

Executive Summary

Reining in the IGP’s Power: Decentralisation as an option

This paper examines decentralisation as a potential policy option for the Malaysian Inspector General of Police’s (IGP) office given the issues of accountability and overcentralisation. It is a continuation of a previous IDEAS policy paper (Strengthening the Royal Malaysia Police by Enhancing Accountability) that discusses the failure of oversight bodies in enhancing the accountability of the IGP’s office due to the lack of greater structural reforms.

By using a comparative approach, the paper shows that (i) a centralised police system is not the prevailing characteristic among many federations around the world and (ii) many federations that practiced a monolithic, centralised police system do not have a good record on accountability and rule of law measures, such as Russia, South Africa and Nigeria. This is not to suggest centralisation’s sole culpability but to highlight its role in encouraging the politicisation of the police due to the lack of separation from a powerful federal government and independent oversight bodies. Such a system also discourages any attempts to ‘change from within’ for the Malaysian federal government has historically benefitted from a powerful IGP position. The reciprocity between the lawmaker and the law-enforcer confers a degree of insularity for both sides, often to the detriment of opposition or civil society voices.

Following the argument above, this paper proposes two types of decentralisation that could, first, limit the range of powers concentrated in the hands of the IGP; and second, decouple the link the position has with the federal government so that greater avenues of checks and balance can ‘blossom’ at lower tiers of government, namely the states. The first involves horizontal decentralisation, which would see the Special Branch separated from the RMP, thus divorcing the IGP’s mandate from the more controversial areas of policing, including espionage, intelligence and counter-terrorism. The separation also allows for greater transparency of the Special Branch as its operations can no longer be obscured by the larger police bureaucracy. Vertical decentralisation is also proposed to allow for the institution of independent state police forces answerable to state governments, so that aside from federal oversight, accountability measures can also be implemented at the state level. Vertical decentralisation diversifies the avenues where citizen can seek redress from potential abuses and neglects of the police force, which is currently concentrated by, and at the federal agencies.



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