

# VOICE OF MALAYSIA AS MEDIA IN MANAGING THE PROPAGANDA IN MALAYSIA- INDONESIA CONFRONTATION (1963-1965)

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## Abstract

Mass media played a significant role in conveying a government's information to the society. At international level, the mass media is very effective in highlighting the image of the country and in the early years of Malaysia's independence, this role was entrusted to Suara Malaysia Broadcast. The history of the establishment of Voice of Malaysia is closely related to the Malaysia's confrontation with Indonesia (1963-1966). With the necessity of Malaysian security, the Voice of Malaysia formed to against Sukarno's propaganda towards Malaysia. This paper discusses the history of the formation of the Voice of Malaysia and its role as counter attack of Indonesia's black propaganda. Through the Voice of Malaysia, the Malaysian government has channeled current economic, political and social situation during Confrontation period. The most interesting aspect was the Voice of Malaysia also involved the Indonesian peoples who fled to Malaysia for opposing Sukarno. Finally, Confrontation was successfully ended through Bangkok Treaty 1966. The effectiveness of the Voice of Malaysia was acknowledged by British representatives and Indonesian military leaders. This paper uses the classical diplomatic historical approach and qualitative method. Most of the references are based on British official records gathered from the British National Archive, Kew, London. Other references are secondary resources such as books and article. The major finding of this paper is proved that the significant role mass media as a non-military instrument in against outside threat.

**Keywords:** Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, Voice of Malaysia, Radio TV Malaysia, black propaganda, Bangkok Treaty.

## INTRODUCTION

The media had played various of significant roles in all aspects of life. The primary role of media could act as a place of information, entertainments, acknowledgements and many more that has been expanding accordingly to the development of the people and the media. One of the most important role of a media can be seen in the aspects of the management of diplomatic relations between countries of the world. For example, the way in which a country's image appears in other foreign countries' newspaper also influences the people's perception of that particular country. The power that the media holds has the potential to make a huge

impact on the people of the world. The contribution of media in diplomatic relations can be seen in their role during the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation in 1963-1966 through The Voice of Malaysia (Suara Malaysia). The objectives of this paper are to discuss Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation events that took place, to study the formation of Voice of Malaysia station and its role in against Indonesia's black propaganda. This paper using qualitative method with classical diplomatic approach focuses on content analysis on primer and secondary sources.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The basis of Malaysia- Indonesia relations has been formed since ancient times. The history of traditional Indonesia's kingdom such as the kingdom of Majapahit affiliated with traditional Malay kingdom in Malaya Peninsular region such as the kingdom of Malacca. Therefore, the geo-strategy factors, language, cultural and religious similarity became a basis of Malaysia-Indonesia's good relationship especially in the early stages of Malaysia's independence period (Ahmad Nizar, 2013). However, this good relationship did not last long when Indonesia launched confrontation policy against Malaysia in 1963 until 1966.

In the context on discussion of Malaysia-Indonesia relations, the event of confrontation (1963-1966) attracted many attention of researchers. They are [1] which more focused on the history of confrontation event itself and its implication in Malaysia-Indonesia bilateral relations. According to [2, 3] the formation of was the main cause of Indonesia's confrontation policy towards Malaysia in September 1963.

However, previous years shown that the relations between these two countries are not very good. This is because Indonesia accused Malaysia of being a third party in channeling aids (from Western powers) to PRRI (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia* or The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) in Sumatra and PERMESTA (Universal Struggle Charter or *Piagam Perjuangan Semesta Alam*) in Sulawesi [4, 5], Indonesia's confrontation policy over Malaysia also driven by fears that the formation of Malaysia will encircle Indonesia when Sarawak, Sabah and Singapore merge into Malaysia. After all, Indonesia accused the formation of Malaysia as a neo-colonialism agenda promoted by Western powers [6, 7]

Meanwhile [8, 9] discussed in detail about the involvement of Malaysian military personnel in operations against Indonesian aggression during confrontation while the earlier scholar who are focusses on Indonesia-Malaysia relationship are [7, 10] which emphasized on Indonesia's political circumstances which influenced the Indonesian President, Sukarno's confrontation policy towards Malaysia.

One of the interesting discussion on Sukarno's policy towards Malaysia during confrontation period wrote by [11, 12] who was a United States Ambassador to Indonesia in 1963. Based on his good relationship with President Sukarno has allowed him to write very well about Sukarno's attitude towards Malaysia (and US) during confrontation period. Jones, in his book, *The Possible Dream* also stated that he had put aside his friendship sentiments with Sukarno for the sake of his country in carrying out his duties as ambassador in Indonesia.

In conclusion, many studies found that the Indonesia-Malaysia's conflict during confrontation period was more influenced by domestic political situation, their national interest and the different of personality between Indonesian President, Sukarno and Malaysia's Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al- Haj. However, the writing about the use of radio station as a media in channeling Malaysia's propaganda against Indonesia are not so much written by researchers. This is because most of the writing more focuses on the role and influences of the press in Indonesia and Malaysia during confrontation rather than radio or TV.

## INDONESIAN CONFRONTATION OVER MALAYSIA 1963-1966

The Confrontation was the dark side of the history of Malaysia's diplomatic relations with Indonesia. This conflict started as a result of the political dichotomy and the leadership of both countries that were driven by their national interests. Indonesia, on the other hand, had their own reasons on why they were against the formation of Malaysia on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1963 (FO 371/176324). This was due to the fact that the formation of Malaysia was believed by Indonesia, to be influenced and sponsored by the Western imperialism and also as an act to besiege Indonesia. Indonesia's outrage by Malaysia's formation can be seen when they set the Jakarta's Malaysian embassy building in fire following the announcement of the formation of Malaysia on 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1963. As a response, Malaysia decided to cut their ties with Indonesia (and Philippines) on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1963. Following the incident, on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1963, all telecommunication between Malaysia and Indonesia had also been blocked.

The peak to Indonesia's psy - war on Malaysia when Sukarno launched "Crush Malaysia (*Ganyang Malaysia*)" campaign in the early year of 1963. The open war Indonesia-Malaysia started when Indonesia began landing their troops at water territorial of Johor and the Kalimantan's border since the year 1963. Prior to the outbreak of the Indonesia-Malaysia armed confrontation, cases of accusations and propagandas has taken place widely between the leaders of both countries (CO 1030/1471).

In facing Indonesia's attack, Malaysia had use two main methods – overt operation (an openly operation) and covert operation (confidential operation). During this confrontation, the Malaysian security aspect was still part of the British responsibility and throughout the confrontation period, the British was directly involved in assisting Malaysia in overcoming the threats from Indonesia (FO 371/187567). British assistance in helping Malaysia can be seen when they decided to spend approximately 100 to 150 million pounds a year to occupied the needs for defense during the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation in about 3 years (1963-1966). As for the military operation, an amount of 10,000 Commonwealth soldiers was involved in defending Malaysia from Indonesia's intrusion. (FO 371/181492).

In terms of covert operation, it involves several strategies including intelligence and propaganda methods that was led by Norman Reddaway, which is the British diplomat and was an expert in the field of intelligent and counter propaganda. During the Confrontation period, he has led many British propagandas efforts on Indonesia (FO 371/181490. Throughout that time, the covert operation was under the jurisdiction of Psy-War Section in Malaysia which acted as a master plan for all propaganda activities towards Indonesia. The implementation of this operation also involved the Ministry of Information of Malaysia (Easter, 2007). Among the strategies used by Malaysia was to use the media through the formation of the first Malaysia's international station, that is the Voice of Malaysia or *Suara Malaysia*.

## LIST OF EVENT IN MALAYSIA-INDONESIA CONFLICT UNTIL AUGUST 1964

EVENT	DATE
Sukarno declared confrontation towards Malaya	20 <sup>th</sup> January 1963
Malaysia recalled the Ambassador in Indonesia	31 <sup>st</sup> January 1963
Police station in Tebedu was attacked by Indonesian troops	12 <sup>th</sup> April 1963
Sukarno launched campaign "Crush Malaysia"	27 July 1963
Formation of Malaysia	16 <sup>th</sup> September 1963
Indonesia had cut diplomatic relation with Malaysia	16 <sup>th</sup> September 1963
Malaysia had cut diplomatic relations with Indonesia (and Philippines)	17 <sup>th</sup> September 1963
Sukarno formed DWIKORA to crush Malaysia	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 1964
Indonesian troops landed at Johore and Singapore	July and August 1964

## THE FORMATION OF VOICE OF MALAYSIA BROADCAST

Ghazali Shafie, who was then the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, has been the mastermind for preparing a master plan to overcome Indonesia's propagandas on the direction of Malaysia's Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. Meanwhile, Dol Ramli, who was then the Acting Director of Malaysia Broadcast was directed to draft a to set up a special broadcast to against the Indonesian propaganda. The main purpose of this broadcast was to disseminate Malaysian information to the people of Indonesia, especially those in Sumatra and Java. The focus was given to those who did not support Sukarno's policies confrontation towards Malaysia and those who were neutral in this matter. In this regard, Tunku wanted one broadcasting plan that could reach and listened by the Indonesian [13, 14]

However, the Malaysian transmitter system during that time did not have the capability to reach the broadcasts in Indonesia. To overcome this issue, Malaysian broadcasts have gain the Tunku's permission to borrow or rent a transmitter system from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The Voice of Malaysia broadcasting operation requires a BBC transmitter system in the Teberau Straits as it was capable of operating a very powerful overseas broadcast system. According to this matter, Tunku had conduct several discussions with the British and they agreed to provide a full cooperation, both in broadcasting equipment and the finances [5, 6]

As a result, on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1963, Voice of Malaysia station was launched in three languages namely Malay, English and Mandarin. Voice of Malaysia was broadcasted all the way to Indonesia in Malay language. Among the contents of these programs were Requested Songs (*Lagu-Lagu Permintaan*), Dramas, Chit-Chat Program namely *Pak Desas and Pak Desus* and also, Cooking program known as *Rancangan Masak-Memasak*.

Table 2

## PROGRAMS IN VOICE OF MALAYSIA BROADCAST

Item	Programmes	Aims
1.	Requested Song ( <i>Lagu-Lagu Permintaan</i> )	a. Shows good relations between the people of Malaysia-Indonesia.
		b. Penetrate codes to convey messages against the PKI.
2.	Chit-Chat Programme ( <i>Pak Desas and Pak Desus</i> )	a. Shows the true situation of the Indonesia's economy.
		b. Describes the difficult life of Indonesian society due to inflation.
		c. Imagining the hardships of the poor and depress Indonesian family life in in facing financial difficulties.
		d. Tells about the rising price of household goods in Indonesia.
3.	Cooking Programme ( <i>Rancangan Masak-Memasak</i> )	a. Demonstrates a stable and luxurious Malaysian economic compared to the Indonesian.
		b. Denied Sukarno's accusations that Malaysians are suffering under Western imperialist power.
		c. To tell that Malaysians are enjoying a peaceful life and are not threaten by Indonesia's attacks.

Interestingly, for the Requested Song program, the names of the individuals that requested the songs and the nominees to whom the songs were directed to did not exist. These names were pseudonyms while the addresses were derived from telephone guides in Indonesia. The main purpose of Song Request program was to show the good relations between the Indonesian-Malaysian people. This program also seeks to dispel Sukarno's accusations that the people of Malaysia hated the Indonesians. In the meantime, this program also sought to highlight the strong racial sentiments between the people of both countries. In addition, these requested songs also contained secret codes to convey messages against the PKI.

In many of the program broadcasted by Voice of Malaysia, *Pak Desas and Pak Desus* drama were the programs that was most loved by the listeners. It's a show in drama aspects and the show also talked about the daily lives of the people in the

country during that time. This program, among other things, exposed the real situation of Indonesian people who were facing rising prices of goods, food shortages and low wages. In fact, in the early of 1960s, Indonesia was facing a serious inflation problem (FO 371/180317).

However, Voice of Malaysia broadcast was seen as a threat to the Indonesian government. Accordingly, on November 1963, President Sukarno issued a ban on the people of Indonesia from listening to Suara Malaysia. Sukarno also declared that those who listens and disseminates information will be sentenced to death. This was reported by the British; "...and those listening to Radio Malaysia are liable to severe penalties (FO 371/181499)".

### THE MODUS OPERANDI OF VOICE OF MALAYSIA'S BROADCAST

Voice of Malaysia broadcast operation was aided by the Indonesian people living in Malaysia. Most of them were individuals accused of being members of The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI- *Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia*) rebels by the Indonesian government (DO 35/9951). The PRRI movement which was declared on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1958 was an autonomous movement for the region from the central government. It was described by Sukarno as a revolt and a treason of his people towards his government. Some of the people involved in the movement have fled to Malaysia to secure safety from Sukarno (CO 1030/1471). In addition, Voice of Malaysia broadcast was aided by these Indonesians who disagreed with Sukarno's pro-communist policies when he was heavily influenced by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI- *Partai Komunis Indonesia*)<sup>[12]</sup>

The selection of Indonesian people in Voice of Malaysia operation was because of their better understandings about their mindset and the acceptance of the people of Indonesia in their homeland. According to Dol Ramli, in his meetings with Tunku, he stated that Radio Malaysia needed the people of Indonesia a lot more than the Malaysians due to their contrast thoughts and opinions about PKI and Sukarno. Those selected as presenter of the Malaysian political message, were individuals with good personalities and anti-PKI. At the same time, there were many of them that have fled to Kuala Lumpur and decided to settled in Klang Valley (FO 371/181490).

With the assistance from Des Alwi, Radio Malaysia has successfully identified a number of Indonesians to be hired to serve at Voice of Malaysia. Des Alwi was an Indonesian citizen who has gained political asylum in Malaysia because he was against Sukarno and his government. Des Alwi, during this time, was also involved as PRRI Radio broadcaster in Kuala Lumpur <sup>[1]</sup> He was asked to select the individuals and as a result, he manages to bring 15 Indonesians to meet Dol Ramli.

These individuals were given oral and attitude-revolutionary type tests to see these individuals were indeed in opposition towards the Indonesian government or simply just disagree with the way the country was governed. The best candidate was Kamarudin, who was able to succeed through crash courses, which were training or courses on how to prepare reports and handle broadcasting. Voice of Malaysia's main target was for the people of Indonesia, especially those in Java Island, which was the center of the PKI movement. Voice of Malaysia also focuses on those who were less affected by the PKI propaganda and have relatives and friends in Malaysia. (FO 371/181490).

As stated earlier, the role of Voice of Malaysia was more on counterattacking Sukarno's propaganda attacks on Malaysia. Among Sukarno's allegations towards Malaysia were, Malaysia was facing inflation due to high increase of daily goods as a result of Indonesia's attack on Malaysia. To refute Sukarno's allegations, Dol Ramli spoke with Idris Md Shah, one of the important officials in Voice of Malaysia, regarding this matter. As a result of their discussion, a cooking programme was broadcast. It covers the preparation of a menu of ingredients such as large-sized shrimps, cheese, butter, fresh fish, and imported fruits that are cheap and easy to access, unlike

Sukarno's accusation on how these products are difficult to obtain due to the Indonesian military attacks on Malaysia[5, 6]

Information on the political developments and economic situation in Indonesia became the main topic in Voice of Malaysia. This information was easily gained through the pro-active action of Wisma Putra as well as the cooperation of Indonesia's neutral foreign embassy partners such as Japan, Turkey, Norway, India, Canada, US and many more. In this regard, the role of Joint Malaysia-Indonesia Department (JMID) was also important. Among the key informants to Malaysia was the British Ambassador in Indonesia, Sir Andrew Gilchrist. The information was obtained through his direct and indirect conversations with important people in Indonesia such as Adam Malik, Nasution and Dewi Sukarno[9]

The Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation was finally ended when Sukarno was overthrown in Gestapu incident 1965. The conflict officially ended when the Malaysia-Indonesia Restoration Relationship Agreement was signed on 11 August 1966 in Bangkok. In this agreement, Malaysia was represented by Tun Abdul Razak, meanwhile Indonesia was represented by Tun Adam Malik (FO 371/187567). The end of the conflict between these two countries was also contributed by the role of Voice of Malaysia broadcast as a channel to convey the information about Malaysia to Indonesian people especially to those who against Sukarno in his policy towards Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of the role played by Radio Malaysia (Suara Malaysia) is acknowledged by David C. Cuthell, the Director of US Southwest Affairs; "In the propaganda field, ... that Radio Malaysia had been doing excellently in this respect." According to Dol Ramli, Suara Malaysia has achieved its goal following the amount of information that has been formulated to be conveyed (confidential) to the people of Indonesia in the country. Even in his meeting with the Director General (*DerGen*) of the Radio Republic of Indonesia (RRI) Lotto Soetan Tunaro after the peace confrontation, he acknowledged that information about Indonesia which had been broadcasted by Suara Malaysia during the period of the confrontation was "very accurate" or in Indonesia's language is "*persis.sekali*". The major finding of this paper is shows that the role of mass media (*Suara Malaysia*) in highlighting a positive image of the country. This paper also proved that the significant role of mass media as a non-military instrument in against outside threat.

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