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ABSTRACT

Brunei has historically relied on Britain for protection from internal and external threats. Even today, there is a battalion of Gurkhas and British officers resident in Brunei. This research paper seeks to explain Brunei’s continuous preference for British protection. It finds that the 1962 Rebellion in Brunei, Indonesia’s complicity in it, and Britain’s swift and successful intervention had a huge psychological effect on Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin. The Rebellion brought to the fore the instability of the outside world. Beyond the need for simple physical security, the Rebellion required that he continue to routinize relations with Britain to reassure himself, maintain the same cognitive ordering of the world, and maintain the minimum level of his Anglophilic identity. He therefore preferred British protection without a rational deliberation of the cost and benefits of British protection, but he did so out of habit or gut instinct. This paper therefore relies on the constructivist and identity-based notion of ‘ontological security’ and the recent turn in IR towards the logic of action or habit, which deemphasizes rationality in theorizing agency. This can explain why Brunei continues to prefer British protection, despite eventually having no threats and having sufficient military capabilities on its own.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to Professor Cha, who shaped this research in a significant way, the ‘LAU Trio’ who kept me company at the Lauinger Library, the entire Masters in Asian Studies family and my parents.

Many thanks,
Wafi Abdul Manan
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**Introduction**

Why does Brunei prefer British protection? The Bruneian Sultan, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin, preferred British protection because he was concerned not just by physical security, but ontological security; the need not just to be physically safe, but also to feel safe. His friendship with Britain provided this ontological security – especially after having gone through the 1962 Brunei Rebellion. This was the main motivation behind his preference for British protection, much more than purely rationalist predictions that it would seek the alliance that would most address its needs and threats.

**The Puzzle**

Brunei is a unique case in South East Asia in that it was the last country to abandon British protection and become independent, second only to the crown colony of Hong Kong if we are considering the rest of Asia. When Britain was eager to relinquish its obligations and decolonize ‘East of Suez’ starting in the 1960s, Brunei managed to cling on to British protection for at least another 20 years. Of all the protectorates or protected states of Great Britain, it was the last.

Between 1906 and 1971, Brunei’s internal and external security had been fully managed by the British. Between 1971 and 1983, Britain was consultatively responsible over Brunei’s external security and after 1983, Brunei had to manage its own external security upon independence. However, even till this day, Brunei retains a battalion of Gurkhas and British Officers, renewed every 5 years as late as 2015. As of 2015, both sides are contemplating greater
interoperability between the British and Brunei armed forces\textsuperscript{1}. This is all the more puzzling given the lack of any significant threat since after the 1962 Bruneian rebellion and Indonesia’s subversive ‘Confrontation’ from 1963-66, and the lack of any threat at all since independence in 1984. Furthermore, other small states like Singapore took security into their own hands without continually depending on the British.

That a neo-colonial state would cling onto an imperial power despite the imperial power’s wishes is also peculiar. Even the current Sultan of Brunei HM Hassanal Bolkiah himself says “There can be few instances in the history of a relationship between a protecting power and a protected state where the protector applied pressure on the protected to accept early independence and this pressure was vigorously resisted by the latter. That was precisely what happened between Britain and Brunei”\textsuperscript{2}.

\textbf{A Critique of Existing Explanations}

Most of the explanations offered by historians on Brunei in this time period (1960s- mid 1980s) suggest that realism and the rational quest for survival was the supreme factor that motivated Brunei’s preference for British protection. For example, Nani argues that the Sultan preferred British protection because of the prevalence of internal and external threats. These threats are many: the 1962 Brunei Rebellion, the 1963-66 Indonesian Confrontation which started in Brunei, the ill will of Malaysia towards Brunei after Brunei rejected the merger into the

\textsuperscript{1}‘British defence chief pays courtesy on deputy minister’. Brunei Times. 2 June 2015. \url{http://www.bt.com.bn/frontpage-news-national/2015/06/02/british-defence-chief-pays-courtesy-deputy-minister}

\textsuperscript{2}Speech to the Commonwealth Summit, Bahamas, Borneo Bulletin. 21 October 1985, 26 October 1985.
Federation of Malaysia, the status of similar micro-states like East Timor in the 1970s as colonial artifacts and therefore easy bases of instability that needs to be subsumed. Brunei’s army was not capable yet, and Indonesia and Malaysia continue to be threatening until Bruneian independence. Hence, British protection was the most rational objective.

However, Nani seems to inflate the threats of Malaysia and Indonesia to Brunei in the 1970s and doesn’t give documentary evidence that the Sultan knew of these developments and saw them as threatening. Furthermore, an explanation that rests on just realism or physical security seeking is ultimately insufficient for two reasons. Firstly, a rationalist security seeking explanation ultimately doesn’t account for why other means of protection was rejected. Malaya’s defense of Brunei (before 1963 and before it was mildly threatening) was functional enough to protect Brunei. Realism doesn’t explain the countless statements of the Sultan where he said he prefers British protection over others like a Federation of Malaysia and a Five Power Defense Arrangement. Secondly, a rationalist framework cannot account for why the Sultan’s threat perception continue to be so high for so long after the 1962 Brunei Rebellion, only allowing the British to leave in 1979. Bayesian updating of a more stable situation in Brunei starting in 1967 should have reduced threat perceptions slightly. Instead, a lingering threat perception of this kind usually points to the role of emotions and constructivism.

**Argument / Theory:**

Small states, like Brunei in particular, need to address not just their physical security, but

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also their ontological security. That is, they desire not just the need to be safe, but to feel safe. Brunei has valid concerns about its survival, and realism in valid in accounting for why it would need external protection in the first place but the two reasons stated above points to a non-material explanation as well. I use the idea of Brunei as an ontological security seeking state to explain this preference.

Ontological security places fewer premiums on physical markers (territory and sovereignty) and more on how assured states feel about their security. Ontological security is the false or real perception that the social world is repetitive and therefore stable, allowing states to bracket concerns about the anarchy or chaos of the world. States with a healthy level of trust in their environment and others will adapt and learn. Their sense of stability is a precondition for learning and adapting. Only then can the rational choice approach prevalent in IR work: rational actors in the face of uncertainty will assign probabilities and maximize expected utility, updating probabilities in a Bayesian fashion. In contrast, ontologically insecure states are not in the right frame of mind to evaluate decisions rationally.

Conversely, ‘ontological insecurity’ is the existential anxiety that occurs when events doesn’t happen along predictable lines and the state no longer knows what to expect. It accentuates the perception that the world is threatening. It is usually only states with a low level of trust in their environment and others that become afflicted with ‘ontological insecurity’ or existential anxiety in the face of massive change.

Confronted with massive change, ontologically insecure states can do two kinds of

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‘ontological security seeking behavior’: (1) routines or (2) collective identity or friendship. To deal with routines first, this follows on from the Sociologist Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory that even healthy individuals follow the same course of action and routine to perpetuate their identity. Individuals or states would choose ‘courses of action comfortable with their sense of identity’. In some special circumstances, states with low levels of trust in their environment and others fear uncertainty as an identity threat and suppress that fear by clinging onto the routines to which they become attached. Routines are crutches to help stabilize the cognitive ordering of the environment, instead of being consciously chosen decisions, as the rationalists would contend.

States can also routinize relations. Being part of a collective identity or being in a ‘friendship’ can also be stabilizing or an ‘ontological security seeking behavior’. According to Mitzen, “society solves its members’ ontological security problem for them, since society is a shared cognitive ordering of the environment. When trauma happens, the individual’s fall is cushioned by the social order, which reproduces a general ontological security until she can pick herself up again.”. Friendships can serve the same purpose. Mitzen writes that the pursuit of ontological security can lead actors to ‘routinize relationship with significant others’. This is exactly the situation and problem confronting Brunei, as it reels from a crisis in 1962 and hopes that the cognitively stabilizing and reassuring British protection will remain for some time to

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The foregoing discussion about ‘ontological security’ and its difference with physical security can be summarized in the following table:

**Table 1: Difference between ‘physical security’ and ‘ontological security’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Physical security</th>
<th>Ontological security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security of ...?</strong></td>
<td>Security of the state</td>
<td>Security of the self/identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preconditions for a state of insecurity</strong></td>
<td>Perception of specific threats.</td>
<td>Perceptions of a general threat from the world due to low levels of basic trust in others and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trigger for a state of insecurity</strong></td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Massive change from the status quo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach in assessing security</strong></td>
<td>Rational (Bayesian updating, assigning probabilities)</td>
<td>Automatically choose courses of action comfortable with their sense of identity (logic of habit, gut instinct)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses to insecurity</strong></td>
<td>Naming and identification of threat and mobilizing resources against it in a directed way (internal &amp; external balancing).</td>
<td>Routines, or routinizing relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea that Brunei should be an ontological security-seeking state should stand logically on its own, before evidence is supplied. Even assessing the background conditions of Brunei, ontological theory should be a salient feature for Brunei in three ways. Firstly, Brunei is
ruled by the Sultan who is the sole decider of Brunei’s foreign policy, so the anthropomorphic assumption of ontological insecurity is fine in this case. Secondly, Brunei is a micro-state, fears about its security and survival should permeate its identity; it should therefore seek ways not just to be physically secure, but assure itself that it is. Thirdly, from the 1960s, it faces the prospect of being independent and sovereign in a newly decolonized South East Asia (long before the creation of ASEAN), where former colonies have thicker ties with their European colonizers rather than with each other. Already, it meets the preconditions of ontological insecurity: having a low level of trust in the environment and others countries in the region. In this situation, it is natural for countries newly introduced to an anarchic, self-help environment to prolong the past ties and sources of protection that they know best. Moreover, the need for ontological security would be exacerbated by the 1962 Rebellion.

Although a contingency and not social scientifically interesting, the 1962 Rebellion must be included to explain the puzzle of Brunei and British protection\(^{11}\). The fact that Britain

massively helped led the Sultan to think he needed Britain to protect his country. Moreover, the fact that Indonesia supported the rebels led the Sultan to mistrust his proximate neighbors.

**Hypotheses**

Given the foregoing explanation or theory, what hypotheses can we deduce and search for in the case of Brunei? If the Bruneian Sultan prioritizes ontological security in the way I’ve described, we would expect to see evidence of ontologically insecurity in the face of British withdrawal. To capture such an amorphous concept, we would have to look for its affective operationalization. Feelings are the rotors that give abstract constructivist concepts force in real life. For example, the ‘we feeling’ of security communities, the ‘outrage’ in taboo violation, and the ‘shame’ in social influence. The corresponding feeling for ontological insecurity is ‘anxiety’. This gives the following hypothesis:

[Hypothesis 1] If the sultan was ontologically insecure, he would feel anxious at the prospect of British withdrawal – sometimes even irrespective of physical security interests.

Moreover, if the Sultan was ontologically insecure, he would want to routinize relations that are assuring to him. British friendship isn’t just needed for protection, but to stabilize the cognitive ordering of his environment. A useful heuristic is that he sees a relationship with

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Britain as an end in itself (friendship) and not as means to an end (protection). How do we prove this? Moreover, how do we ensure that we don’t select the dependent variable of many decades of British protection and post-hoc call this ‘routine’ or ‘friendship’ and therefore, signs of ontological security seeking behavior? Routine can be proven as sincerely routine by process tracing and finding the falsifying evidence of rational cost-benefit weighing when the Sultan was considering British protection\(^ {13} \).

**[Hypothesis 2]:** There should be no rational cost-weighing of British protection versus other forms of defense that directly led the Sultan to prefer British protection.

**Method**

As it stands, the argument is very vulnerable to the problem of substitutability, wherein two independent variables (a desire for physical security or ontological security) can equally explain the same outcome. In other words, Brunei was faced with various threats in the 1960s and this could better explain their anxious need for British protection. Even by the proposed concept, the Sultan’s desire for ontological security involves a desire for physical security: British protection. One way around this is more granularity with the timeframe, trying to discern if Brunei was actually physically insecure during that time, and therefore being more careful about alluding to ontological insecurity. Moreover, since we are only imputing ‘ontological insecurity’ onto the Sultan, we can actually compare his threat perceptions against others around

\(^ {13} \) I borrow this methodology from Ted Hopf (2010), ‘The Logic of Habit in International Relations’. *European Journal of International Relations*, 16:4 (2010), pg. 550-551
him and take their view as an objective reading of Brunei’s ‘physical security’. Brunei’s status as a neo-colonial state actually gives us a good methodological leverage, since we have the Sultan’s threat perception but also British officials’ (who equally care about Brunei’s interests) threat perceptions in the 1960s. In the 1970s, we will do the same but also using concrete statistics, as well as outside observers’ and Bruneian officials’ (military and civilian) perceptions.

Therefore, using others’ views as an objective assessment of the situation in Brunei (physical security), we can compare this with the Sultan’s assessment, which may be colored by his concern for ontological security. A model of these two independent variables can be classified in a table as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL INSECURITY</th>
<th>DOESN'T NEED ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY</th>
<th>NEEDS ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW CAPABILITY and/or SIGNIFICANT THREAT(S) (1962 – 1967)</td>
<td>Can feel secure without a friendship with Britain.</td>
<td>Would only feel secure in a friendship with Britain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterfactually, Brunei would align with Malaysia and enter the Federation (1963, 1965)</td>
<td>Align with Britain and reject all other defense alignments in the 1960s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL SECURITY</th>
<th>LOW CAPABILITY and/or NO SIGNIFICANT THREAT(S) (1967 – Present)</th>
<th>HIGH CAPABILITY and/or NO SIGNIFICANT THREAT(S) (1967 – Present)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counterfactually, Brunei would assent to multiple British requests to withdraw (1968, 1974). Brunei would internally balance completely by itself.</td>
<td>Align with Britain despite no significant threat after 1967.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to align after 1976 despite no significant threat and despite very robust capabilities. [CASE #2: 1967 - 1979]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The first case study has to deal with the immediate aftermath of the Rebellion (1962-65) to see if it affected the Sultan along the lines of our theory. However, conscious of Brunei’s threats at this time, I have tried to devise a hard test. I evaluate the rationalist argument on its own terms and find it to be illogical. If physical insecurity were such a severe problem, the Sultan would have opted for any defense alignment. The evidence available to the Sultan at the time should have led him to believe that British protection was not slated to last, and so joining the Malaysian Federation for defense was the rationally better option. He did not do this however, and process tracing reveals his anxiety of British withdrawal and distrust of Malaysia. This case study will use process tracing due to the abundant documentary evidence.

The second case study is a hard test in that Brunei was actually physically secure and yet the Sultan still wanted British protection. I have tried to pick the hardest time range against which to test my theory. From 1967 onwards, Brunei was already physically secure according to many observers, yet it was still desperately dependent on British protection. To generously allow for sticky threat perceptions from Confrontation, which ended in 1966, and a deficit in defense capability in the 1960s, I will also assess Brunei from 1976 onwards. In this time, the Sultan had very little rational reason to cling onto British protection. According to the perception of others, it had few significant threats and could balance internally. Due to scarce first hand documents, this case is a congruence test which negates all plausible alternative explanations for why Brunei would want British protection.
Case Study #1: 1962-1965, the Brunei Rebellion, and the Malaysian Federation

In this section, it will be argued that the Sultan’s rejection of the Malaysian Federation (essentially an alternative defense alignment for our purpose) can only be attributed to his ontological insecurity since he displayed anxiety at the prospect of British withdrawal, and operated by a logic of habit without rational cost-weighing in wanting British protection.

The Rebellion occurred on 2 AM on the 8th of December 1962. The plan of the rebels was to target the main police station, the residence of the Chief Minister, and the Istana or Palace to take the Sultan and force him to proclaim a North Kalimantan or North Borneo Federation under the leadership of Brunei. Accounts vary, but there was definitely an exchange of shots outside of the Palace, with the Sultan taking command of the counter-fire, before moving to the police station, which was subsequently laid siege to by the rebels. The Sultan sent a telegram to Lord Selkirk on the morning of December 8th, asking for help and invoking the 1959 Treaty, and stayed in the station until British reinforcements arrived. British reinforcements came that very evening from Singapore and accumulated thereafter (1 Gurkha Battalion, 1 British Battalion, and some marine units under General Walker), within 5 days the rebellion in key spots was crushed, and by May 1963, the Rebellion ended as a serious conflict.

After the Rebellion, Brunei was extremely vulnerable, even according to objective British perceptions. The British High Commissioner in Brunei wrote: “There is no doubt, in my mind,

15 Majid, *Rebellion*, pg. 91
16 Majid, *Rebellion*, pg. 108, 109, 125
17 Majid, *Rebellion*, pg. 104, 135
that if British Military presence were to be withdrawn, or seriously weakened, the rebels would strike again, and this time the Sultan, the nobility and the administration would be butchered\textsuperscript{18}. Brunei had no internal capability to withstand another rebellion. The country’s police force could not quell the previous one. Brunei’s army had just been created and at the time, was undergoing training in Malaya\textsuperscript{19}. In 1967, the population was only 114,145 and the army was only 692 men.\textsuperscript{20} The Sultan even stated that ‘even if half of the male population of Brunei were to join the armed forces, the little kingdom could not defend itself’\textsuperscript{21}. Recruitment drives for short-term military service in late 1963 made no headway\textsuperscript{22}. Moreover the Indonesian Confrontation started in April 1963 in nearby Sarawak, and there were fears that this would rekindle the insurgency in Brunei. Gen. Walker had this fear as the Rebellion was not crushed, but driven underground. Hundreds were let go whilst the ringleaders were imprisoned\textsuperscript{23}.

Therefore, in the face of such profound physical insecurity, there should have been great pressure to align quickly with Malaysia and enter the Federation. The threat perceptions of everyone except the Sultan led to this point. When asked by Lawson during the July 1963 negotiations, all three Pengirans or nobles close to the Sultan said Brunei should join Malaysia for its security and survival, especially given what happened with the Rebellion\textsuperscript{24}. Pengiran

\textsuperscript{18} Memorandum on the Brunei Revolt (15 Dec 1962) by Sir D White, British High Commissioner to Brunei for Lord Selkirk and others attending a meeting at Labuan on Dec 17. CO 1030/1446.
\textsuperscript{19} Major General Lewis Pugh to H.C. Byatt, 4 September 1970. FCO24/739.
\textsuperscript{21} Borneo Bulletin, 24 May 1969
\textsuperscript{22} Majid, \textit{Rebellion}, pg. 153
\textsuperscript{23} Majid, \textit{Rebellion}, pg. 153.
\textsuperscript{24} Isa Ibrahim. \textit{Brunei and Malaysia: Why Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin refused to join the federation}. (London: IB Tauris, 2013), pg. 105
Kerma Indera said there is “no alternative”; Pengiran Ali said “Brunei’s survival would only be guaranteed by joining the proposed Federation”\textsuperscript{25}. Even British officers thought that “the advent of Malaysia had radically changed the situation, and that there was now a much more satisfactory alternative for safeguarding the security of Brunei… it would of course be more difficult for the UK to assist in the internal security of Brunei”\textsuperscript{26}.

Furthermore, even as the Sultan depended on British protection, there was increasing evidence to the Sultan that continual British protection was not guaranteed. Indeed, in several meetings in December 1962, British officials kept persuading the Sultan to join Malaysia (reflecting their new wish in the aftermath of the Rebellion to abandon their responsibilities to Brunei). Whether the Sultan caught on to the new British position is unclear, but he did want reassurances that British protection would continue upon independence\textsuperscript{27}. Moreover, in May 1963, the Sultan had gotten a letter from Lawson his legal adviser saying British protection was only predicated on oil production\textsuperscript{28}. In June 1963, during Malaysia’s 48-hour ultimatum, the British Commissioner General Selkirk actually told the Sultan he must not expect indefinite British protection\textsuperscript{29}. However, against such mounting evidence, the Sultan still rejected a merger with Malaysia in July 1963. It is worth investigating the Sultan’s rationale in detail.

It seems that even as early as December 1962, immediately after the rebellion, he preferred British protection. According to the British Commissioner White after meeting with

\textsuperscript{25} Ibrahim, \textit{Brunei and Malaysia}, pg. 105
\textsuperscript{26} Brunei’s political future: draft telegram from Mr Sandys to Lord Selkirk. January 1963. CO 1030/1466, no E/7, GM(63)1, annex A.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibrahim, \textit{Brunei and Malaysia}, pg. 105
\textsuperscript{29} Ibrahim, \textit{Brunei and Malaysia}, Pg. 91
the Sultan, “The Sultan himself is still vacillating [on the merger with Malaysia] [...] He is clearly most concerned for his own safety and security of tenure and is thinking in terms of independence with a British garrison”.\(^{30}\)

It seems that this conviction for British protection in December 1962 preceded the rational cost-benefit weighing of Malaysian protection versus British protection that started only in February 1963. This is confirmation of our second hypothesis where the Sultan operated automatically by habit or gut instinct. Indeed, it wasn’t until February 1963 that the Sultan asked his legal adviser Neil Lawson QC that if Brunei were to join the Malayan Federation, what kind of a future relationship would Brunei then have with Great Britain. Lawson explained that Brunei would cease to be a protected state and diplomatic relations with other states would be transferred to Kuala Lumpur. Interestingly, Lawson felt it pertinent to bring up that “there should be no objection to His Highness continuing his personal friendship with the British Queen and with his many friends in Britain so long as Kuala Lumpur did not view such contacts as encroaching on their power over foreign affairs”. Isa Ibrahim present at the scene then wrote:

> There followed a long contemplative pause after listening to Lawson’s exposition of the legal and constitutional implications of becoming a member state of the proposed federation. I detected signs of unease on the part of the Sultan. There was no doubt to me that the requirement to sever the long-standing historical ties between his country and Great Britain weighed heavily on His Highness’s mind and that he was pondering the

\(^{30}\) Despatch from Sir D white, British High Commissioner to Brunei, to Mr Sandys. 20 Dec 1962. CO 1030/1076, no 6.
consequences for Brunei of such a drastic move\textsuperscript{31}.

Unease and anxiety at the prospect of losing Britain, not just in matters of security, is a sign of ontological insecurity, and this evidence confirms our first hypothesis. The Sultan then asked Lawson that if the treaty of protection were terminated would Brunei still be able to invite British troops to come to Brunei? Lawson answered in the negative, that all defense matters would be the responsibility of the federal government in Malaysia.

Lawson then moved on to other concerns […] There was hardly any comment from His Highness on these matters.

I could sense that the Sultan’s mind was now preoccupied with what was to him the vital matter of British protection, and the security and defence of Brunei that the protection provided… It is clear to me now, and it is more so now in retrospect, that the prospect of severing Brunei’s treaty relationship with the United Kingdom … was one of the most important factors that must have diminished his desire to join the proposed federation.\textsuperscript{32}

The decision to opt for British protection was settled by July 1963, when the Sultan expressed in the local newspaper his hope that the British government would “continue to honor the existing arrangement for the defense of Brunei”\textsuperscript{33}. Indeed, in London that July, there were indications that

\textsuperscript{31} Ibrahim, \textit{Brunei and Malaysia}, Pg. 33
\textsuperscript{32} Ibrahim, \textit{Brunei and Malaysia}, pg. 34
whilst the Sultan was in final meetings on joining the Malaysian Federation, he already wished to discuss the future relationship of Brunei with Britain and referred to the possibility of “strengthening Brunei’s defense treaty with the United Kingdom”\textsuperscript{34}.

\textbf{Case Study \#2 – 1967-1979}

The case of 1967-1979 provides an opportunity to do a ‘hard test’ on my theory. In this timeframe, Brunei was physically secure, yet it still required British protection. Only an explanation of ontological security can explain this.

According to objective accounts by British officials like High Commissioner White, Brunei was physically secure since 1967. This is in conformity with the facts. The Brunei Rebellion was successfully crushed by 1963. Sukarno and his anti-colonial foreign policy was thrown out because of a coup in May 1965.

At this stage, however, the Sultan’s ontological security was still contingent on British protection of Brunei. In 1966, British PM Wilson announced the withdrawal of Britain from Brunei in the House of Commons in the future but did not give a date. On July 1967, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs threatened the withdrawal of the Gurkha battalion and the end of British protection if the Sultan does not democratize\textsuperscript{35}. On 26 September 1967, the Overseas Policy and Defence (OPD) Committee in London formally decided to persuade the

\textsuperscript{34} \text{Telegram from Mackintosh to Secretary of State, 18 July 1963. Cited in FCO371/169703, 11 July 1963.}

\textsuperscript{35} \text{B Trend to Prime Minister’s Office, 27 July 1967. PREM 13/3181.}
Sultan to democratize Brunei with the implied threat that the 1959 Agreement will be terminated otherwise. On 4 October 1967 Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III abdicated the throne (but continued to rule behind the scenes until his death in 1986). If these facts are related, this is another (very extreme) instance of ontological insecurity. Indeed, although there are many possible reasons for his abdication in the historical literature, like London’s change of the sympathetic British Commissioner F.D. Webber over his veto or a move to escape previous promises to democratize, one corroborating reason for the abdication offered by J.O. Moreton of the Foreign Commonwealth Office was that the Sultan had been “disturbed by the pressure put on him in July in London and by the decision shortly afterwards to withdraw British forces from the Far East.”

In 1968, Foreign Secretary George Thompson formally notified the Sultan of British withdrawal in November 1970. The Sultan immediately “expressed concern for the implications for the State of Brunei of the withdrawal of British protection and enquired about the possibility of continuing defence safeguards…” He said if continuing British protection is not possible, Britain should provide alternatives. In 1969, however, the British High Commissioner Adair, after talking to a Reuters Correspondent who had an audience with Sultan Omar, wrote that the Sultan was flat out against the new Five Power Defense Arrangement, saying Brunei “was not interested in being associated with the Five Power Talks” and “would seek continuous British

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36 OPD(67) 28, 28 July 1967.
37 Record of Meeting held in the Conference Room Commonwealth Office, Brunei: Future British Policy, 27 November 1967. T312/2320.
38 Letter of George Thompson to Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, 18 October 1968. PREM 13/3181.
military protection”.\textsuperscript{39}

From the mid-1970s onwards, the idea that Brunei prefers British protection for physical security becomes more untenable, yet the Sultan still resisted British request to withdraw until he relented in 1979, agreeing that Brunei will be independent in 1984 with British protection until then. However, around about this time, there was no significant threat facing Brunei. Jeshurun writes that “it might be safer to conclude that…..Brunei threat perception bears no resemblance to the reality of their military strength”.\textsuperscript{40} A Bruneian commander said of the mid-1970s that an external attack was ‘least likely’ and internal attacks ‘more possible but unlikely’.\textsuperscript{41} In terms of internal attack, a plausible scenario might come not from the party of the 1962 rebellion but from the populace frustrated with the slow progress of reform.\textsuperscript{42} At any rate, British protection was not suited for internal threats, having only responsibility for Brunei’s external affairs since 1971. More perplexingly, just 2 years after independence, a senior Brunei official said “there is no internal security threat to speak of”.\textsuperscript{43}

Around about this time, Brunei actually had the capability to internally balance. In 1962, it had a defense budget of $2 Million; by 1966, it grew to $19 Million. Its spending on the army

\textsuperscript{39} Adair to Aires, 8 April 1969. FCO 24/429/1,  
\textsuperscript{40} Chandran Jeshurun. “Threat Perception and Defence Spending in Southeast Asia” in Defense Spending in Southeast Asia, ed. Chin Kin Wah. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987) Pg. 3  
\textsuperscript{42} Huxley, “Brunei: Defending a Mini state,” pg. 233  
\textsuperscript{43} Huxley, “Brunei: Defending a Mini state,”. pg. 228
specifically also increased. In 1976, it spent $100 million on the army. In 1979, it spent $374 Million. In 1980, it spent $288 million. Tim Huxley said that ‘in terms of military expenditure per capita, the Sultanate was outspending its ASEAN associates even in the mid-1960s’. These accumulative budgets must have made Brunei stand in good position in terms of security. By 1983, Brunei was well-equipped to deal with an emergency on the oil fields, domestic insurrection and cross-border incursions. Colonel Pehin Mohamad Daud of the Bruneian Army said in 1981 that Brunei is ‘as well equipped as any army in the neighboring region’.

**Conclusion**

It is clear to see that Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin was motivated by ontological security in his desire for British protection, much more than the rationalist desire for physical security. The Sultan clearly showed signs of ontological insecurity (anxiety) at the thought of British withdrawal, had a gut preference for British protection after the rebellion (December 1962) well before the first evidence of rational deliberation about the issue (February 1963) and moreover, continued to rely on British protection into the 1980s when Brunei was sufficiently capable and had no threats whatsoever.

This has some mileage in explaining why Brunei has a British base today with a battalion of British officers and Gurkhas stationed there. Although Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin died in 1986,  

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45 Huxley, “Brunei: Defending a Mini state,” pg. 224  
Brunei continues to have a British base today for several reasons. First, Sultan’s Omar Ali Saifuddin’s action was a fait accompli resisted first by the British but was then seen as mutually beneficial to both Brunei and Britain. Since the upkeep of the garrison is paid for by Brunei, Britain has a free facility in Southeast Asia to station their officers. Also, until 1997, Britain planned to use its forces in Brunei for any contingency in Hong Kong. Moreover, until this day, Britain now uses Brunei as a training ground for its soldiers to conduct jungle warfare. Secondly, there is now a sincere, thick discourse of friendship between Britain and Brunei. Initially superficial and at times insincere, this discourse is now taken for granted and invoked casually, either by MPs in the House of Commons, by successive British PMs, or in any British official’s visit to Brunei, as well as Bruneian newspapers. I contend that on top of the initial reasons laid out in this paper and the subsequent path dependence, it is the utility of the British garrison and the continuing sense of friendship shared on both sides that maintain British protection for Brunei. So, along with path dependence and utility, identity and constructivism still animates Brunei’s preference to have British bases on its sovereign territory.

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