

# Rag Tag Guerilla “Invasion” of Malaysia: Covert Operation to Trigger Social Unrest and Foster Regime Change?

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*A hung parliament, or even a narrow majority for the BN, may set the stage for massive street agitation which could pave the way for a regime change which is the goal of not only the Opposition but also its foreign backers. This is why much more is at stake in the Sabah tragedy than what meets the eye.*

Some foreign media reports on the tragedy in Sabah have given the erroneous impression that Malaysia is faced with “an armed invasion.” This is ludicrous, given the scale and scope of the attacks that began on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

The local media is more accurate in describing the rag-tag band of perhaps 200 people who have killed eight Malaysian police personnel as “armed intruders from Southern Philippines.” In spite of these killings, Malaysia remains a relatively peaceful country.



Image credit: <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/my.htm>

The Malaysian police and military are very much in control of the situation which has affected directly only three areas on the east coast of Sabah, one of the 14 states and territories in the Malaysian Federation. 54 of the intruders who have styled themselves as

the “Royal Army of the Sultanate of Sulu” have been killed so far in an operation which is now in its second week.

The intruders, it is alleged, are pursuing an unresolved claim to Sabah staked by the Sulu Sultanate since 1962. Quite apart from the fact that the credentials of the present claimant, Sultan Jamalul Kiram, are suspect and the Sultanate itself has been defunct for decades, there is no historical or legal basis for anyone to dispute the legitimate position of Sabah as a state within an independent, sovereign Malaysian nation. Sabahans themselves have, over almost 50 years, reaffirmed, over and over again, their status as Malaysian citizens through numerous elections and a whole range of other political, economic and cultural activities which in law prove that they are an integral and indispensable part of the nation.

One hopes therefore that the Sulu Sultanate’s claim to Sabah which in the past was articulated through the Philippine government will cease to be a thorn in the relations between our two countries. Malaysia and the Philippines should formally bring this contentious issue to an end and strengthen bilateral cooperation through two fronts: one, the implementation of the Manila-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Accord of 2012 — an Accord in which Malaysia played a part— which requires a lot more hard work and commitment; and two, the expansion of economic relations based upon some of the concrete proposals linked to the BIMP-EAGA corridor that former Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, and former Philippine President, Fidel Ramos, agreed to work upon.

While laying the Sabah claim to rest will take a bit of time, Malaysians and Filipinos would also like to know how these intruders, many of them well-armed, came to land on Sabah shores? How did they breach maritime surveillance? Did the intelligence services on both sides have some prior knowledge of what was brewing? If they did, why didn’t they act? From the look of things, after this tragedy, intelligence-gathering and surveillance will have to be beefed up.

Our people are also very concerned about the individuals and groups in the Philippines and Malaysia who may have manipulated and exploited Jamalul Kiram to undertake this foolish adventure. Philippine intelligence sources seem to suggest that three groups may be implicated; that there may well be a convergence of motives. One, a small group that wants Kiram to demand a higher annual quit rent from the Malaysian government. (Malaysia has been paying this rent to the heirs of the Sulu Sultanate since 1963—a rent inherited from the British Colonial Administration.)

Two, another bigger group that is targeting Philippine President, Benigno Aquino, in view of the forthcoming Congressional Election. By stirring up trouble on the issue of the Sabah claim which has been on the back burner for years, elements in this group hope to reduce the President’s popularity. There are others in this group who are opposed to his agreement with the MILF and seek to use the Sabah issue as a tool to wreck the Accord. The former Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leader, Nur Misuari, is one of those opponents. Misuari has an additional reason for getting into the act. In 2001, when Arroyo was President, he incited a revolt in Sulu and when the military moved against him, he escaped to Sabah, hoping that it would be a safe sanctuary for him. Much to his disappointment, the Malaysian police detained Misuari and later deported him to the Philippines where he was jailed for a while.

For both Malaysia’s role in facilitating the Manila-MILF Accord and for handing him over to

Manila 11 years ago, Misuari, it is alleged, has a grudge against Kuala Lumpur. He has therefore chosen to work hand-in-glove with an old friend of his from the Malaysian Opposition who has no qualms about using whatever means to oust the Najib government. In order to entice Kiram and his followers and other disgruntled elements, individuals in the Malaysian Opposition had reportedly promised them land, titles and other sinecures.

How would the armed intrusion of Kiram and his followers help this third group — elements in the Malaysian Opposition — as categorised by Philippines' intelligence? A serious security situation in Sabah, these elements may have hoped, would sully Najib's reputation and lead to a significant erosion of support in the General Election expected in the next few weeks. It is important to remember that the ruling party, the Barisan Nasional, won 24 out of 25 parliamentary seats in Sabah in the last election. If Sabah — a huge vote bank — slips out of the BN's grip, it is quite conceivable that its overall majority would be severely affected and there may even be a hung parliament. A hung parliament, or even a narrow majority for the BN, may set the stage for massive street agitation which could pave the way for a regime change which is the goal of not only the Opposition but also its foreign backers.

This is why much more is at stake in the Sabah tragedy than what meets the eye.

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