Counterinsurgency through KESBAN: Tun Razak’s Administration

1. Amelia Yuliana Abd Wahab, Ph.D. Candidate, Defence Studies & Management, National Defence University Of Malaysia, amelia4433@yahoo.com
2. Wan Hashim Wan Teh, Professor Emeritus (Ph.D.), Defence Studies & Management, National Defence University of Malaysia, hashim@upnm.edu.my

Abstract

Tun Abdul Razak’s counterinsurgency (COIN) through security and development in contending the illegal communist activities conducted by Communist Party Of Malaya (CPM) was a successful COIN strategy. Most significant threat during Malaysian Second Premiership, Tun Abdul Razak Bin Hussien Al-Haj was the continuous communist insurgent guerrilla warfare activities. The objective of this paper is to highlight the security and development or KESBAN as the COIN used by Tun Abdul Razak in 1970s. In analyzing the dynamic of his COIN, secondary materials were used as to gain better insight of his strategy. KESBAN, from the Malay words KESELAMATAN and PEMBANGUNAN or security and development was originated during Tun Abdul Razak premiership albeit KESBAN was formally much later legislated in 1980 by National Security Council (NSC). The paper identified COIN strategy deployed during Razak’s administration was unique strategy as the focus not solely using the hard power by the armed forces to deal with the threat, the socio-economy and socio-political stability was crucial as the approaches to win the heart and mind of the population. The aim of this population-centric approach was to subdue the population to abandon CPM guerrilla activities and support sovereign Malaysia and most important to maintain the survival of the country during Second Emergency. KESBAN was an admirable COIN strategy for a small country with multi-ethnic society. This paper discovers the necessity to look into other perspectives of COIN rather than focus only on a usage of hard power.

Keywords: KESBAN, security, socio-economy, counterinsurgent, Second Emergency
Background

This paper will be focusing on the counterinsurgency (COIN) crafted throughout Tun Razak’s administration. The objective is to highlight his COIN strategy and its outcome. Security and development or KESBAN was the essence of COIN strategy deployed during low-intensity conflict or known as Second Emergency. Through the difficulties and hardship in obtaining independence, Malaysia or previously called as Malaya had a bitter twelve-years experience in bloody war, First Malayan Emergency (1948-1960). The historical experience gave a nightmares and dark memories to its people. Colonialism practiced by foreign powers does reflected negative connotation, it means manipulation of economics and psychology, political authoritarian and extensive usage of brutal forces. On positive side, colonialism does induce spirit of nationalism and struggle to obtain freedom and independence (Wan Hashim, 2011). Somehow, Malaysia successfully gained independence on August 31, 1957.

In analyzing the dynamic of Tun Abdul Razak’s COIN through security and development, secondary resources such as books, newspapers, journals, memoirs and past research were used. All these materials gave better preliminary insight for this conceptual paper. For Malaysia, post-independence period was a tough period to maintain its survival. Moreover, the condition of world politics, Cold War conflict between Super Powers and their involvement to expand influence and hegemonic power, in this paper focus on Southeast Asia, precisely Malaysia. The ideological race between Western Blocs, United States Of America (U.S) and its allies against The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and People Republic of China (PRC) colored world politics on that period, especially on their direct involvement in ‘Third World’ countries. During that détente period, Washington was concern on ‘domino theory’ and collapse of Southeast Asia to the communism and believes all communist lines of command eventually ran back to Moscow (Weatherbee, 2010).

On the contrary, communist parties throughout the world were urged to pursue a militant policy towards imperialism that is the Western Capitalist blocs. The situation has become more acute with the inclusion of communist ideology in Southeast Asia. Communist uprisings started in Malaya, Burma, The Philippines and Hyderabad right after the Southeast Asian communist parties held its meeting in Calcutta on March 1948 (Comber, 2009). As asserted by Jackson (2011), Chinese Communist agents quickly
infiltrated Malaya and gained control of emerge labour movement. Their intention was to overthrow the country and establish a Communist-Controlled Republic.

Second Emergency and May 13, 1969
In Malaysia, even though First Malayan Emergency was declared over since 1960 and independence was obtained on 1957, the communist movement was still active with their illegal guerilla warfare activities under the control of Communist Party Of Malaya (CPM). CPM was formed in April 1930 after the dissolution of Nanyang Communist Party in Singapore. The main aim of CPM was to transform the country into a Communist Republic. At that time, CPM was not legally registered and their guerilla warfare activities was done ‘underground’ without recognition by authorities. Mentioned by Ward & Miraflor in Memoirs of Chin Peng (2003), financial support from PRC amounted USD $100,000 led to second communist armed struggle in the country. Zakaria Yadi (2004) highlighted that Second Emergency started in 1969, after the racial riot on 13th May and ended after the CPM signed a peace accord with Malaysian Government in Haatyai, Southern Thailand in 1989. The peace treaty was an effort and collaboration by Malaysian Government and Thailand Government with CPM, witnessed by two representatives from PRC.

In The National Operations Council (NOC) report signed by Tun Abdul Razak aftermath of racial clash incident on May 13th, 1969, indicated CPM strategy to weaken the nation by manipulating the sensitive issues includes economic and racial issues. CPM subversion strategy was a tactic to obtain support of their guerilla activities from a segment of the population especially from Chinese ethnic group to fight against Malaysian authority. Majority number of membership and leadership of CPM were from Chinese ethnic group and involvement of minority Malays were perceived as symbolic only (Ruhanas, 2009). Racial conflict of 13th May, instigated by CPM hinders the national unity and stability and a threat to national security (Yadi, 2004 & Sharom, 2001). National Consultative Council (NCC) highlighted after racial riot, three matters that need to be addressed urgently which includes the need to reconciliation and restoration of goodwill among various races, and the need to reaffirm social contract that was embodied in the Federal Constitution as well as the need to close socio-economic divides between different races (Jawhar, 2011). Thus, in the multi-ethnic
society, racial issue is a sensitive matter and if not managed properly, it may destroy harmonious and prosperity of a nation.

**Counterinsurgency and KESBAN**

The heart of this paper will look into the COIN strategy crafted in the Tun Razak’s administration. He was the Second Prime Minister of Malaysia and known as ‘Father of Development’. His COIN strategy focused on development in Malay Language, pembangunan for better security posture. In Oxford dictionary, development means the gradual growth of nation state to become more advanced and stronger, in International Relations, security is about survival and freedom from any threats (Buzan, 1991). The core of COIN is to ‘winning hearts and minds’ from population. According to David Petraeus, successful COIN must focus on population in term of their needs and security, isolation of insurgents and population, emphasis on intelligence and amnesty of insurgents (Kaplan, 2013). Malaysia does not follow the conventional method by using strong armed forces for better security stance during Tun Razak’s administration. His strategy of COIN as on his statement: -

“...the primary task of armed forces is to fight the communists, but at the same time they must also help implement the government development plan. This is part of the fight against communists. Defence and development go hand in hand” (Yadi, 2004).

Tun Razak’s concept of security through development further developed later by National Security Council (NSC) and enshrined in the national security concept of KESBAN, taken from two combination of Malay words, keselamatan dan pembangunan or security and development. Basic premise of this concept security and stability were crucial precondition for development as reflected in National Security Directive No. 11:

KESBAN constitutes the sum total of all measures undertaken by the Malaysian Armed Forces and other government agencies to strengthen and protect society from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency.. (Jawhar, 2011).

Although, KESBAN was formally legislated by National Security Council (NSC) as Directive No 11, in year 1980, Malaysian government since 1970 adopted concept of
security through development during Tun Razak’s administration to combat and counter CPM’s insurgency activities and maintain harmonious amongst multi-ethnics society. Revisit of Tun Razak’s COIN strategy is a sine qua non to understand the present and perhaps, future situation in Malaysia.

**Socio-Economic Security**

The economic disparity between ethnicities and races was a major security and political problem to the Malaysia. In 1970, the Malays received the lowest income compared to Chinese and India households. Monthly income indicated $179 received by Malay households, Chinese $387 and Indian $310 despite of their status of the son of soil or ‘bumiputera’ (Second Malaysian Plan, 1971).

Wan Hashim (1983) highlighted apart of racial socio-economic imbalance, high employment rate rose from 6% in 1960 to 8% in 1970 and high portion of foreign domination in Malaysian economy approximately 62%. During this time, the Malays are poorer compared to Chinese as most of them stayed in rural areas, whereby Chinese in semi-urban and urban areas. He pointed out, traditional notion portrayed Chinese hold economic power and much more wealthier than Malays, whereas Malays hold more political power and, and this perception created fear, mistrust and antagonism between these two majority ethnic groups.

Thus, National Economic Policy (NEP) was crafted to reduce economic gap base on ethnicity as well as to correct and improve socio-economic imbalance. NEP took twenty-years to implement starting from 1970 until 1990 for Malaysia’s economic development and also to enhance national unity and national security (Jawhar, 2011). National unity for a Malaysia case in year 1970 onwards can be defined as:

…. Unattainable without greater equity and balance among Malaysia’s social and ethnic groups in their participation in the development of the country and in the sharing in the benefits from modernization and economic growth. National unity cannot be fostered if vast sections of the population remain poor…. (2MP,1971)
Different New COIN Approaches

In International politics and Malaysian foreign policy, Tun Razak took different approaches when dealing with PRC. PRC was known to be a great supporter of CPM and International onset, Cold War prevented other ‘Third World’ and small countries to have an official engagement with any Communist countries. This was not in case of Tun Razak, he made an official visit to PRC on May, 1974 and met PRC Prime Minister, Chou En-Lai together with Mao Tze Tung to discuss several issues including CPM guerrilla warfare activities (Nordin & Hussin, 2014). He later made an official visit to North Korea, North Vietnam, East Germany and Republic of Mongolia.

Malaysia officially joined Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1970 and the following year, Malaysia together with ASEAN countries includes Thailand, Indonesia, The Philippines and Singapore signed a declaration Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOFPA). This action was to ensure that Southeast Asia region was free from any manner of interference by outside powers (Weatherbee, 2010). According to Tun Razak, ZOPFAN could gradually fill the power vacuum created by the U.S. disengagement from the region (Alagappa, 1998). The active role of ASEAN members played a significant factor to the stability and defence in Southeast Asia region.

Tun Razak make an effort to strengthen Malaysian internal politics. His administration shouted slogan of ‘less politics, more development’ (Hussain, 1997). This strategy was to ensure the full concentration towards leading the nation state to prosper and unite the multi-ethnic society. Apart from that, Rukunegara or Pillars of the Nation was created to encourage devotion of multi-ethnic society toward the state and improve relationship among different ethnic group in the society. Wan Hashim in his book Race Relations in Malaysia (1981) stated Rukunegara could help the government in galvanizing the country and guiding it towards national unity and help in blunting the edges of conflict among different races.

Malaysian Armed Forced In Second Emergency

In 1970, there were about 1,000 communist guerrillas operation along the Malaysia-Thailand border, the number was increased in year 1975 to 2,054 communist guerillas operating in the Thailand border (Sindhu, 2009). Apart from that, CPM’s involvement in crimes further continued in 1975. Their guerrilla activities such as bombing of the National Monument in Kuala Lumpur and assassination of Inspector
General of Police (IGP), late Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Hashim in 1974 in marked their aggression in Malaysia.

To combat communist insurgents, KESBAN Belt was established along the Malaysia-Thai border to counter CPM guerilla activities with the security and development on 550 KM long border areas includes the Northern States of Peninsula Malaysia like Kedah, Perlis and Perak. In this strategy, Malaysian Armed Forces played a pivotal role ensuring the success of collaboration and coordination between various government agencies. Yadi (2004) concludes that an overall Malaysian government containment policy towards the CPM was a successful effort.

Conclusion

The past historical development influenced political and economic discourse until this day. Security is the special form of politics in the sense that all the security issues is political problems but not all political conflicts are security issues (Kolodziej, 2005). The term security itself is vague and contested, different country or individual may have different interpretation of security. Thus, as mentioned earlier, Buzan (1996) defined security as the ability to survive, while John E. Mroz definition of security is the relative freedom from harmful threats and Walter Lippman described security is the ability of to maintain core values. Scholars have their distinctive interpretation of security.

In International Relations (IR), the diverse interpretation of security and action taken to prevent issues of security may be understood through the identity and interest of each state. To simplify, threat to one country may not be consider as threat to another country. Constructivism theory of IR argues international system is constructed by interaction of states. Alexander Wendt (1992) in his article ‘Anarchy Is What State Make Of It’ highlighted interests and identities are socially constructed, they are the result of the interaction of states (Daddow, 2013). Historical-produced and culturally bound knowledge enables individuals to construct and give meaning to reality, in this sense, knowledge includes symbols, rules, concepts, and categories (Barnett, 2008). Thus, defence and security must not solely rely only on one sector, the combination of sectors, such as economic, political, societal, and psychological may contribute to better security position of a state. In this paper, it was highlighted security and development was the essences of Tun Razak’s administration. His COIN strategy to combat CPM through non-
aggression tactics and population-centric approaches indicated the success COIN must not focus only using hard power.

To understand his inspiration of COIN, it is best to recommend for further research into this area. In depth research require identifying factor that contributed to Tun Razak decision and action in confronting with the threat to national security. The question remains until today on Tun Razak’s approaches to change Malaysian policies especially through NEP and foreign policy by recognition of communist states was controversial, yet his action make Tun Razak’s idiosyncrasy unique and remarkable.

References


