NATIONALISM: THE ISSUES OF TERRITORIAL DISPUTES BETWEEN MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA IN THE CELEBES SEA

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Working Paper Series

Faculty
of
Social Sciences

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Introduction

Nationalism is a socially and historically constructed ideology which influences a state's foreign policy in various ways, particularly so when events occur which spark nationalist sentiment. Impact of nationalism becomes complicated when governments take advantage of this sentiment and manipulate an international event for domestic socio-political purposes. Conceptually the phenomenon of nationalism points to the issue of national sovereignty, self-determination and autonomy. These ideas were originally the basis for the establishment of the nation-state. Territorial disputes between Malaysia and Indonesia evolved into a 'clash of nationalisms' because inherently they involve an explicit threat to political sovereignty and open the possibility of an alteration to the established geographical borders of a sovereign state. The maritime territorial disputes have had a profound impact on the sovereignty of both countries. Bilateral relations were also complicated by the Indonesian government's use of the territorial disputes to heighten nationalistic fervor to bolster national unity which had declined since the fall of the Suharto regime. Nationalism was a useful instrument to help counter the country's pressing domestic political, social and economic woes in the challenging process of democratic transition.

The case study of Malaysian and Indonesian bilateral relations provides a meaningful and intellectually challenging backdrop against which to study the nature of nationalism. Both nations have experienced colonial domination, and are hence similarly sensitive about national sovereignty