The Securitization of Sabah's Threat Challenges

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ABSTRACT: *One of the salient characteristics of developing countries' security is that threats not only drivenby the externalbut also internal sources. Furthermore, security in these developing countries has always being perceived and defined from the state's perspective.But, since the end of the Cold War, threats to security have affected the whole structure of the system, be it state, society, or individual. Security, therefore, needs to be looked at from comprehensive angle. Hence, by using the National security theory of developing countries and Securitization theory as the basis for discussion, the article explores and discusses how state and its society manage their threats. Furthermore, this paper analyses how Malaysia manages it security threat. Sabah, one of the states in the Federation of Malaysia, is used as a case study on how Malaysia has managed its security predicaments. Managing security threats in Sabah has been influenced by several variables such as local political influences, federal-state relations, and societal understanding of national identity. The article concludes that Sabah's security threats have been securitized by local political and community leaders. But, the successes of securitizing the threats depend on how security actors at the federal level are convinced with the omnipresent threats.*

KEYWORDS: *Malaysia, national security, Sabah, sectoral security, securitization.*

I. Introduction

Since the Treaty of Westphalian 1648, the concepts of sovereignty, territorial integrity, border, regime and political survival have become an integral part of state's security management. The treaty places state as the central focal point or the main actor in the international system. The original idea of the Westphalia is that state is built based on nation or ethnic identity. State, through the role played by government, is obligedto protect its territorial and political integrity, nation's sovereignty and population survival. The territorial and border integrity, furthermore, are carried out by two security agencies - police and military. Both security agencies have the responsibility to protect the internal and external sovereignty of a country. This state concept has also become the foundation of the international system so far.

Unfortunately, the nation-state concept may applicable to the European continent. When many Asian and African countries were granted independence from their European colonial masters, these newly independent countries left with no choice but to accept the European nation-state concept. State was set up and, boundary was artificiallydrawn without having views or negotiation with the local leaders. Hence, the boundaries and territories were drawn not based on language and race but rather on political considerations. The colonial powers deliberately separated a nation or civilization into two different territories in order to undermine the political power of their former colonies. This is to ensure that a newly formed independent state would always rely on its former colonial power for political survival or economic assistance.

The implication is enormous. These newly independent states, even until today, must endure with the political identity crisis. The concept of nation-state is alien to the most of population. Questions of loyalty to either their own nation (race) or state have become a protracted debate and have been manifested with scores of civil and separatist conflicts. At the same time, border control and territories are still faced with overlapping claim issues between the two countries as the previous colonial power did not set a clear boundary line. People's cross border mobility are the common phenomenon faced by those states. Some ethnic communities that share the same language and culture are even separated into two different countries. Borders have restricted their movement. But for the state, defending border from outsideintrusion is the number one security issue since it involves issues of sovereignty and national security.

For a relatively new country like Malaysia, the dilemma is not only to manage its border from foreign intrusion but at the same time to have a firm control on its fragile societal and economic structure. The country underwent several processes of state formations. During the colonial period, the land was subjected to various treaties among colonial and regional powers that divide the territory into various powers. For instance, in 1855,

Singapore was ceded from Johor through a treaty facilitated by the British Straits Settlements. (Allen, Stockwell & Wright, 1981: 46-47) In 1878, the North Borneo territory (nowadays Sabah) was "permanently leased" through an agreement between Sultan of Sulu and British Company agents, William Hood Treacher dan Baron Gustavus von Overbeck. (*Brunei Times*, Sunday September 21, 2008) After its independence from the British in 1957, the country was initially known as the Federation of Malaya, consisted of eleven states. In 1963, the incorporation of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore formed the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore left the federation in 1965. The formation of independent Malaya and later Malaysia has indeed led to the separation of various ethnic groups into various nationalities or countries.

Hence, this article is to discuss and analyse how Malaysia manages it security threat given score of threats emerge especially since the end of the Cold War. Sabah, one of the states in Federation Malaysia, is used as a case study in order to understand how the country manages its security predicaments.Sabah is a unique case in the way Malaysia manages its security. Firstly, its sources of threat come from various forms, i.e. porous border, radicalism, political identity, and the Philippine's claims, among others. Secondly, managing Sabah security, involves delicate political negotiation between the federal and state government. Unlike other states in the Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah as well as Sarawak holdspecial autonomy in various matters such as immigration and land.

II.   National Security versus Sectorial Security

The concept of national security has long been debated. (Brown 1983, Booth 1991, Wolfers 1962, Walt 1991, Waltz 1979, Trager and Simonie 1973) This concept becomes the basis for discussion among international relations scholars especially during the Cold War era. For Wolfers (1962), a well-known American security scholar, the concept of national security can be referred to as a lack of threats or being threaten in achieving values, and in terms of subjective understanding it refers to the absence of fear of the value achieved. Walt (1979) argues that security is the ultimate-goal in the world of anarchy where objectives such as peaceand power can be achieved toguarantee state's survival. It can be argued that in general, earlier scholars as well as subsequent western scholars like Collins (2016), Baylis, Smith, and Owen (2014), and Smith (2005) maintains the Realist's state-centric view where military dimension of security is the basis in understanding state' predicaments. According to Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998: 203-4), security is,

> ... how best to deal with them and - as a second-order question - how actors manage or mismanage security policy because of intellectual or bureaucratic failures. ... It sees states as the given, eternal form of units; it views interests as something objective; and it has rules about the behaviour of states that take on something close to natural science status, such as balance of power and arms race theory.

This Realist's thinking emphasizes that the security object to be protected is the state itself.

However, security threats among developing countries or Third World countries have traversed the idea of border sovereignty and military-related issues. Developing countries like Malaysia are facing with security management issues that include internal as well as external threats such as development and poverty, political identity, drug abuse, cross-border human trafficking, and religious militancy. In addition, developing countries also face with the dilemma of nation-building. This is because thestate is not built based on the original concept of Westphalia - one nation one state. Developing countries are left with problems of the pluralistic composition of their population.The population needs to learn to live togetherand to form socio-political identity in a newly independent state. Consequently, they are faced with a dilemma whether to maintain their identity or to be assimilated in a plural society dominated by a specific race or ethnic group. This security dilemma or predicaments of developing countries has long been emphasized by many scholars such as Al-Mashat(1985), Abdullah (2012), Abdullah and Embong (1997), Ayoob (1995), Thomas (1989) and Azar and Mun (1985).

Nonetheless, since the end of the Cold War, various theories have attempted to offer new debateson national security since the earlier scholarly failures in explaining the security predicaments faced by developing countries. In 1998, Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde produced an important pieceto the post-Cold War security discourse entitled*Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Their work is alsoreferred to as the Copenhagen School of Thought on Security. This new but rather radical perspective introduces the concept of Sectoral Security and Securitization Theory. The school arguesthat security subjectivity no longer belongsto the state. According to this school, in defining whether threats can be regarded as security issues depends on the sectoral process that occur within a society. In every state, there are various sectors that need to be protected. These sectors such as politics, economy, social, culture, language and others, are part and parcel of state's formation and systemic stability. A state needs to clearly identify which sector that the most affected by the threats.A

question then arises- how can a specific sector be affected by security threats? Interestingly, the Copenhagen School of Thought offers Securitization Theory. Thetheory offers how a state takes steps to identify, socialize and declare a threat as a national security issue.

The Securitization Theory focuses on three basic variables - the process of "framing", speech act and the socialization of the threat. The first step is that an issue needs to be identified, framed and labelled as a priority to the state security agenda. State needs to show how an issue would become a threat or referent object to a state's specific sector. To achieve this, securitizing actor plays an important role in emphasizing that the issue as potential threat where state would face with "a point of no return". It is the duty of state to avoid further catastrophic consequences. Security actors or agents could be played by government or political leaders (for the top-down process in labelling or securitizing the threats) or even leader of the society or community or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (for the bottom-up process of securitization). The second stage is the 'speech act' by the securitizing actor played by policy makers, politicians, and community or NGOs leaders. The flow of securitization process can be top-down or bottom-up, but the most effective process is usually top-down. This is because the speech act of top political leaders in securitizing an issue as a threat is considered highly credible. According to Buzan,Waever and de Wilde's(1998: 32), securitization process is not an act of politicalizing an issue as security threats. The speech act by leaders is to rationalise approaches or action to be taken, and to socialise the issue as treat in order to ensure prompt action would be taken. Finally, securitizing actors would socialize the threat(s) as an immediate security concern, which the relevant government agencies need to attend to.

Based on the above discussion, this article will use National Security of Developing Countries Theory and Theory of Securitization as the basis for discussion. It can be argued that threats and security of the developing world does not solely focus on military aspects of security threats. Security predicaments of developing countries cover the entire dimension of its existence as a state. (Thomas 1989) Political and economic cohesion between the developed and developing countries are vastly different.Developed countries have existed for more than 400 years while developing countries are relatively young and less than 100 years old. Therefore, developing countries are still in the process of nation building to strengthen their political, economic and social stability. Aspects of internally driven threatsare the main focus of their survival.

Furthermore, although the role of a leader is crucial in the securitising a threat, civil society leaders have increasingly played an important role in highlighting and socializing a threat as security matters. For example, the role played by NGO leaders such as the Green Peace in addressing environmental issues through the process of socialization with the community has led the public awareness to the issue. When the issue is increasingly being raised from local to national level, a securitization process has in fact taken placewhere a government through its enforcement agencies - as a major agent of national security management - adopt the issue as a security concern that need be addressed urgently.

III.   Actors in Sabah's Security Management

Sabah becomes part of Malaysia in 1963, when the people of the state, through the Cobbold Report, agreed to join with Sarawak and Singapore in forming the Federation (See Map 1: Sabah). Despite the debate over Sabah's status in Malaysia, whether its status is the same as other states or otherwise, Sabah's security management is governed and structured just like any other states in Malaysia (Singh 2018).
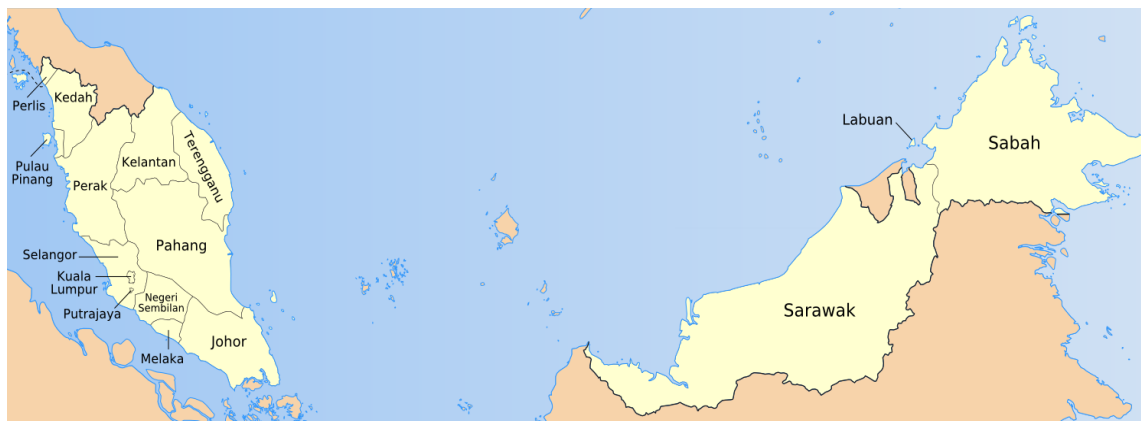
Map 1: Sabah and the Federation of Malaysia (Reference: Wikipedia, Online, 2019)

The division of power between federal and state governments is enshrined under the Part IV and VI of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Part VIIA outlines specific constitutional power of the states of Sabah and Sarawak. In general, all states in the federation has specific jurisdiction on matters related to Islam and Malay customary, water, land, and local government. At the same time, state and federal government also share powers and coordinate on urban and rural development planning, wildlife protection, social benefits, and local health. But the federal government has the absolute power on matters related to finance, education, defence and security, foreign affairs, and transportation

Sabah as well as Sarawak have wider jurisdiction under the Part VIIA of the constitution compare to other states in the federation. This enlarged constitutional power enjoyed by the two states is based on the 20-point agreement before the two states agreed to join Malaya and to form Malaysia. Among the special jurisdictions of Sabah and Sarawak are related to customary land, English use in governmental affairs, and the provision of two High Courts which have coordinated jurisdiction–the High Court in Borneo, and the High Court of Malaya.

The management of security and defence is basically under the responsibility of the Federal Government. Federal agencies that involve in security management in Sabah are the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM), the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), which was established in 2004. According to Ahmad, Cheng-Chwee and Idris (2018) security management in the Malaysian states is in fact steered by the Prime Minister and the federal cabinet. The same argument has also been raised by Harun. (2009). Saravanamuttu (2010), Abdullah (1989) in discussing the key role played by the prime minister in managing national security of the country.The prime minister's role is played through the National Security Council (Majlis KeselamatanNegara) or the MKN, a federal coordination agency responsible in coordinating any security operations including natural disasters. MKN's operationsinvolve various federal security enforcement agencies.

The body is in fact is the predecessor to the National Action Council (MAGERAN), set up under Article 150 of the Federal Constitution when the Yang di-PertuanAgong (the King) declared an emergency as a result of the bloody incident of May 13, 1969. Although MAGERAN was dissolved, the government decided to replace it by establishing the National Security Council on 7 July 1971 given the fluid security scenario in the post 1969 May riots.

The Emergency (Essential Powers) Act 1979 is the majorterm of reference or source of authority to the formation and responsibility of the MKN at the federal, state and district levels. MKN has been given the responsibility to co-ordinate national security policies and, to issue instructions on security measures including, public order and safety as well as security issues at various levels- federal, state and district. (Website of the National Security Council, 1 January2019, translated) At the state level, the MKN is led by the State Security secretary while at the district level- District Security Secretary (SKD). The meeting of the State Security Committee is chaired by the *Menteri Besar*(state minister) or in the case of Sabah, the *Ketua Menteri* (chiefminister).

In terms of security operations, MKN issues several directives, known as *Arahan MKN* (MKN Directives). Since 1971, there are 21 directives issued by the MKN where the latest directive,*Arahan MKN No 21*outlines the management of public order threats. According to the directive, threats of public order can be a catalyst to a more dangerous consequences andwould threaten the stability and security of the country. In this directive, the threat of public order is defined as incidents or riots whether planned or spontaneously triggered by religious, political, racial, economic or social groups. (Arahan MKN No. 21)

Furthermore, the power, scope and structure of MKN have been further strengthened since 2016 under the Act Number 776, National Security Council, which has been approved by the Parliament. Under this Act, the role, function and jurisdiction of the MKN, among others, "... formulate policies and strategic measures on national security ... monitor the implementation of policies and strategic measures on national security including territorial integrity, defence, socio-political stability, economic stability, strategic resources, national unity and other interest related to national security." (Act 776 MKN, Part II: 4 (a)). The Act also empowers the prime minister to declare certain areas as security zone (Act 776 MKN, Part IV: 18 (1)) But critics quick to point the vast emergency declaration power hold by the prime minister. Local political and judicial analysts argue that the Act is in contradictory to the federal constitution under the Article 159, in which the power to declare emergency lies in the hand of the Yang DipertuanAgong. (*BeritaHarian*, Online July 28, 2016) The Act is perceived to go beyond the power conferred by the Malaysian Constitution which clearly states the power to declare an emergency located in the hands of the Yang di-PertuanAgong.

The new MKN Act 776, to some extent, explains how the federal government react to the attacks of Southern Philippines's Sulu army into the east coast of Sabah. On 7 March 2013, the administration of Najib Razak established a special security zone in Sabah or known as ESSCOM (Eastern Sabah Security Command). The establishment of ESCOM is a response to a series of intrusions in eastern Sabah especially after the Lahad Datuincidentswhere six Malaysian security personnel were attacked and killed by Sulu army in its attempt to capture eastern Sabah. The ESCOM special security area is based in Lahad Datu but covers the enforcement areas ofother six districts namely Tawau, Semporna, Kunak, Kinabatangan, Sandakan and Beluran (see Map 2). The administrative zone of ESCOM covering 1,400 kilometres of control area. Among measures to tighten security of the area are the introduction of curfew in eastern Sabah waters between 6 pm and 6 am, temporary halt of barter trade activities between eastern coast of Sabah and southern Philippines, and the deployment of defence assets in the area including the navy submarines.

ESCOM operation is under the coordination and jurisdiction of the MKN chaired by the Prime Minister. In early 2018, the National Security Council meeting decided to establish the Eastern Sabah Security Zone Advisory Council (ESSZONE) jointly chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Chief Minister of Sabah. Advisory council members consist of National Security Director, Chief of Défense Force;Inspectorate General of Police; Secretary General Ministry of Domestic Trade, Co-operatives and Consumerism; Director General of Immigration; Director-General of the Royal Malaysian Customs Department; Director-General of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, ESCOM Chief Commander, and the Sabah State Secretary. The establishment of the ESSZONE Advisory Council, among others, is to further strengthen existing mechanisms with the scope of work based on the 2013 and 2014 Public Safety Regulations and Executive Order No. 1 of 2014. (SuzainahJiffar 2017)
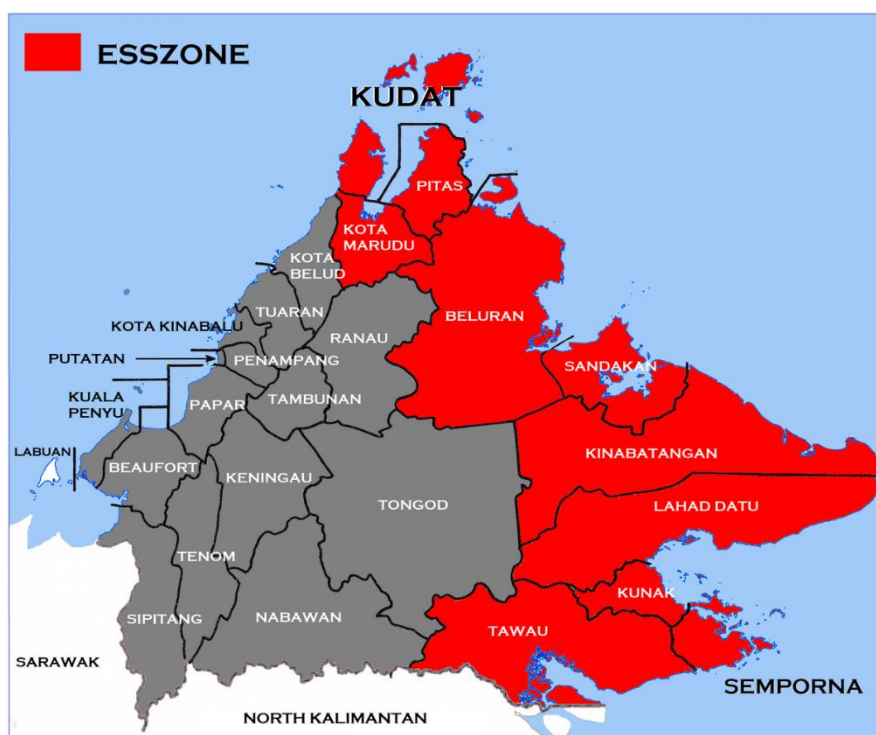
Map 2: ESCOM Security Zone (reference *ESCOM Times*, Online, 11 December 2018)

It is interesting to note that the state government also has a role and influence in security management in Sabah even though security and defence issues are under the jurisdiction of the federal government. According to Ahmad, Cheng-Chwee and Idris (2018: 55, translation), the country has not yet established an institutionalized, centralized, professional, coordinated and comprehensive security management, structure and process.Thus, it gives leeway for some states especially Sabah and Sarawak to play an influential role in the management of state's security. The State Security Committee Council is chaired by the Chief Minister himself. Council members are represented by MKN senior officials, federal security enforcement agencies such as Police, Military, APMM, ESCOM, as well as state agencies like Immigration and state-secretariat office. The council monitors the security developments in Sabah periodically. The state government is also part of an actor in making decisions, and in some cases, the state government has a political advantage in deciding some security

matters. This is because in implementing a Sabah security policy, the involvement of local leaders at the district and village levels is indispensable. In addition, cooperation from local authorities is also important. During the establishment of ESCOM, for example, the state government had a big role in determining the appointment of its director-general. (Brig. Gen. Tuan Roslan Tuan Ismail, Interview, Sept 17, 2017) Mohammad Mantek, an Administrative Officer and Diplomatic from Sabah were appointed as Director-General of ESCOM on the state's insistence.

IV.   Sabah's Threat and Security Management

On August 6, 2013, Kota Kinabalu High Court Judge, P. Ravinthran, sentenced a seven-year jail sentence to Detective Corporal Hassan Ali Basari, a member of Lahad Datu District Police Headquarters (IPD) branch, under Section 130M of the Penal Code.(*UtusanMalaysia Online*, August 7, 2013) Basari, a Suluk[1], is a police's Special Branch (SB) officer. According to the court case, he regularly met with KiramArmy leader, DatuAgbimuddinKiram, from the southern Philippines. He was convicted for his failure to relaysome important information on possible invasions and external attacks on the east coast of Sabah. Consequently, the Malaysian security authorities failed to detect the early movements of the Kiram Army. The Kiramarmy then launched an attack on Kampung Tanduo, Lahad Datu in February 2013. As a result, two senior police officers from the VAT (Very Able Troop) 69 Commando Force and six Special Branch (SB) of the police force were killed during the two attacks.

The above case shows how Sabah's security is so vulnerable due to various sources of threat especially when the state security agency officer himself conspired with the external elements. The above example is not something new for the state of Sabah. The state, also known as *negeri di bawahbayu*(state below the wind) has various ethnic groups that have a fraternity link across the state's borders. Sabah has 42 ethnic groups and over 200 other sub-ethnic groups, with over 80 local dialects. (Sabah Museum, 1992: 4) These groups'settlementspread out throughout the state- from nomadic sea fearers such as the Bajau Laut and Suluk, who lives oncoastal areas of the east coast of Sabah, toriver community who live in deep tropical jungle such as the Orang Sungai (the River People) and Murut.

It can be argued that Sabah's multi-ethnic composition is one of the key challenges in managing security in Sabah. Like other developing countries, Sabah faces with nation-building issue where its ethnic groups are not fully united. Among the largest ethnic groups are Kadazandusun, Bajau, Rungus, Murut (Baukan), Bugis, Malay-Brunei or Kedayan, as well as Chinese. One, therefore, needs to understand the historical set-up of Sabah in order to understand it nation-building problems. Sabah is part of the Brunei's sultanate empire since the 6th century. (*Brunei Times*, Online, 2016) Based on *the History of the Malay Annals*, which the English version was translated by John Leyden in 1821, the kingdom of Brunei was a trading centre between Southeast Asia and China. (Welman, 2011: 160) Nearly all the Borneoterritories including Sabah were under the suzerainty of the Brunei Empire. During those periods, traders from China often traded in Kinabatangan, Sabah (see Chapter 25 in *the Malay Anals*(1821)). During the reign of Sultan Bolkiah (1485 to 1524), the influence of Brunei's empire expanded to Luzon in the north andthe Sulu (Mindanao) region to the south. But conflicts and palace civil war within the Sultanate of Brunei saw some of its colonies being handed over to Sultan Sulu. In 1662, there was a power struggle when a senior palace official, Bendahara Abdul Mumin wanted to overthrow Sultan Mohammad Ali. With the assistance from Sultan Sulu, the rebellion was crushed, and the Sultan of Brunei rewarded the Sulu with a territory in the East Coast of Borneo (Sabah).

With the award, the North Borneo (Sabah) became part ofthe land controlled by the Sulu sultanate. However, the arrival of European merchantsonce again changed the political landscape in the Sulu sultanate. In 1878, an Austrian Company, the Overbeck, cunningly tricked the Sultan of Sulu to enter a land agreement for the transfer of rights of the North Borneo. The agreement was written in English, in which the Sultan did not have the privilege to understand the whole content of it.It was agreed thatSultan of Sulu would hand over his rights for $ 5,000 (Spanish Dollar) a year. But due to financial problems, the Overback Company sold its rights to the British government in 1888. The British government and later Malaysia continued to pay compensation money to the heirs of the sultanate of Sulu. (Wright, 1966:471) However, the problem of identifying the right heirs of Sulu sultanate led to the intermittent payment by the Malaysian government. The incident of Kampung Tanduo, Lahad Datu in 2013 by aKiram group, one of the many heirs of the Sulu sultanate, caused the Malaysian government to stopthe payment indefinitely.(Subject A, interview, July 7, 2018)[2]

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[1]Suluk is one of the ethnic groups in Sabah originated from Mindanao, southern Philippines. Although Sabah has become part of Malaysia, family and cultural ties among Suluk go beyond boundary.

[2] Subject wants to be anonymous since he is involved and privy with some sensitive security matters pertaining to the issue.

Sabah's long history had made it one of trade destinations for various ethnic groups in the region. Movement of people in the regions prior to the independent period was not restricted by borders or enforcement since nation-state was yet introduced in the Southeast Asian region. The formation of community identity in Borneo Island was generally not influenced by border construction. For a long time, communities in Mindanao islands (Philippines), Kalimantan and Sulawesi (Indonesia), Sarawak and Brunei were free to move. The Suluk, Banjau, Tausuq, for example, were some of the biggest ethnic groupsthat roaming around the islands of Mindanao and the east-coast of Sabah for centuries. (King, 2017: 165-66)

But the introduction of state system in the region has changed and affected the movement of these ethnic communities. Borders have been arterially drawn and unfortunately it also separates an ethnic group and even a village into two different countries. The Sulu people were separated into two countries when Sabah joined Malaysia in 1963, the islands of Mindanao and the sultanate of Sulu became part of the Philippines, while Borneo Island was divided into three different countries.

Movements of the people in the region subsequently are restricted under a strict border control. But Sabah has 14,400 km of maritime boundaries and 2,019.5 km of land borders across three countries- Sarawak, Kalimantan and Mindanao. (*Utusan Borneo*, Feb 13, 2016: 1) It is hard to control such a long border. Furthermore, Sabah's borders are also subject to dispute with neighbouring countries. The Philippines's claim on Sabah has been a thorn in flesh in the diplomatic relations between Kuala Lumpur and Manila especially during the President Diasdado Macapagal (1961-1965) administration. President Macapagal together with Indonesia's President, Sukarno opposed the formation of Malaysia. While Manila did not launch any attacks to a newly formed Malaysia, Jakarta did the opposite by claiming that the formation was part of neo-colonialism attempts.Although Sabah claims were hardly been raised during the Marcos administration, it has been used as political punches by several Filipino politicians under the subsequent administrations. In the latest developments, a member in the Government consultative committee on the review and proposed amendment for constitution of the 1987 has suggested the Manila government to include Sabah as the thirteenth Philippine territory. (Chew, Online, January 31, 2018)

Sabah's security management is also subject to the roller-coaster relations between the state and federal government. Among the contentious issues is the identity card (IC) project or better known as "Project IC". The project refers to allegations against the federal government under the BarisanNasional (BN) or National Front that provides citizenship status to immigrants and refugees, especially from Southern Philippines as one of the strategies to increase the number of Muslim voters in the state. It was also a demographic change strategy to ensure that Sabah is not dominated by Christian communities who form as the largest voters in the state.(Sadiq, 2005: 108; Allerton, 2017: 261) The IC Project's allegation was initiated by Sabah's local political parties since Tun Datu Mustafa's administration (1965-1975), but no action was taken by the federal government for political reasons. In fact, this issue has beencapitalized by Sabah's non-Muslim Bumiputera[3] parties in several general elections. The success of the Sabah United Party or PartiBersatu Sabah (PBS), a party dominated by non-Muslim bumiputras, to forma state government between 1984-1994 under Joseph PairinKitingan, was influenced by among others, the previous state government's policy of pro-bumiputra and, the collusion charges between state and central governments onthe IC project.

This IC project doesnot only show the existence of political corruption at the highest level, but more importantly it has led to a more serious security ramification. The corrupt practices haveeven affected efforts to manage the illegal immigrant and refugee problem in the state. Many cases have been reported in the newspaper about the involvement of authorities and politicians in corruption (see for example *The Star Online*, Feb. 9, 2017). In some cases, Southern Filipino separatist members easily obtained local identification card. (Ibid.) Two consequences resulted of this corrupt practice. First, those who obtained the card have enjoyed all benefits offered by the government like fuel and food subsidies, free schooling, and scholarships. Secondly, their loyalty as citizen is a big question mark. They may become informers to separatist or even terrorist movements. The Lahad Datu case is the point of reference.

It was only in September 2012, the federal government set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry or RCI to investigate the IC project allegations. In December 2014, RCI published a report confirming the existence of the project in Sabah but failed to name the parties concerned. The results of the report were criticized as government's 'shadow puppets show' for failing to name the mastermind behind the project. (Allerton, 2017: 22)

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[3]Bumiputra literally means "sons of soil" or the indigenous people. Under the Federal Constitution, bumiputra enjoys certain privileges such as scholarship, land, and government contracts.

Nonetheless, the existence of the IC project scandalis closely associated with the regional conflict that has affected Malaysia in general and Sabah in particular. The first is the Southern Philippines conflict involving three major actors - the Philippine government, the Moro National Liberation Movement (MNLF), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Movement (MILF). The southern Philippines conflict has been resulted from prolonged political oppression and economic marginalization of the Moro people, which subsequently sparked, into an insurgent warfare. Secondly, as a result of the continuous armed struggle in the area, hundreds of thousands of southern Philippines Muslims fled to Sabah. Sabah was seen as a suitable destination for refugees, due to the long-standing historical and family relations. According to Kassim and Imang (2005), there are more than 90,000 refugees, who have entered Sabah since 1969. As a result, they have been labelledas stateless people. Some of them also attempted to seek political asylum from the Malaysian government through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These refugees furthermore refuse to return home even though MNLF, MILF, and the Manila government have signed a peace treaty recently.

Despite of that, Malaysia is not a signatory state of the United Nations Convention on Refugees 1951 and, the 1967 Protocol on Refugee Status. Malaysia's refusal to sign the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol has been due to the concerns that it would invite more unwanted refugees into the country. (Subject A, Interview, July 7, 2018) Hence, in general, Malaysia does not recognize refugees and asylum seekers by not providing any facilities or assistance to them. (Kassim 2009) The refugee and asylum seekers in Malaysia arebasically managed by the UNCHR Office in Kuala Lumpur. According to UNCHR, until August 2018 there are approximately 161,140 refugees or asylum seekers in Malaysia who are mostly in Sabah. (UNHCROnline, 2018)

The refugee issue in Sabah has long been securitised by local political leaders especially when some of these refugees were allegedly became Malaysian citizen through the IC project. The concerns of local Sabah politicians and community have been social threatsposed by the refugees to the state's social-security and political sectors. They are alsobeenperceived as intimidating the local community's life and culture. The refugees have different cultures and their presence have allegedly led to the rise in crime index in big cities in Sabah. For the Sabah non-Muslim political leaders, the ability of these refugees and to some extent illegal immigrants to gain Malaysian citizenship through the IC project is a political sectorial threat. The influence of non-Muslim bumiputra politics, therefore, could be further eroded.

Although their arguments were accepted by the RCI in 2014, many factors influenced government policies in accepting the southern Filipinos yet at the same refusing to accept its refugee status. First explanation is the role played of the Sabah government itself during the United Sabah National Organization (USNO) party administration in the late 1960s. At the height of the southern Philippine conflict, the Chief Minister of Sabah at that time, Tun Datu Mustafa Datu Harun, himself a Sulu-Bajau ethnic, "has accepted and allowed them to stay and take shelter ...". (Hidayat, Hajimin, Ibrahim 2017: 195, translated by author) Furthermore, close family ties between Tun Datu Mustafa and his southern Philippine roots influenced the decision. His policyreceived no objection from the federal government because Kuala Lumpur had the same opinion as the state administration at that time.

Hence, it can be argued that Malaysia practices "a policy without policies" in regard to the refugees and asylum seekers in Sabah. This argument is based on the fact that first, Malaysia has not signed the UN Convention on Refugees for the fear that it would open the flood-gate at its border especially from conflict areas. In fact, Malaysia has so far very selective in managing refugees. This can be seen how Malaysia hosts refugees from Palestine, Bosnia and Syria, where they have been given special treatment from the federal government compared to other UNCHR-registered refuges like the Acehnese, the Sulu, and Rohingya,

The final challenge to security threats in Sabah is related to the problem of legal and illegal economic migrants. Sabah is the second state in Malaysia, which has the largest population after Selangor in the peninsular. According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, in 2017, the population of Sabah is about 3.8 million people. However, the report does not provide a breakdown of statistics by ethnic and religious groups in the state. Furthermore, based on the Sabah's*State Statistics Data* book (2015: 7-9), out of 3.2 million Malaysians in 2010, l8% (568,575) are ethnic Kadazandusun, Malays (5.8%); Bajau (14%); 9% (Chinese), Murut (3%), and others Bumiputera (21%). What is interesting is that non-citizens registered in 2010 were approximately 890,000 people representing approximately 27.8% of Sabah's occupation. This data shows how non-citizen residents represent a quarter of Sabahans as a whole.

Who are all these non-citizen residents? Most of them are economic migrants coming from the southern Philippines and the eastern archipelagic part of eastern Indonesia. Indonesian economic migrants are mostly Flores, Bugis, Torajas and Murut Kalimantan. (Tajari&Affendi, 2015: 5) While these economic migrants have helped to increase economic development in Sabah, their presence was securitised by local political leaders

and local communities. These economic migrants have been accused of seizing local economic opportunities and activities. In fact, these economic migrants begin to engage in retail business, transport and even marry locals to obtain business licenses, in which they are not allowed by law to venture in. Many urban and rural areas have begun to be dominated by migrant groups. According to Simon Sipaun, Chairman of the Institute for Development Studies of Sabah (IDS), in 2005, the Kinabatangan district had a population of 85,000 but only 25,000 were citizens. In the same year, the total number of prisoners in Sabah was approximately 3,000 people but 70% were foreign nationals. (Sipaun 2012, Online) In 2016, the Tawau Municipal Council had demolished more than 40 houses in a village called the Icebox. The village was believed to be dominated by more than 90% of foreigners. (*Daily Express Sabah* Online, September 15, 2016)

What caused the issue to be securitized is that the number of economics migrants represented a quarter of the population of Sabah and this appears to increase based on statistics provided by the local authority. But according to Dollah and Abdullah (2018:725),the immigration and security issues in Sabah clearly show that the securitization actors need to convince at least three main groups of audience that is firstly, Malaysians and Sabahansin particular, secondly, national and state economic players; and, finally, the policy makers in Parliament.

Based on their argument, the only actors that active in securitising the threat of economic migrants are the local leaders, state economic players and selected Sabah'sNGOs. Yet the national actors do not perceive it as a priority threat. What's more is that the local players, be it traders as well and politicians, have failed to convince an important audience – the policy makers at the federal level. One possible explanation is that local and national economic players still need migrant economic workers due to theircontributionin developing the state. The increasing socio-economic status of the localshas resulted in difficulties in getting locals who are willing to work in the dirty and hazardous working environment (Pye, Daud, Harmono,&Tatat 2012). Thus, the vacancy is filled by migrant groups from neighbouring countries. This phenomenon, however, is not new in the Malaysian context. Almost all states in Malaysia are also facing with the same dilemma.

V.   Conclusion

Sabah's security threats–unending problems of nation building and political identity formation, the influx of illegal migrants, and refugees and stateless people, coupled with the spill over effects of neighbouring country's armed conflict, have posed challenging tasks both for the state and federal governments to manage its security. Sabah's security predicamentshave to been seen from a developing security lenses that driven from externallyas well as internally driven factors.Understanding Sabah's security issues should also be analysed from the context of its long and rich history. In addition, the concept of nation-state so far has not been fully understood by the local people who have freely moved around the area for centuries. Furthermore, those security threats have persistently being securitized by the local communities and political leaders in Sabah. However, this article concludes that the most important audience in the securitization process, the federal policy makers and politicians have not been convinced as yet, to bring up the issue as threats to national security.

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