intensity from country to country. It is, therefore, generally expected that these states would co-operate in the matter of counterinsurgency measures. There has been bilateral security co-operation between Malaysia and Thailand in their border areas for a number of years. This military co-operation, it should be noted, is strictly bilateral; there is as yet no multilateral co-operation in ASEAN to fight the Communist insurgents.
A question that arises in this context is: What are the prospects for the establishment of a joint military force by ASEAN? Both the Bangkok Declaration and the Kuala Lumpur Declaration provided the legal basis for such joint co-operation among the ASEAN countries when they affirm the determination of the ASEAN countries to ensure their stability and security from external interference in whatever form.

The ASEAN leaders are, however, opposed to ASEAN's assuming a military role, since a joint military pact would provoke other Powers and unnecessary reactions. They, therefore, prefer to stress the importance of defence co-operation and to insist that their organization is not a military pact.

If the military strength of a country is not adequate to guarantee its security vis-a-vis external threats, it means that there is a gap between the military strength and the requirements of security. This gap is often covered by means of diplomacy. Malaysia has sought to fill the gap in its case by means of its proposal for a neutralized Southeast Asia and through recognition of the region as "a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality free from any form or manner of interference by outside Powers".

Malaysia's foreign policy shows that its outlook on neutralization is subject to its relationship with its ASEAN partners, in particular, with Indonesia, with which a special relationship based on Malay identity seems to exist.

As discussed in Chapter V the strongest driving element behind Malaysia's proposal for neutralization is
its concern for security. Allaying the fears of critics Tun Razak said: "If we can get outside powers to respect us, then we don't need any security arrangements." On 10 March 1968, in an interview to Felix Abisheganaden, he remarked that his country's main concern was "not so much defence but security. The idea is to ensure security with as little expense as possible." There has, however, been an increase in Malaysia's military budget in view of the apparently insecure environment in the region. Despite its commitment to the idea of neutralization, Malaysia takes its defence and security responsibilities seriously.

Owing to Malaysia's vulnerability to external armed attack (which became clear during the period of Indonesia's confrontation in the sixties) the Malaysian proposal for a neutralized Southeast Asia can be interpreted as a device for involving the countries of the region into a kind of security framework. The emergence of the idea of neutralization is related to the decline of ANFA, the inadequate military provisions of the ANZUK, and the changes in the Malay ruling elite which resulted from Tun Razak's assumption of the office of Prime Minister of Malaysia. Hence Tun Dr Ismail, Tun Razak, and Ghusali bin Shafie regarded the proposal for neutralization as a substitute for a defence agreement in the field of security. Neutralization, if guaranteed by the Big Powers, would keep the region free from international contention and from intervention by outside Powers in regional affairs. It would also eliminate or minimize inter-State conflict within the region. Faced
with the possibility of a threat emerging from within the
country and the region in view of the activities of the MCP
and the proximity of the victorious Communist forces in
Indo-China, the Malaysian policy-makers have resolved that
economic development should be accelerated so as to solve the
problems of poverty and inequality and eliminate the condi-
tions of underdevelopment which lead to subversion and
revolutionary change. With a view to ensuring what they
call evolutionary change, they have emphasized the need to
promote rapid economic development and social improvement.
Being a successor to the colonial empire, Malaysia, because
of its far-flung territories and delayed unification
(delayed, i.e. till September 1963), faced serious problems
of territorial and political consolidation. Hardly had it
achieved unity when it was challenged by Indonesia with its
policy of open confrontation. It now seeks to concentrate
its energies on economic development, and its leaders seem
to imagine that if the Big Powers guarantee peace and
stability in the region and freedom from external attack
by announcing their recognition of the neutral status of
the region it would enable them to concentrate on the tasks
of nation-building.

Malaysia has used the ASEAN forum to promote the
idea of neutralization. Its proposal for a neutralized
Southeast Asia was adopted by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference in November 1971. Tun Razak looked upon Asean as the solid foundation on which to build a neutralized South-
east Asia.
Involvement of the Big Powers in the international affairs of the region is today the most intricate problem from the standpoint of peace and security in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia has seen a series of military conflicts, including especially the Indo-China conflict. None of these conflicts is an exclusive product of the disputes between the Southeast Asian states. They are all the result of the moves of the external Powers for their own benefit. The first lesson to be drawn from the Indo-China war is that for the attainment of regional peace and stability, Southeast Asia should be insulated from the rivalries and conflicts of the Big Powers. The second lesson is that a military alliance with an external Power contains in itself the germ of war, not of security. Hence these benefit the Big Powers, not the dependent states. This is not to say that there are no internal conflicts within the region. As discussed in Chapter III there are many local conflicts based on historical claims and counter claims. None of these, however, would have escalated and wrought havoc if the Big Powers had not sought to fish in the troubled waters.

We may justifiably conclude that the problems and issues discussed in Chapter V, are not conducive to a for neutralization neutralized zone, and the prospects are, therefore, bleak. If the security of any state in Southeast Asia is threatened, it is more likely to seek the help of some external Power or Powers than from within the region, for the Big Powers possess superior technology and military strength. The presence of the Big Powers - economic, political, and
military - is likely to increase. This would only enhance
the possibilities of conflict.

Malaysia wants Southeast Asia to be neutralized
because in that event it stands a better chance of
realizing its aspiration for an independent foreign policy.
The Malaysian leaders view the proposal for a neutralized
zone in the context of the country's deep concern for
security. Tun Razak realized that the pursuit of a policy
of neutralization and exclusion of interference by the Big
Powers in regional politics would appeal to nationalist
sentiment at home.

As discussed above, the basic problem confronting
Malaysian society is the question of promoting harmony
among its three main ethnic groups - the Chinese, the Malays,
and the Indians. The neutralization proposal has an appeal
to all the divergent sections, including the Malays and the
"Young Turks" within Barisan Nasional. It thus serves as a
link between the domestic and foreign policies of Malaysia.

Malaysia's policy-makers have used foreign policy to
safeguard national security both internally and externally.
For a number of years Malaysia maintained defence ties and
cultivated friendly relations with the erstwhile colonial
Power, viz Britain, and with two of its Commonwealth partners,
Australia and New Zealand. These Powers were sufficiently
equipped to help Malaysia militarily and otherwise. They
were also willing to extend help and co-operation in the
maintenance of its national security in the early years
following independence and throughout the period of
Indonesia's Konfrontasi. This special relationship, however, underwent considerable change as time passed; so much so that Malaysia was constrained to adopt new approaches to foreign relations. The change in Malaysian outlook coincided with the British announcement of the decision to withdraw forces from areas east of Suez. Malaysia thereupon hit upon the policy of neutralization of Southeast Asia. It also embraced non-alignment. Malaysia played an important role in the creation of ASEAN. Malaysia has thus sought to marry problems of national security to those of regional security, which is an important objective of the ASEAN states. Interaction between the various factors mentioned above shapes and determines the foreign policy of Malaysia.