



International Boundary Study

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Indonesia – Malaysia Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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INDONESIA–MALAYSIA BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The terrestrial boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia is limited to the island of Borneo, separating the Indonesian regions of Kalimantan Barat and Kalimantan Timur from the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. The boundary, which measures approximately 1,107 miles in length, was delimited by Anglo–Dutch agreements negotiated during the preindependence period. Two small sectors have been demarcated, one along Sabah, where several streams are crossed by the border, and the second southwest of Kuching where several small rivers form the frontier. Elsewhere, the frontier is marked only by the mountain ranges which form the major and minor water divides chosen as the boundary.

The remainder of Indonesia and Malaysia are separated by the water bodies of the Strait of Malacca, including the Strait of Singapore, and the South China Sea. A line of separation of sovereignty may be drawn to divide the territories of the two states but the symbol utilized should not be that of an international boundary.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

A. Physical

Borneo, the third largest island in the world, is almost bisected by the equator. The name, Borneo, appears to be a corruption of Brunei, the designation of the sultanate that dominated the island at the time of its discovery by Europeans.

The northern third of the island is occupied by the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah (North Borneo) and the British-protected state of Brunei. The southern two-thirds form that part of the Republic of Indonesia referred to as Kalimantan.

The frontier region is primarily an area of low folded mountains, which are aligned generally east–west. Local relief varies with underlying rock formation but is usually gentle. Elevations along the frontier vary from several thousand feet to 7,084 feet at Moeroed peak near the tripoint of Sabah–Sarawak–Kalimantan Indonesian Borneo. The Bawang range, which forms the western sector of the frontier, is low and discontinuous. The major break in the range occurs between the headwaters of the Sadong and Kapoeas rivers southeast of Kuching. A secondary break occurs along the coastal region to the west, providing easy access from the Sambas River to the Sarawak River.

In the central region, the mountains are composed of a series of parallel ridges and valleys forming a continuous belt. The inner range consists mostly of granite, while the flanking ridges are of sandstone or slate. The igneous core has gentle slopes and rounded peaks while the sandstone and slate ridges are characterized by deeply eroded valleys and relatively steeper slopes.

To the east, elevations decrease to the shores of the Celebes Sea, other than for a narrow coastal plain which remains unbroken.

Climatically, Borneo is tropical. The lowlands are very hot and humid, with slight seasonal variations in temperature. The average annual temperature is approximately 80° F. An increase in elevation affects temperature slightly but it does bring relief from the excess humidity of the lowlands. Probably no place on the island receives less than 100 inches of rainfall annually, while exposed ranges and their flanks may have as much as 200 inches. No true dry season exists although rainfall is greater in one season or another depending upon exposure to the monsoons and their seasonal pattern.

As a consequence of the high temperature and high rainfall, vegetation growth is rank. The dominant pattern is the evergreen, tropical rain forest in the interior and the mangrove swamp along the sea and river shores. Taller trees reach heights of 200 feet or more. Climbing plants are common as are jungle growths along the streams and clearing. The general picture is one of continuous and monotonous forest coverage. At approximately 3,000 feet elevation and above, however, a dwarf alpine type of vegetation grows.

B. Socioeconomic

Borneo has a sparse population in comparison with the neighboring islands of Java, Celebes, and Sumatra. Major concentrations occur along the coast, particularly at the mouth of the important rivers. The valleys themselves form secondary areas of settlement, although the inland penetration is not deep except along the west coast. The interior of the island is virtually uninhabited except for the upper courses of the Sadoeng and Kapoeas rivers.

The coastal peoples are primarily Malays from Java and Sumatra, Chinese who migrated in early times to work the gold fields of the Sambas, and Sea Dyaks. The Chinese have concentrated in the predominantly Malay urban centers since the depletion of the gold veins, while the Dyaks and other Malays make up the rural settlers. With few exceptions, agriculture remains as a basis of subsistence, depending upon rice and associated crops. Some coconuts, spices (pepper), and rubber are grown commercially on plantations, but a shortage of labor has limited commercial development. A greater problem, however, is the basic infertility of the soils. The high temperature and great rainfall produce a rapid and continuous leaching of the minerals. The residual soil is a nearly sterile laterite.

In contrast to Java and Sumatra, Borneo has had no active volcanoes to revitalize the soil with ash or lava. Only where alluvium exists are the soils considered even moderately productive.

The peoples of the interior consist of a collection of various aboriginal races, many of whom have only recently abandoned the time-honored practice of head-hunting. They exist

primarily in a tribal economy based upon subsistence agriculture, collecting, and hunting. They usually live in long houses which they periodically abandon as the soil is depleted.

C. Historical

While Borneo was first visited by Europeans during Magellan's circumnavigation, early efforts to settle the island were unsuccessful. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English all endeavored in various ways to tap the suspected riches of the soil, but the warlike character of the natives and the rigors of the climate combined to thwart their schemes. The Dutch established a factory at Bandjermasin on the south coast in 1603 but abandoned it four years later when the local populace murdered the employees. A second effort in 1635 also ended unsuccessfully within three years. In 1698, Dutch aided in the establishment of a sympathetic rajah at Bantam (Java) which gave them, for a brief period, limited but successful trade with his Borneo territories. Additional attempts made in the following century produced marginal benefits but increasing costs and poor returns led the Dutch government to order the abandonment of the settlements in 1797.

Official Dutch thinking concerning Borneo related it to Java. The island represented an outpost of Javanese influence which was useful to supplement trade and to protect the main settlement. Thus the adjacent south coast had the most appeal. The British, on the other hand, thought of Borneo as a station on the trade route between India and China. In the days of sailing vessels, the route to China during the southwest monsoon utilized the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea west of Borneo. However, during the northeast monsoon (October to April) this route became impractical and ships were forced to pass south and then east of Borneo. Even with the advent of steam navigation, the British retained the thoughts of Borneo as a strong point on the route's flanks. As a consequence, the most important part of the island to them was the north coast, with its spacious and relatively protected harbors.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the British defeated the Dutch naval forces in several engagements and occupied the Netherlands' holdings in the East Indies. Without the threat of Dutch competition, a serious effort was exerted toward the creation of factories in Borneo but with little success. The lack of cooperation by the native princes and the shortage of available labor doomed the attempts to failure. By the terms of the Convention of 1814, the British East India Company returned the management of the East Indies to the Netherlands. The Dutch immediately undertook a campaign to reestablish their former claims to Borneo and other outlying islands. The Sultanate of Bandjermasin immediately accepted Dutch protection. The Sultan also ceded full sovereignty to "(Tatas, Kween, all of the Dayak provinces, the districts of Mendawai, Sampit, and Kota Waringin with all their dependencies, together with Sintang, Lawai and Djelai, Bakoempai, Tabanio, and Patagan, with Poeloe Laoet, Pasir, Koetei, Berouw, and all their dependencies." With the granting to the Dutch of this vast tract of territory, British holdings established on the south coast of Borneo during the occupation period ceased to exist.

As the Dutch gained control in south Borneo, the sultanates of Sambas and Pontianak on the west coast requested Dutch protection. These requests appear to have been motivated as much by the desire to escape the depredations of the unruly Chinese settlements at Sambas and the activities of coastal pirates as the realization of Dutch primacy in the island. However, the Dutch were soon forced to abandon territory again in 1825 as a consequence of the Javanese rebellion. After the return of peace, the Dutch followed the same general policy of extending protection and sovereignty to the native principalities. In contrast to Java, however, the amount of interest shown was very slight. The principal concern, at first, appeared to be aimed at the elimination of claims by other states.

The first permanent British foothold on Borneo was gained by James Brooke, who later gained fame as the White Rajah of Sarawak. In 1839 Brooke arrived in the area on a private exploring expedition. His help in putting down a local rebellion was requested by the government of Brunei. On this occasion, however, Brooke did not accede to the request and continued with his expedition. The next year, when he returned to Kuching, the government again sought his services and he accepted. For his help in ending the revolt, Brooke in 1842 became the sovereign ruler of Sarawak between Tandjung Datu and the mouth of the Sadong River.

The Netherlands, at first, objected to Brooke's holding but, after the British Government stated that it had no official interest in Sarawak, they soon tolerated his activities. Each time that Sarawak increased its territory, however, the original Dutch nervousness returned. The Dutch also watched with suspicion official British naval support given Brooke in his efforts to end the piratical raids of the Dyaks. To offset this growing British sultan, the Dutch began to expand their influence along the entire east coast, signing protection agreements with the sultanates of Koetei, Pasir, Boeloengan, Goenong Taboer, and Sambalioeng. The British had also negotiated agreements with several of the same sultans but the home government never ratified them.

In 1847, Great Britain negotiated a treaty with the Sultan of Brunei, partially at the urging of Brooke, for a British settlement on the island of Labuan. Reluctantly in 1850, the Netherlands concluded that the fact of British occupation of northern Borneo must be accepted, and they redoubled their efforts elsewhere. Nine years later, the Sultanate of Bandjermasin rose in revolt against the Dutch and full peace was not restored until 1867. The sultanate was declared to have lapsed in 1860 and, from then on, the Dutch ruled the dominions directly. For the next decade the Java Government consolidated its hold on the south and west coast of the island, the territories of Bandjermasin.

In the meantime, the territory of Sarawak continued to expand at the expense of the nearly impotent Sultanate of Brunei. By 1853, the eastern boundary was at the Rajang, in 1861 at the Bintulu, and in 1882 at the Baram. The last of the cessions, annexations, or purchases were (a) the Trusan in 1884, (b) the Limbang in 1890, and (c) the Lawas in 1904–05.

To the north, during this same period, the Spanish were endeavoring to terminate a long conflict with the Sultan of Sulu. The sultanate had been declared under Spanish sovereignty as early as 1638. However, as the Dutch learned, the mere declaration without occupation was a fruitless activity. In 1851, the sultan agreed to adhere to the sovereignty of the Spanish throne and to end the piratical acts which flourished in his domain. Sulu, at this time, had hereditary sovereign rights to the northeast coast of North Borneo from Boeloengan to Marudu Bay and over the northwest coast as far as Pandasan. Since the Sulu piracy had not ended, the Spanish in 1873 established a blockade over the sultanate which led to violent protests from British traders at Singapore. An assault on the capital city of Jolo, however, led to the capitulation of the sultanate in 1878.

In the waning period of Sulu sovereignty, outside interest developed in North Borneo. An American company and later a Scot endeavored to establish commercial depots without success. In 1875, an Austrian named Overbeck purchased the North Borneo leases of the American Trading Company. He later joined with a wealthy and influential Englishman, Alfred Dent, and in 1877 they renegotiated the agreements with the Sultan of Brunei for the territory between Kimanis Bay and the Seboekoe River on the east. In exchange for an annual payment, the two obtained full sovereignty over the territory of modern-day Sabah. Knowing of the rights and claims of the Sultan of Sulu, they then negotiated a similar cession with him. The territory between the rivers Pandasan in the west and Seboekoe in the east, for an annual tribute of \$5,000, was ceded on January 22, 1878, six months before the final Spanish conquest of the Sultanate. With the 30,000 square-mile territory firmly in hand, contractually at least, the two men sought some form of protection from a European power. The Austrian government refused support and Overbeck promptly withdrew from the company in 1879. The British Government, however, granted protection in 1881 by issuing a royal charter to the newly incorporated North Borneo Company in spite of protests of the Netherlands Government. Spanish claims were settled by the protocol of March 7, 1885, which recognized Spain's sovereignty over the Sulu archipelago in exchange for a relinquishment of claims to the mainland territories.

The British and Dutch soon realized that a boundary had to be drawn between their respective spheres and territories if serious incidents were to be avoided. A commission created in 1889 examined the terrain and the documents and recommended a boundary which was legalized by the convention of 1891. This delimitation essentially represented a compromise between the extreme claims of the two powers. As more geographic information was gained in time, the original boundary delimitation was amended in 1915 and again in 1928 to make it conform to reality.

D. Political

During the second World War, Borneo was completely overrun by Japanese military forces and occupied until the final months of the conflict. Considerable damage was done to the facilities and economy during the initial occupation and as a result of Allied bombings. As a consequence, the Rajah of Sarawak and the British North Borneo Company realized that they did not have the resources to repair the war-ravaged economy of the two states. In due course, Sarawak and North Borneo passed to the British Government as colonies on July 1, 1946, and July 15, 1946, respectively.

Nationalists in the Dutch East Indies had declared their independence of the Netherlands as early as August 17, 1945. It was not until December 28, 1949, however, that the newly independent Republic of Indonesia replaced the Dutch on the southern side of the frontier. Finally, on September 16, 1963, the State of Singapore, the Colony of Sarawak, and the Colony of North Borneo (now renamed Sabah) joined with the independent Federation of Malaya to form Malaysia.

The proposed union of Sarawak and Sabah with Malaya led to Indonesian protests and a request for assurance that the peoples of Borneo desired the federation. An impartial United Nations commission visited the two colonies to talk with various elements of the population and on September 14, 1963, the U.N. Secretary-General declared that a sizeable majority favored Malaysia. However, the Indonesian Government has not accepted the fact of union nor the Secretary-General's report. Guerilla operations originating from Indonesian territory have occurred along the frontier and landings have even been made on the Malayan peninsula. In the meantime, the Philippines has entered reservations to Sabah's inclusion based upon the former sovereign rights of the Sultanate of Sulu. No specific territorial limits have been mentioned publicly for the Philippine reservations but they presumably would equate with the Sulu grant to Overbeck and Dent.

Speeches of Indonesian officials have called for independent states of Sarawak and Sabah, free from association with Malaysia. Indonesia officially makes no claim for either state or for any portion of their territory. The Indonesian "confrontation" policy has become more fixed within the past several months culminating in the state's withdrawal from the United Nations to protest Malaysia's election to the Security Council.

III. ANALYSIS OF TERRESTRIAL BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The boundary starts on the east coast at latitude 4° 10' N. After the island of Sebatik is divided, the boundary crosses the waters between the island and the mainland in a sinuous line following the median of the Tamboe and Sikapal channels to the Sikapal range which forms the water divide between the Serudong and Simengaris rivers. The water divide is followed generally westward to 116° 49.9' E. where the Seboeda River is crossed. Mounting the minor water divides, the boundary continues westward to 116° 42.3' E. where the Agisan River, a tributary of the Seboekoe, is also intersected. In like manner, the

boundary meanders westward to 116° 26.2' E. where the Pantjiangan River, an upper course of the Sembakoeng, is also crossed. The intersections of these three rivers with the boundary are marked with pillars. Continuing westward, the boundary intersects the Sesai River at approximately 116° 09' E. All four of these intersections take place along the parallel of latitude 4° 20' as specified in the original Anglo–Dutch treaty.

From the last-named river crossing, the boundary mounts the ridgeline which constitutes the major water divide, and this feature serves as the border for approximately 800 miles. In places, knowledge of the precise location of the divide is rather scanty.

Southwest of Kuching, the water divide is abandoned between the peaks of Api and Raja. Over a straight line distance of 13.6 miles between the peaks, the boundary follows a complicated course utilizing straight lines, foot paths, streams, water divides, and a crest line. The boundary, where it follows a stream, has been defined as the right bank of the specific stream. Pillars, either of wood or concrete, mark the major turning points. The stretch along the boundary measures approximately 19.75 miles.

On the peak of Api mountain, the boundary returns to the water divide for an additional 78 miles northwestward and then northward to the South China Sea at Tandjung Datu.

IV. TREATIES AND OTHER ACTS

Listed below are the treaties and other international acts which created the present international boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia. All but one of the treaties relate to the boundary on the island of Borneo. The sole exception allocates islands in the Strait of Singapore.

A. Treaty regarding territory and commerce in the East Indies between Great Britain and the Netherlands signed in London on March 17, 1824 (British and Foreign State Papers, 11:194)

The intent of the treaty apparently was to divide the islands immediately to the north (British) and south (Dutch) of the Strait of Singapore. However, a differing interpretation by the Dutch soon developed. The specific language forbade the British (Article 12) to establish settlements in the "islands south of the Straits [sic] of Singapore." The interpretation of this rather loose language came to be that the British were excluded from all islands south of the latitude of the Strait. On this version rested much of the Dutch opposition to official British occupation on the island of Borneo.

B. The London Convention of June 20, 1891 (Cmd. 6375; 1892)

The boundary line between British Borneo and Dutch Borneo was delimited by this act as starting from 4° 10' north latitude on the east coast (Article I) and continuing westward, so as to include the Simengaris River in Dutch territory, to 117° East and 4° 20' North (Article II). The water divide between the Simengaris and Soedang (Serudung) rivers was to be the boundary. The above-mentioned 4° 20' N. parallel would then become the boundary to the line of ridges which formed the main water divide further to the west. Should rivers cross the boundary, deviations within a five-mile strip could be made so as to include small portions or bends within Dutch territory if they emptied into the seas south of 4° 10' or within British territory if they met the sea north of this latitude (Article II). The remainder of the boundary was dealt with simply from the above-mentioned line of ridges—the boundary followed the main watershed of the principal rivers as far as Tandjong-Datoe (Tandjung Datu) on the west coast (Article III). Finally, Article IV divided the island of Sebitik (Setabik) along the parallel of 4° 10' while agreeing that the exact positions of the boundary could be determined "hereafter by mutual agreement (Article V)."

C. Joint Commissioners Report signed at Tawao on February 17, 1913.

Due to the lack of specific knowledge of the geography of interior Borneo, certain difficulties soon arose over the 1891 delimitation. Invoking Article V of the convention, the two states created a joint commission to delimit the boundary in greater detail. The joint report, with map, became the basis of and was incorporated in the following agreement.

D. Agreement between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands relating to the boundary between the State of North Borneo and the Netherland possessions in Borneo signed at London on September 28, 1915 (Cmd. 8105; 1915)

The technical report of the joint commissioners is accepted as the body of the Agreement along with the changes produced in the North Borneo (Sabah)–Dutch Borneo (Kalimantan Timur) boundary. Four boundary pillars were erected (all on the parallel of 4° 20' N.) where the Pentjiangan (2) River, the Agisan River (1), and the Seboeda River cross the boundary and an additional two (on the parallel of 4° 10' N.) on the west and east coasts of Sebatik (Sebitik) island. In the waters between the island and the coast, the commissions accepted the median line of the Troesan Tamboe and the Troesan Sikapal as the boundary to the water divide.

The report continues with a detailed description of the changes in the boundary. A 1:500,000 map with four insets, three at 1:50,000 and one at 1:100,000 form a part of the agreement. The map shows the boundary from the island to 115° 40' East (the peak of B. Padas). Coordinates for the boundary pillars are also on the map.

E. Convention between ... the United Kingdom and ... the Netherlands ...
respecting the delimitation of the frontier between ... Borneo under British protection
and Netherlands territory ... signed at the Hague, on March 26, 1928 (Cmd. 3671;
1930)

A minor alteration in the water divide principle is made between the peaks of Api (110° 04' E.) and Raja (109° 56' E.) to follow several small streams, paths, and straight line segments. A 1:50,000 map is appended to the convention. Markers were erected in this sector, 15 of wood and five of cement and wood.

V. SUMMARY

The Indonesia–Malaysia boundary on the island of Borneo has been delimited by Anglo–Dutch international agreements negotiated in the preindependence period. Two small sectors have been demarcated. No dispute is known to exist on the precise alignment of the boundary although Indonesia and the Philippines have expressed reservations over the incorporation of Sarawak and/or Sabah into Malaysia. The boundary, however, should be shown as international with no reference to the disputes. They are considered to be territorial rather than boundary disputes, per se.

The best source for the depiction of the terrestrial frontier between Sarawak and Kalimantan Barat is the British topographic series Sarawak 1:150,000 compiled and drawn by the Lands and Surveys Department of Sarawak. For the demarcated area covered by the 1928 Convention, the 1:50,000 map affixed to Command 2671 (1930) may be utilized. It should be recalled, however, that elsewhere the boundary follows the water divides according to the treaties. Should new data show the divides in altered position, the boundary must follow the new courses of the divides.

The map references for the Sabah–Kalimantan Timur boundary are poorer in quality. The best source is the map affixed to the 1915 agreement which has been described above. Acceptable substitutes are the International Map of the World (IMW) 1:1,000,000 sheet NA 50 and the British map of North Borneo (DOS 973) published by the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. No large-scaled Indonesian maps are available of the boundary area but Dutch-published sources (of the preindependence period) show the boundary essentially the same as do the cited British maps.

The water boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia should not be shown except in the narrow confines of the Strait of Singapore and adjacent waters. A theoretical median line has been constructed on Map No. 2 (attached), and it may be used by the cartographic agencies. However, the line of separation should not be shown, by a symbol, as an international boundary since there is no treaty justification for the position. Rather, the line is one of convenience for the cartographic separation of sovereignty.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Research in Economics and Science, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

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