



## South China Sea Maritime Disputes and Malaysia International Integrative Relations as a Jihad Strategy in Balancing the World's Authoritative Powers

<sup>[1]</sup> Cdr Mohd Harris Sadi RMN, <sup>[2]</sup> Jamaliah Jamil, <sup>[3]</sup> Zulhasni Abdul Rahim, <sup>[4]</sup> Adam Leong Kok Wei  
<sup>[1]</sup> Malaysia Armed Forces Haigate Complex, <sup>[2]&[3]</sup> Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, <sup>[4]</sup> The National Defence  
University of Malaysia

<sup>[1]</sup> sirloinmcgrill75@gmail.com, <sup>[2]</sup> jjamaliah2@utm.guraduate.my, <sup>[3]</sup> zulhasni@utm.my, <sup>[4]</sup> adam@upnm.edu.my

**Abstract**— *The Western International Relations (WIRs) studies have been lauded for centuries owing to idealism innovation with all sorts of 'ism' (realism, liberalism, structuralism, internationalism, modernism, and imperialism) by various schools of thought with massive volumes of political studies aimed at re-creating the global order. But, regretfully, these WIRs have severely disregarded the International Relations (IRs) legacy of Al-Andalus with 800 years of the political establishment in Spain. Al-Andalus was Columbus's reason for the America continent's discovery right after it fell. Besides, it had inspired European Renaissance, and imperialism dreams revived political ideologies among the mixed heritage known as Graeco-Romanesque, Judeo-Arab (Shamsie 2016), but today, nothing except purely theological locus. This study attempt to analyse the International Relations IRs from industry weltanschauung based on the powerless nation case study. The analytical areal divided into sixth sub-topics: The critique over western IRs philosophy: The Integrative International Relations as holistic match: The Malaysia-China-US trade and bilateral relations: The South China Sea Economy and Biodiversity Worth: ASEAN as a Peacekeeper Guardian for the South China Sea (SCS) and South East Asia (SEA). The last section is about Malaysia's comprehensive bilateral and multilateral IRs. This study expects to provide new insight into IRs formulation for the benefit: political policymakers, strengthening WIRs and IRs academic world, thus equally beneficial to postgraduate students. Analytical review based on 120 selected articles written by field experts, security journalists, army people, international relations scholars (both from the Muslim and Western world), secret service representatives, newspaper testimony, and international organisations.*

**Index Terms**— *Malaysia, International Integrative Relations, Foreign Policy, Bilateral and Multilateral Relations, South East Asia, Middle-East, South China Sea, ASEAN, Jihad, New World Order.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The research is crucial to understand how smaller states tend to align or modify their behaviour in response to the acts of superpowers or how superpowers use their influence to determine the actions of smaller nations. The study will look at state behaviour in the context of how countries conduct international relations in the global community and world

politics. It will also investigate how a shift in a superpower's foreign policy may impact the approach of small nations. Besides, this study also examines how smaller countries execute their international defence ties considerations employed or influence international relationships. The findings of this study will be helpful to anyone interested in studying International Relations, Foreign Policy formulation, particularly military and intelligence policy. Examining selected literature would serve as the foundation for a more profound knowledge of the research topic and challenges. Likewise, it aims to discover potential gaps in prior literature and factors relevant to the investigated issue. Six themes identify for the assessment and evaluation.

The first subject will focus on the critique of Foreign Relations (FR) and International Relations (IR) Ideology. Next, the general nature of Malaysia-China economy bilateral relations and Malaysia-US ties and security collaboration. The third theme specifically discussed the South China Sea (SCS) economy and biodiversity worth that caused US-China severe-cold relations during and after the Trump administration. The fourth theme is how ASEAN continuously plays an influential role as guardians of Southeast Asia and the South China Sea sovereignty. A recommendation to Malaysia through ASEAN to effectively play a meaningful role as a peacekeeper and guardian of the South East Asia region and the South China Sea Sovereignty. Finally, the last sub-topic discussed Malaysia's holistic bilateral and multilateral foreign relations/approach. Later, the increase and decrease in activities, funding, or agreements could describe the impact on Malaysia's defence relations mechanism.

### II. RESEARCH METHOD/APPROACH TO THE STUDY

This research analyses the topic through a holistic, pragmatic self-study examining Malaysia's international and foreign relations concerning its defence and security. A trustworthiness content and thematic analysis (Elo et al. 2014), (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove 2016) & (Hecker, Wicke, Haklay, & Bonn 2019) which also known as hermeneutical approaches (Mayring, 2014) yet qualitative adopted throughout this study. A descriptive and exploratory way is used during articles preparation, organisation, and

reporting of the outcomes and findings. Articles compile in an inductive and deductive manner. Only relevant journals, books and publications were collected with a strict selection of unit analysis (review of the dataset) extracted and organised according to the study theme of International Relations IRs with sub-theme Political Relations PRs, Foreign Relations RFs and Defence Relations DRs.

The rigour, validity, reliability and trustworthiness were strictly safeguarded during the information and dataset identification process via thorough in-text referencing. While clarifying objectives and outcomes expectations through conceptualising topics and sub-topics, thematic attributed benefits and challenges. Example: Malaysia's IRs attributed toward the world's authoritative power (the US & China), how the IRs approach benefits Malaysia and the challenges faced by Malaysia concurrently in maintaining its IRs balance between the US and China. Finally, the dataset is examined and organised into primary and secondary topics (categorisation approach). The implicit theme may require only a brief description. In contrast, an abstract theme (to be understood beyond the written narration) requires an interpretation that must include classifying the IRs policy, comparing, defining or describing the theme, and connecting each theme (topic) to establish a new storyline and knowledge for the study.

The study's significant focus is on examining and analysing the current approach to Malaysia's bilateral and multilateral relations/cooperation between the US and China and emphasising relations' effectiveness to safeguard national sovereignty. Both relations have significant sensible yet sensitive evidence, limiting the application of the required data. The data and information gathered regarding the US may be limited to online published documents and written literature. The only possible primary source would be the US Defence Office in Kuala Lumpur and credible sources from International Relations & Security articles published via Google Scholars database. Some literature, especially official documents and statements of government departments discovered, can be biased in favour of official policies on both sides, and the writer needs to tread carefully in using these sources. The research will provide an intensive review based on the year 2000 onwards article—however, an exemption to several reports, particularly journals that provide top-secret data, including Malaysia's Defence White Paper 2020, is worth quoting.

### **III. THE CRITIQUE OF THE WESTERN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES AND THE NEED FOR INTEGRATIVE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Humans invented mainstream theories of Security, Foreign Relations as well as International Relations, as discussed in (Kolodziej 2005), (Mgba & Ukpere 2013) and (Kristensen 2018), providing meticulous yet mediocre alternatives to Realism, Neorealism, Liberal Institutionalism or Internationalism. Similarly, Post-structuralism, Neo-Marxism, International Political Economy, The English school & the European Union (Stivachtis 2013), The Copenhagen School, Modernism, Colonialism, Imperialism

(Tayyar 2018) and the like has been vastly studied and scrutinised through extensive sociology qualitative or quantitative approach either rely heavily on human behavioural phenomenon based on history or secondary data, otherwise, studied in analytic form through statistic or experimental evidence which frequently involved great power nations. Unfortunately, despite being the most studied field by international relations experts, the above mainstream hypotheses have failed to promote peace, unity, and equitable access to world resources, resulting in most nations worldwide still experiencing security shortfalls and extreme poverty today. Every day, many ethnic minorities face ongoing genocide and oppression. The significant dilemma of mainstream Security, Foreign Relations, and International Relations fundamentalism, those reductionists and conservatives, was due to the underlying sentiment within the theories domain. It fails to acknowledge the humanity realm nature that uniquely possesses social structures through belief system benchmark.

The majority of S, FR, and IR doctrines developed to support and promote the western way of public relations rather than to enhance diversity, honour, or at very least to reach a win-win bilateral or multilateral alliances between world power nations and vulnerable yet powerless countries. Oppression under the term of fighting terrorism as purportedly justified by western S, FRs, and IRs creeds yet openly show hostility toward Muslim individuals, community, and the nation as a means to justify killing has a long history in Islamic civilisation as well. The final messenger and prophet of monotheism teaching, Muhammad PBUH and his followers suffered constant hostility in Mecca. The prophet and his band of followers were compelled to flee Mecca for Medina due to a plan to assassinate him (An-Na'im 1987). However, after relocating to Medina, Muhammad PBUH established a first-ever International Relations (IRs) written treaty and seal between the Muslims and the Medina Jewish community. In order to advocate a global peaceful coexistence and respect for community human rights, a similar IR treaty was signed to regulate the relationship between Muslims and Christians both in Najran and Sinai (Alikhani 2016).

Today, the IRs theory known as hegemonic stability, as advocated by (Goh 2013), (N. M. Yazid, 2015) and (Tow 2016), may appear to provide persuading hedging, balancing, and bandwagoning of small nations into world power nations such as the United States or China for specific agendas. Nevertheless, it is still necessary for those countries to carefully select unilateral, internal balancing approaches or build up their defence mechanism capabilities as a deterrent power. In contrast, this hedging theoretically undermines the ability of so-called great power nations to manage their internal Covid19 problem by balancing their hegemonic creed efficacy. Alternatively, most small countries may choose alliance or close strategic partnership with advanced entities with a greater economy with good governance instead of relying heavily upon the relatively hard-power nations to safeguard their authority. As emphasised by (Thomas, Tutu, & Tutu 2005), any rebranding, whether in foreign policy or international relations, is cultural or public diplomacy, must take seriously the piety, the faith, and genuineness of people's religious convictions in other

countries, including the interpretation of life-holistic definitions for human right protection, governing natural law in connection with individual or family life. Therefore, practical strategy to foster and sustain the international collaboration of nations should be based on trust and peace-building diplomacy and encourage democracy for civil society and economic development, particularly in the poorest countries. Although most of Thomas & Tutu et al.'s friends passed the test of Orthodox Christian Doctrine, many nonetheless backed the Apartheid system. It is difficult to understand yet questionable why those God-fearing individuals believe in Apartheid and other murdering and genocide doctrines. Consider the Zionist Israel's continuous oppression of Palestinians, as well as the Communist-led ideological prosecution of Uyghur in Xinjiang, China. The Jews accused Hitler of the enormous number of Jews massacred in Germany during Second World War II, yet they outperformed Hitler in terms of barbaric behaviour (President Erdogan).

Currently, there are many IR actualities where both China and America breached other nations' autonomy or denied minorities group sovereignty. For example, the assassination of Qasem Soleimani during Trump's reign (The Guardian 2020), the US ongoing support of Israel Apartheid over Palestinians (Stephens 2003), (Soekarno & Utomo 2019), and (Zanotti 2016), and the PRC's ongoing oppression over Muslims Uyghur in Xinjiang Province (Mukherjee 2010), (Smith Finley 2007) & (Clarke 2015), as well as China business debt trap with small yet weak nations under the name of Bell Road Initiative or BRI. Furthermore, the continuous Zionist massacres and bombings over unarmed Palestinians and Palestine land, China's PRC's ongoing persecution of Uyghur minorities, and the ethnic cleansing of Myanmar Rohingya by the Burmese Junta Military (Ahluwalia & Toby 2018), (Dussich 2018) and (Anwary 2020) are all example how disastrous the consequence of secular S, FR and IR strategy. Fortunately, it has paved and forced a global civilisation to rethink, reconstruct, and redefine the epistemology and ontology of nation Security, Foreign or International Relations discipline focus that critically need to be reformed and transformed.

Likewise, it is no longer acceptable or naively overlooked or simply dismisses the role of the insignificant religion in the contemporary nation-state and its sovereign apparatus. Supposedly, the belief system should be part of the International Relations domain breadth, but repercussions of disregarding religion mean that Western IRs will soon be irrelevant to the world's 2.3 billion Muslims. It has become unavoidable to move beyond the field's narrowness yet broaden the scope of analysis to incorporate the new dynamics, including the spiritual resurrection of security foreign and international policy, notably to explain complex interaction between nations and communities (Sandal & James 2011). The problem with the western and secular way of international relations as felt and perceived by Muslims across the world today are due to the sense of injustice or western double standards concerning the Palestinians & Palestine (Berger & van Ham 2010). The western and communism IRs strictly uphold resolutions the international law, however, become more pathetic when it comes to Muslim countries but close their eyes when involving Israel

and Uyghur. These double standard relations make Muslims sharply aware, regardless of their nation's origin. To understand international relations in the Muslim world, it is equally critical to examine the religious soft power (Mandaville & Hamid 2018).

Today, liberalism as a normative basis of the international system has long demise due to too many uncertain events of other nations rising in the international arena. For example, IRs experts observe the rise of China, India, Turkey, and Indonesia, totally out of the post-Western world order. China is home to 1.5 billion communists. India is the cradle of Hinduism and Buddhism belief, while Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, along with the Nusantara archipelago are emerging Muslim authorities in the global arena. Additionally, other emerging niece IRs concerning religion are worth integrating into the new IRs world order for better and harmonious world relations. In the future, it is increasingly possible for the polity or countries to put a culturally specific spin on liberal economics and parse their security interests through religion. However, within the failure of US and European alliances in foreign relations across the Middle East and Afghanistan for the past two decades, none of the western or secular IRs has succeeded in resolving the Muslim world affair.

Therefore, it is crucial to revisit and discuss the International and Foreign Relations method through the Muslim worldview. As claimed by (Sheikh 2013), religion is re-emerging as a significant component in international conflict and can no longer be deniable by global civilisation. Conversely, it is critical to address Islamic theology in dealing with foreign relations and Islamic politics. The approach is simple; according to Islam principle, international relations politics works with the national system as long as the Muslim states administration forefront the needs of the wider Muslim community before an individual want. Islamic International relations consider universal principles by the Islamic Relief Organisation (Rahman 2018). The creed includes consists of six significant values, namely uphold monotheism: To prevail justice & freedom of nations (countries function freely without foreign intervention); human rights (as prescribed by Sharia law); equality (fair access to education, work and resources regardless of gender); social solidarity (minimised poverty & zero caste system), as well as sustainable vicegerent custodianship on earth.

In other words, Islam IRs obligatory to be developed from community solidarity ummah to form Muslims' way of standardised international relations. This methodology is firmly reinforced by (Mubarok & Candra 2020) with an idea of initiation over Islamisation on foreign relations or, in other terms, *Integrative International Relations*. The authors' ideal worldview was to harness and bridge Western weltanschauung IRs and Islamic discourse into a new scientific discipline to minimise the clashes between the civilisation itself. Similarly, (Mohammad 2006) accentuates any legal foundation of international relations in Islam, benchmarked through the Shari'a approach. The sources of Shari'a are the Quran and the Prophetic traditions (Sunnah). Derived from Shari'a is the Fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence, which covers the myriad of problems and issues that arise in the course of man's life. A book of good governance known as *Kitab Al-Imara*, book 20 of Sahih Muslim hadith

compilations from 4473 up to 4731, deals with human beings' character and international relations methodologies. The hadith book is easily accessible through the IUM portal written in the reference list at the end of this article. Human and International Relations in Islam highly regard peace, love, mercy, and compassion as the core principles of Muslims to enter or correspond to any international law on foreign relations. Peace (salam), love, mercy, and understanding are natural ranks that should prevail among nations and allow restoring to coercive means, military or non-military, only in self-defence and when international peace and security are threatening. The *jihad* that western IRs largely misunderstand precisely yet meticulously explained in the book of Jihad & Expedition or *Kitab Al-Jihad Wa'l-Siyar* via Sahih Muslim: Book 19. As endorsed by (Haynes 2021), Western IRs should incorporate religion into realism and liberalism in agreement with Fox & Sandal (2011). The authors now realised a critical need to accommodate the diverse ways of religion impacts international and foreign relations by adapting religion-friendly IRs analysis due to Islam's massive impact on the international arena. One of the superior outcomes is the discovery of different facets of religion, particularly Islam, and its cultural relations paradigm naturally is the central component of a novel theoretical understanding of International Relations. Faith system in most countries across the world, especially in the eastern hemisphere, increasing its significance, tools for political mainstream and nationalism relations despite remains an opaque element in the western hemisphere.

In comparison, Islam IRs may also fit into the neorealist liberal approach. Muslims as ummah are summoned to compete yet strive for self-development in terms of righteousness or promoting good deeds. Such exhibit behavioural relations are non-existence in the western world. Supposedly, those more developed Muslim countries assist the less developed Muslim nations that struggle with extreme poverty or calamities. However, unfortunately, the giant nations holding economic and military power prefer to seek and use their capability to invade or exercise direct intervention over the weak or powerless countries.

#### IV. THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIA INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS WITH CHINA AND THE US GOVERNMENT

##### A. Malaysia – China Economy and Bilateral Relations

Presently, Malaysia maintains an equidistant relationship with China and the United States. Malaysia's relations with the United States have progressed in the same way as its relations with China have. Malaysia's non-aligned movement or NAM strategy since 1971 (Wey 2017) has reaped significant benefits in terms of bilateral cooperation with the United States while also ensuring that the collaboration is in harmony with its diplomatic relations with China to avoid potential conflicts of interest. Diplomatically, Malaysia is developing its bilateral ties with China, despite continued disagreements over maritime sovereignty over the South China Sea (Parameswaran & Safe 2015), while adhering to regional principles and procedures to preserve its interests.

Malaysia's response to incidents in the South China Sea involving China has previously been strictly regulated and frequently communicated to Beijing in secret as rising nationalism among the public limits government options and risks the existing relationship, particularly during Najib's term. In response, Beijing has applauded Malaysia's government for taking a pragmatic approach over Terumbu Layang-Layang, Spratly's islands issue (Ganesan 2010: page 267), both privately and publicly, as well as treating it more favourable compared to Vietnam and the Philippines regarding the South China Sea disputes.

Conversely, Malaysia has sought to defend the unity of the ASEAN over the South China Sea rights by speaking out against unilateral adjustments of the status quo by hegemonic nations. As a result, China has emerged as an attractive FDI contributor, especially since the invention of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). During Najib Razak's tenure, China was Malaysia's largest investor, with investment closed to USD1.6 billion or 17.5 per cent of the nation's total Foreign Direct Investment (Liu & Lim 2019). The investment is mainly on a large-scale, capital-oriented mega infrastructure project. Currently, Malaysia-China indirect trade is approximately USD66.2 million via Singapore Port. In addition, the authors claim, China has also invested approximately 700 million indirectly through various Malaysian public and private agencies and firms linked to IMDB, as disclosed by the Wall Street Journal. However, contradicted to (Gerstl 2020), in 2019, Malaysia's FDI investment was USD7.6 billion, contributed mainly by Japan with USD2.5 billion, Hong Kong with USD2.1 billion, the Netherlands with USD927 million, and the US with USD647 million, while China invested only USD112 million. Additionally, Malaysia signed bilateral trade agreements with Australia, Chile, India, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, and Turkey and was actively involved in all ASEAN free trade agreements, including CAFTA.

Furthermore, China's capitalist aspiration known as *High-Speed Rail* (HSR) under the BRI initiatives or *One Belt, One Road* (OBOR) (Shah 2016) is being observed as a strategy for strengthening its authority over the Southeast Asian nations, not just the South China Seas alone, by implementing bilateral meetings with specific host nations rather than multilateral cooperation with ASEAN collectively. As argued by (Pavličević & Kratz 2018), (Oh 2018) and (Ziegelmeir 2020), such projects are exceedingly expensive yet unsustainable, yet it seems like *all roads lead to Beijing*. Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Indonesia, and even Malaysia are incapable of financing this too-good-to-be-true venture. The HSR budget has exceeded 80 per cent of Laos' GDP and elevated the country's external debt up to 125%. Therefore, it is certainly ill-advised to undertake this China's BRI scheme. Although China will finance the large-scale of the project, it is an unbearable long-lasting cost to any of the Southeast Asian nations for over-reliance on China as Sri Lanka already faces its consequences (Var & Po 2017), (Sautman & Hairong 2019) and (Haderiansyah, Habibah, Setiawan, & Hayat 2020) after fall into China debt trap. The high-speed rail projects allow China to impose its own *World*

*New Order*, particularly in Southeast Asia. Indonesia discovered that the HSR project is in grave danger after conducting a feasibility study on the Jakarta-Bandung train. As (Russel & Berger 2019) highlighted, China's BRI initiative-related projects were imposed through a series of corrupted bribery bilateral practices. Host countries are openly pressured to endorse the project memorandums of understanding, contracts, and related deal documents, effectively locking in the deals before due diligence occurs. Ignoring critical project design, feasibility, and financial issues exposes the project to significant risks and long-term challenges.

Haste to memorandum settlement deprives vital participants, such as local governments and stakeholders, preventing any opportunity to adequately assess the project's virtues, aims, costs, and ramifications for the host nations. The High-Speed Rail of China's BRI would undoubtedly incur enormous government debts due to its high lending rates (Chang, Deng, & Hwang 2019), posing a political and sovereignty risk to ASEAN countries, leaving Malaysia and Indonesia with no other alternatives except to terminate the HSR. Unfortunately, despite the good bilateral approach with PRC, China continues to encroach into Malaysia's maritime, SCS EEZ, and the Spratly Islands, as reported by the media and thoroughly recorded (Wong 2020). Between 2008 and 2013, 35 patrol ships entered Malaysia's South China Sea naval zone. On another occasion, China's coast guard and militia warships are regular spots at the Sarawak's coast known as Luconia Shoals (Beting Patinggi Ali). The most recent incident involved more than 100 China-registered vessels invading Malaysian seas and a Chinese ship tagging a Malaysian vessel in the disputed areas. As quoted by Wong, *The Malaysian government either acts diplomatically or keeps silent*. Therefore, there is a critical need for Malaysia to bolster its Royal Malaysian Navy, Royal Malaysian Air Force, and Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) to safeguard its sovereignty in Spratly Island, SCS EEZ, and its maritime frontiers.

In contrast, by expressing dissatisfaction with China's bullies and open aggression, outlandish claims of the *Nine-Dash Line* over the South China Sea (Sokolsky 2000), Spratly Islands, and Malaysia's EEZ in the SCS, indeed the most anticipated event (MINDEF 2020), as no previous Malaysian leader has been able to speak robustly about Malaysia's sovereignty over its SCS right. Additionally, Malaysia has terminated multiple contracts of 5G services from multiple China Conglomerates, signalling the end of the nation's pro-communist policies (Narang 2020) following the arrested of 600 China citizens in Malaysia over a foreign exchange scam fraud. As a precaution, Malaysia should be wary of China's government's Islamophobic treatment and mistreatment of its Muslim Uyghur minority, which transparently constitutes a violation of human rights (Abuza 2020). What guarantee does the PRC have that it can be trusted in long-term diplomatic ties if it can quickly and efficiently prosecute its citizens?

## **B. Malaysia – US Bilateral Relations and Security Collaborations**

Security practices and foreign relations between the United States and South East Asia began as early as 1954, after World War II, through the Southeast Asian Agreement or SEATO declaration. SEATO was signed by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan to prevent South East Asian regions from becoming communist countries. The British colonial was Malaysia's representative for the agreement before its independence in 1957 (M. N. M. Yazid 2014). Today, Malaysia-US defence collaborations statistic value valued SD35 million from 2000 to 2015, as revealed by (Ismail & Abadi 2019). The strategic cooperation aims to promote Malaysia-US interoperability in stem-to-stern domain awareness, including Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) collection to fusion and data dissemination, amphibious capabilities, disaster response & preparedness, and non-proliferation efforts. As described by (Siangyen 2016), Malaysia has a long history of constructive foreign relations with the US, particularly during Obama's reign. For example, in 2016, Obama visited Malaysia and presented USD2 million in assistance to help Malaysia to strengthen its maritime law enforcement capability. Particularly in combating illegal goods transshipment, ongoing Abu Sayyaf kidnapping and ransom threat along the East Coast of Sabah region, which borders the Philippines.

As reinforced by (Cheng-Chwee 2008) and (C. C. Kuik 2016), Malaysia needs to build strategic bilateral and defence links with both America and China to safeguard its sovereignty, prevent a crisis, and for hedging reasons, although in different capacities. The Malaysia-US military program collaboration aims to reduce risks and provide indirect balance by establishing and strengthening military alliances without directly or explicitly targeting any nation. On the other hand, Malaysia's defence cooperation with the US is critical to maximising diplomatic gains through multisector cooperative economic arrangements. According to (Coy 2005), the US National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP), through its National Security Strategy (NSS) and its National Guard (NG), is ready in lending support to the Regional Combatant Commanders' TSCP through the implementation of its security cooperation objectives with Malaysia. It is well verse among the NSS objective to foster global economic growth through free market or capitalism, free trade, and building infrastructure.

The US State Department's website claims Malaysia is a significant regional and global partner for the US. Therefore, Malaysia and US signatories to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, known as the TPPA trade treaty, became part of bilateral trade liberalisation (Fergusson, McMinimy, & Williams 2015) between Malaysia and the US that took place during Najib Razak and Barack Obama's reign (Mohamad Yusop 2017). The US is Malaysia's fourth-largest trade alliance, as noted by (O. E. Sun & Han, 2016). Signing the TPP enables Malaysia to secure US Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Undoubtedly, this Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP) paved good access for Malaysia

to enter ample trade opportunities and increased the country's exports of oil palm, rubber, and other electronic products.

In addition, the Malaysia-US FTA treaty's quantitative economic benefit certainly provides win-win trade gains for both nations (Jafari & Othman 2013) along with other exchange benefits. Unfortunately, during Trump's presidency, the US has withdrawn from the TPPA (Petri, Plummer, Urata, & Zhai 2017), which Obama initially started to counter China's BRI. Malaysia-US military to multilateral military exercises with Malaysia Armed Forces MAF and Royal Malaysian Police collaborations vary. These included: The US Navy Seventh Fleet's Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training or known as CARAT program: A multilateral exercise such as Cobra Gold, Cope Taufan, Keris Strike and Air Warrior exercises, the Bilateral Training and Cooperation or BITACG program (Finkbeiner 2013), the Demining and Related Programs (NADR) and the Second Line of Defense Mega Ports Initiative Sustainment Plan-Port Klang Malaysia (King 2009). These drills aided in the operational and bilateral development between the Malaysian armed forces and the United States military. In addition, the challenge for the Malaysia-US defence exercise program lay in its effectiveness in diminishing Beijing's Salami Tactic (Thompson, Pronk, & van Manen 2021). Authors revealed that China is well known for avoiding inciting military objections over its territorial claims across the SCS. Instead, China utilised its commercial fishing ships as proxies to drive ASEAN fishing fleets out of the disputed waters. When the South East Asian fishers try to resist, China's coast guard, the Marine Surveillance Agency, and Fisheries Law Enforcement Agency will suddenly appear on the scene to harass or even detain them.

Other Malaysia-US Military Education & Training collaborations include The Malaysia International Military Education and Training (IMET), the Foreign Military Sales Training, the Counter-Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP), and The Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies (APCSS) programs as updates from the US Defense Operation Office via US Embassy Kuala Lumpur website. Another non-military collaboration between the American Commission on Educational Exchange (MACEE) and Malaysia's Ministry of Education via the Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETA) English enhancement program for secondary schools across the nation. The security and military engagement examples demonstrate both governments' lengthy strategic alliance. These areas of cooperative security might serve as platforms to improve Malaysia-US collaboration on maritime. By increasing security ties with the United States, Malaysia's foreign policy options for dealing with crises such as the South China Sea conflicts might be good to prevent China's aggression across SCS.

Unfortunately, the US foreign policy is greatly motivated by hard power rather than soft power. There have been fewer resources dedicated to US soft power initiatives during G.W. Bush, Clinton, Obama, and even Trump administration reign. Besides, there is still scepticism over the United States' interest and commitment among ASEAN members

themselves, particularly in terms of regional security concerns that undoubtedly contribute to US challenges in restoring its diplomatic relations and a favourable image among ASEAN nations. The authors discovered the US foreign policy remained unaltered since World War II up to this present, heavily reliant upon military capability in its S, FRs and IRs policy (Cronin et al. 2012), continuously activity for *surrogate warfare* (Krieg & Rickli 2018) targeting particular countries that against US's aspiration and interest. There is still a significant disparity between hard and soft power resources allotted to the ASEAN region. The US cannot successfully elevate diplomacy other than demonstrating its complex power ability across SCS or offering standard foreign development funds, followed by small-scale exchange programs. Ideally, collaborations in terms of *Freedom of Sea* alluding to the South China Sea certainly needed a tight formation of security determination to be done collectively yet effectively by the ASEAN region with minimum intervention from China, the US, or other external entities.

In contrast, the US is encouraged to exercise soft power rather than hard power. Preferably, the Malaysia-US diplomatic relations enhance more through economic collaborations similar to Malaysia-China trade diplomatic relationship. (Rinehart 2015) reported Malaysia-US economy bilateral engagement has been long-established. In 2014, US FDI to Malaysia was reported at USD14.4 billion, while Malaysia's FDI to the US in the same year was USD809 million. However, the two-nation bilateral relationship slumped during the Trump administration, and the US was already a tortoise (20 years behind) compared to China's speed in international bilateral efforts. Malaysia export to the US mainly on human capital, professional & technical services, medical apparatus & surgical instruments, rubber-based products, optical and cinematographic appliances. Therefore, there is a valid argument to rejuvenate the Malaysia-US bilateral relations in a sincerer or holistic platform for the benefit of both nation citizens rather than a benefit to the president or prime minister alone.

Currently, as suggested by (Mazza 2018), the US and the EU patrol vessels can be effectively well-positioned across SCS maritime trade routes or along with the disputed Spratly Islands and ASEAN *Economic Exclusive Zones borders*. A maritime patrol aircraft will constantly monitor incidents in contested areas while tracking Chinese submarines hiding in and transiting the SCS. The United States is best positioned to initiate regional maritime domain awareness through multilateral collaboration directly with ASEAN, particularly with nations with unresolved UNCLOS disputes with China. Participating ASEAN members would contribute their Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to the network, and critical nations would have access to a unified operational framework. The US may offer assistance to thus currently less capable countries in enhancing their ISR assets. In addition, this network could aid in collecting data and testimony regarding China's bullying and provocative policy in the SCS disputed territory, which would be extraordinary evidence to present to the

UNCLOS tribunal.

However, to the best of its abilities, the US may refrain from direct intervention over the disputes instead of striving for goodwill balance between the above policies certainly contribute to Asian regional stability and conflict prevention as affirmed by the United Nations. The current statistic from the Pew Research survey on global sentiments toward soft power post-Trump's election, the United States' favourability rating decreased dramatically to 8.39% in 2020, as recorded by its Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity (FBIC) index. Even though referred to as a *wounded giant* due to Trump's Islamophobic relations strategy (Wike, Fetterolf, & Mordecai 2020), the US enjoys a slightly higher favorability rating on a global scale than China. 54% of communities worldwide view the USA more positively, while only 40% said China is more constructive, according to the poll. In terms of global perception, 63% of global perception prefer the US as a hegemonic authority rather than China (19%). Henceforth, these hegemonic nations are unfavourable to almost all Muslim countries due to their systematic Islamophobia philanthropic network (Derghal 2019) and continuously oppressing Muslims worldwide.

## V. SOUTH CHINA SEA (SCS) ECONOMY, BIODIVERSITY WORTH, AND ASEAN AS PEACEKEEPER GUARDIAN OF SOUTH EAST ASIA MARITIME SOVEREIGNTY

### A. *The South China Seas (SCS) Maritime, Economy, And Biodiversity Worth*

The SCS maritime, economy, natural resources, and underwater biodiversity value are the primary reasons SCS has emerged as one of China's main interests in its International Relations arena. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) testifies it in (Dossani et al. 2016) economic-value estimations throughout the SCS nearshore zones. They comprise about 11 billion barrels of oil reserves and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proven and probable reserves. The China Ministry of Land and Resources quote SCS reserved more than ten basins worth of oil reserves, covering approximately 852 240 Square Kilometres'. This God-Made resource is almost half of the entire continental shelf in the SCS. The Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) revealed that the SCS underwater investigation resources report confirmed the SCS holds around 125 billion barrels of oil and 500 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in undiscovered resources.

Among areas identified as oil reserves spots are the North Borneo (Sabah, Malaysia), two other oilfields on the continental shelf in Southern Vietnam, oilfields in Malampaya gas field of Palawan northwest in the Philippines, oil reserves in Tonkin Gulf in two neighbouring blocks of Vietnam SCS area, and Natuna gas field within the Indonesia SCS locality operated by Exxon, plans to serve Singapore through a pipeline. In addition, China owns the huge Yacheng gas field in South Hainan Island and currently provides gas through undersea pipeline channels to market

energy in Hong Kong and Guangzhou (Tønnesson 2002). Within the undisputed area of SCS, several joint venture oil corporations belong to South East Asia nations that had ongoing oil rig activities, such as the Camago & Malampaya, northwest of Palawan. The company gas field started its operation in 2002. While the Natuna gas field of Exxon, Indonesia has formed a joint-venture with Singapore and is in the progress of underwater pipeline development. Additionally, the Central Luconia gas field in Sarawak, Malaysia and the Vietnamese Lan Tay and Lan Do gas field operated by BP are in joint-venture with an Indian oil company is known as ONGC and PetroVietnam thus began in the year 2000, as reported by the Offshore Magazine news (2013) and the South China Sea Expert Working Group (2018) in Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

In another discovery by (Zhang 2018) and (Kaharuddin 2020), the SCS served as a critical chokepoint for international shipping lanes transporting trading goods worldwide, amounting to USD5.3 trillion annually. More than 11 maritime routes of SCS used for international shipping lanes transporting goods worth USD5.3 trillion per year. The Spratly Islands alone were a sanctuary of reef fishes and vital pelagic and generated economic value of USD39 to USD60 million per km<sup>2</sup> annually. The southeast Asia region accounts for 12 per cent of the global landing catch or roughly 10 million tonnes of fish per year. It is a home and living resource to almost 8 million people who live in the coastal area. They produced over 8 million metric tons of marine product or equivalent to 23% contribution to the region annually. Besides, Vietnam and Thailand ranked as the world's top five fishery exporters behind China in 2014. The Fish industry economy in the South China Sea is a source of southeast Asian foreign exchange earnings with a projected net value of 36.9 million tons in 2030, will reach 47.1 million tons in 2050, and ranking fourth among the world's 19 fishing zones for total marine goods production. Unfortunately, this once diverse marine ecosystem had been severely overexploited and overfished due to disputes.

Conversely, according to (Ness 2002) South China Seas was worth disputing due to its 30 per cent sanctuary uniqueness of the world's coral reefs found only in SCS maritime. Its underwater diversity is exceptional due to being a nursery and breeding habitat for 12 per cent of the world's total fish harvest. The South China Sea contains enormous coral reefs of any tropical sea, with the Spratly islands being significantly distinct in reef richness and coral composition (Arai 2015) and (Huang et al. 2015) as well as contributing around 30 per cent of Malaysia's total catch and 25 per cent to the Philippines. The commercial activity and productive ecosystems for coral reefs, mangroves, and estuaries are mainly in the coastal area of SCS. The coast population accounts for nearly 70% of the Southeast Asian population, equivalent to 270 million people, or around 5% of the world population.

Meanwhile, the seagrass is the cornerstone of many complex marine ecosystems and serves as a critical nursery for economically significant crabs, prawns, or other sea resources and holds sediment to the seafloor, preventing

erosion. The estuaries and wetlands are frequently associated with river deltas and coastal locations where land meets the sea. Mangrove forests, swamps, and fens are examples of such habitats. Usually, wetlands or estuaries serve as nursing grounds for fish, crabs, and seasonal homes for migrating birds. They also retain nutrients, prevent erosions, and are utilised in aquaculture and agriculture. For example, South-East Asia holds 33 per cent of world coral reefs (Arthington, Dulvy, Gladstone, & Winfield 2016), with an annual worth estimated at USD190.726 million contributed via the South China Sea.

### **B. ASEAN as a Peacekeeper Guardian of South East Asia and SCS Maritime Sovereignty**

ASEAN's founding declaration urged its member countries to follow the rule of law, uphold justice, and observe the United Nations Charter. ASEAN's goal was to accelerate South East Asia's peace and stability through political understanding, encourage positive inter-relations, sustain a multilateral practice over friendship essence, collaborative efforts, and sacrifice for the region's peace, freedom, and prosperity (Roy 2013) & (Mangku 2017). The 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) established the following:

1. Respect and appreciation for all nations' independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, & nationality identity;
2. The right of each regional member to lead its national existence free from foreign influence, perversion, or threat of violent intervention;
3. Non-interference in each other's domestic affairs and preference for peaceful resolution over any disputes or settlements;
4. The abstention of any threat or coercion instead encourages cooperation among ASEAN members.

Having said that, it is a clear breach of agreement among ASEAN nations to allow China to participate in bilateral negotiations to serve China's agenda, whereby the BRI itself transparently represents China's aspiration to boost its political power and geopolitical influence in order to restructure the *New World Order Doctrines* (Dupuy 2019). The ASEAN association is highly focused on regional multilateral relations based on cooperation, a win-win approach, and promoting peace, unity, and reciprocated understanding. Moreover, almost all ASEAN nations are members of the Non-Aligned Movement NAM (Abdullah 2020). Therefore, any conflict occurrence linked to ASEAN's interest will be a channel through a diplomatic medium and, at its best, negotiate without hard-power involvement. Unfortunately, an increase of unknown risks plus so many conflicting national interests and rivalries between ASEAN themselves are the great hindrances to unity against China (Wey 2017). The ADMM-Plus convention has approved five areas of future practical cooperation and established the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Plus (ADSOM Plus) to implement its decisions. The ADSOM Plus managed to set up five Expert Working Groups, each co-chaired by an ASEAN and non-ASEAN affiliation known as The

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (Vietnam and China), The Maritime Security (Malaysia and Australia), The Military Medicine (Singapore and Japan), The Counter-Terrorism (Indonesia and the United States), and The Peacekeeping Operations (the Philippines and New Zealand). Unfortunately, as debated (Thayer, 2011), the ASEAN Defense Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) treaty with a joint declaration to strengthen ASEAN regional defence, security and cooperation through practical conduct among ASEAN entities will soon become just regional rhetoric. The South-East Asia region scenario requires ASEAN to effectively address the Covid19 pandemic severity impact, the regional globalisation aspiration, and the socioeconomic gap within the ASEAN community. In particular, ASEAN needs multilateral collaboration to produce ASEAN's currency while actively engaging a constructive role in discovering opportunities for regional trade, upgrading ICT, eradicating poverty, and minimising internal conflict as IRs cohesiveness priorities.

As revealed by (Fravel 2011), China is well known for its *Diplomatic Delay Strategy* in its foreign and international relations. China keeps emphasises its international policy as open to negotiations as well as ready for more meaningful and peaceful means about the SCS disputes. Unfortunately, China calls for bilateral talks, not multilateral dialogue with South East Asian countries about the UNCLOS SCS settlement. China certainly knows the ASEAN reticence to accept its ridiculous *Nine-Dash Line* term. Therefore, China can pretend to engage in dialogue by deferring the settlement of the disputes and delaying the time to consolidate its claims. It is about time for ASEAN countries to stand firmly in unity on their SCS UNCLOS sovereignty by taking a practical and pragmatic stance to prevent maritime boundary conflicts that might jeopardise ASEAN socioeconomic interests (Salil 2012). China stubbornly stands for its unlawful claim over 12 nautical miles' territorial Spratly islands within Malaysia's sovereignty.

China has no right to claim the water surrounding Vanguard Bank in Vietnam, Luconia Shoals in Malaysia territory, Waters in Brunei's EEZ surrounding, and Natuna Besar Island in Indonesia. Beijing's harassment of other ASEAN's fishing or hydrocarbon development inside the region compound was unlawful yet must treat as a trespasser by the South East Asian community. Similarly, China has no lawful territorial or maritime claim over James Shoal, a submerged feature barely 50 nautical miles from Malaysian territory but 1,000 nautical miles from China's coast. The Beijing propaganda telling its citizens that James Shoal is China's Southernmost territory indicated greediness, insensitivity, and bullying relations with the powerless nation. The world definitely will not allow China to treat the SCS as its maritime empire (O'Rourke 2020).

Therefore, to balance China's aggression in SCS, the ASEAN nations must establish allies or engage in multilateral talks with any country that utilises the South China Sea as their regular maritime trade route. It is urged to the international community throughout the world to join hands with Asian nations to impose protection of the



Freedom of Sea Navigation by United Nations, FONOPs Freedom of Navigation Operation (Brands & Cooper 2018). Besides, China must learn to respect regional sovereignty, including ASEAN rights to offshore resources. Malaysia should consistently refuse China's borderline extremist acts of arbitrary authority in the South China Sea. Instead of selecting the best possible hedging policy, South East Asia would be far more effective in compromising into a collective multilateral soft balancing engagement policy with both the authoritative powers. According to the ASEAN Integration Report (2019), Industrial Revolution 4.0 has been a strong indicator in establishing a highly integrated and cohesive economy within ASEAN (Menon, Todd, Hashim, & Alias 2019). As a result, ASEAN could fully leverage its competitiveness, innovativeness, and diligent efforts to foster socioeconomic alliances with the European continent, Canada, Latin America, and South Africa as a constructive hedge against potentially aggressive Chinese dominance in the region and the South China Sea.

A standpoint made by (Ozturk 2021), International Relations IRs from the perspective of religious soft power has increasingly become a prime concern on a global scale. Religion soft power merits substantial research and comprehensive coverage due to the influx growth of the Muslim community across the world. Islamic IR's authority is constituted based on a monotheism belief system, universal law principles, human dignity preservation, acknowledgement of religious diversity, and the rejection of racism (Navvab & Aliakabri 2013). These Islamic IRs can be constructive or destructive instruments for any nation depending on its administration as an influence mechanism in foreign relations.

As confirmed by (Ozkan & Chatterjee 2019), cultural and religious elements frequently provide distinct strategic viewpoints to justify the nation's action, incorporated under its framework with unique values based on historical contexts. These factors are definitely inherited from Islam's intellectual cultural legacy, vary throughout the period, and geographical location, yet have profoundly affected the Muslim world countries' global strategy. Without a doubt, Islam theology has a long history of impacting how Muslim governments reflect on and respond to their foreign and international relations to accomplish national and global interests. As a result of Islamic IRs, none of the Muslim nations today have advanced destructive weaponry, although both US and China are fiercely competing to show off their military deterrence.

## VI. THE US SECURITY & FOREIGN RELATIONS IN MIDDLE-EAST

### A. *The US Failed Relations in the Middle East*

The solid reason why ASEAN should avoid hedging against the US was its foreign relations in the Middle East. America abused the *democracy* terminology, *fighting terrorism* and *Islamophobia* as its only weapon to protect its economic interest and justified its agenda igniting a persistent grievance bolstered by the notion that the Middle East and the Muslim world generally have been invaded hence violated by

the Western ideology. The US unwavering support for Israel, along with Zionist ongoing enormous massacres of Palestinians and authoritarian practices by Arab governments, plainly demonstrate that the US hegemonic mission has crippled its prospects in the Middle East (Dalacoura 2010). By being a persistent role in the US-Israel nexus, the US's hidden agenda has been heavily inspired by Israel's theological beliefs. The advent of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century culminated in the Israel State's illegal proclamation in Palestinian land known as Belfour 1948 treaty. Since then, the Jewish and Christian communities have significantly shaped US foreign policy. The role of Israel's theology in US IRs historically has been classified into three aspects; the impact of domestic policies on American policymakers' calculations; the prominence of the Middle East in US diplomatic and strategic thinking; each policymaker's beliefs and behaviour or religious judgments as well as an assessment over the significant theological benchmark among US citizen. All of this is explicitly confirmed by (Aliboni 2011) and (Hummel 2019).

Multiple IRs works by (Stephens 2003), (Yazdani 2019) and (Cole 2020) disclosed United States' decision to maintain sanctions against Iran throughout the coronavirus outbreak has further deepened Iran's bilateral relationship with China due to the possibility of the US Treasury Department third-party sanctions on European banks and enterprises conducting business with Iran has hampered Iran's trade with Europe. Therefore, Iran has increasingly resorted to China since 2018. In 2019 alone, Iran traded over USD20 billion in business exchange with China, which accounted for 20 per cent of all Iranian exports and 25 per cent of its imports. In return, China had provided approximately 40 tons of medical aid to Iran during the Covid19 pandemic in March 2020, entirely disregarding the US embargo. The United Nations tons of appeals to lessen the Trump administration's sanctions campaign against Iran's economy amid the pandemic crisis and to allow Iran access to the resources to mitigate its Covid19, but unfortunately, the US remained defiant. Instead, the US has repeatedly resurrected the cliché issue over Iran's nuclear program. While the United States remains a great power, including in the Middle East, it has reached the end of its hegemonic control and is no longer relevant to 2.3 billion Muslims today. The US has had two costly wars and invasions of two Muslim nations, Afghanistan and Iraq. As quoted by Trump, '*We have spent seven trillion dollars in the Middle East, and we have nothing except death and destruction*'. As heightened by (Zannettou et al. 2019), the cyberwar further intensified via Twitter platforms over anti-US sentiment among Iranian, with the most prominent hashtags such as *Delete Israel* and *Free Palestine*.

The Pew Research Centre (H. H. Sun 2008) uncovered considerable scepticism regarding the motivations behind the US-led war on terrorism, as much as the Muslims throughout the world doubted US liberty and democracy as synonymous with corruption, sex, and violence propagated through Hollywood products. Soft power will have diverse consequences in nations with varied political and cultural norms. Hollywood films, for example, are greatly loved in

Western society, while are undesirable in major Muslim countries due to differing values, behaviours, and belief systems. The Bush administration perceived the Iraq War success narrative as being based on reconstructing Germany and Japan after World War II. The US perceived overthrowing Saddam Hussein's government as a step toward long-term transformation in the Middle East. However, the Bush analogy neglected the reality that Iraq's political conduct and practices differ from Germany or Japan. The cultural diversity is significantly greater between the US, European nations, and the Middle Eastern. Therefore, the economic and social environments are massively diverse. Supposedly, the US strategy and soft power should be different too. The anti-US attitude has become complicated in political discourse (Baxter & Akbarzadeh 2012: Page 15). The Anti-US sentiment is a complex social and political mindset that infuses the global community's political landscape regardless of their nation or nationality. For decades, public perception of the US has been severely negative and worsening during Trump's administration due to his Islamophobia controversial policy.

A warfare proxy is a third party's indirect intervention in war to influence the conflict's strategic outcome (Safak & Çelik 2018). Surrogate warfare by proxy is not a new phenomenon in US international relations. Proxy warfare has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions of people both domestically and abroad. The Syrian war might be described as anarchic surrogate warfare (Mumford 2013) because of the growing yet widespread broad network engagement, seeking maximalist self-interests and coercive goals. Probably this most ungentlemanly warfare ever committed by the Western world against powerless nations around the world is just a rebranded form of special task force inherited from past nations such as the Greeks (Spartans), Persians (Nizaris), Chinese emperors (Sun Tzu's art of war), and Japan (ninjas) (Kok Wey 2019) – the ugliest form of security and foreign policy practice. A battlefield warfare proxy has resulted in an enormous cost to the US worldwide, particularly in the Middle East. While it has allowed the US to exert limited regional influence cheaply in terms of political, financial, and human lives, it has severely damaged the US claims to be a democratic authority ready to take any measures to influence global events. Things deteriorated after the Trump administration authorised the strike that killed Soleimani in early January 2020 (Rauta 2020). The US has lost control and oversight, has been unable to recast conflicts, and its inability to develop long-term sustainable and trustworthy policies has weakened its position as the world-leading force.

List of Proxy Warfare Adopted by the US (Obama Term)	
1	Iran as a proxy in the war against ISIS in Iraq (2014 – 2015) - Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps under General Soleimani provided a necessary ground complement to US-led strikes against ISIS positions in Iraq

2	US military assistance delivered to Arab allies in Egypt, Jordan and Gulf nations (2011) - During the US invasion in Libya, the US provided key capabilities to allies in the air and granted Qatari & UAE armed forces tacit approval to train and equip Libyan rebel forces on the ground. *
3	US provided USD5 million of non-lethal weapons & other military equipment, training and financial support to Gulf countries to act as US proxy to Syrian Rebel Forces in their fight against the Assad regime (2012 - 2014). *
4	The US provided logistic and intelligence support to Middle-East allies under Operation Decisive Storm to fight against Yemen revolutionary troops (2015).
5	US special forces provided training and support in Northern Iraq to support Kurdish Peshmerga fighters to be surrogates to fight against ISIS militants. *

**Extracted from: (Krieg 2016) and (Krieg & Rickli 2018)**

\* US utilised conventional airpower platforms that can quickly eliminate the enemy from high altitude alongside armed drone technology, with significant effects on US kinetic involvement in the Middle East. For example, UCAVs were utilised in the war against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Al-Qaeda in Yemen, and the Al-Shabaab group in Somalia.

### **B. Malaysia's Holistic Bilateral and Multilateral Approach at the Global Scale**

Malaysia's FR and IR strategic framework priority elements included security, economic well-being, and friendliness (E. Noor 2019) as a medium to pave economic collaboration with every country (an exception to Israel) regardless of ideologies and trade accessibility to the world marketplaces. Malaysia relies heavily on international business to develop its nation. Its ultimate goals have been economic well-being, identity, and preservation of social harmony and unity for a decade. Malaysia fully utilises its bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to promote and safeguard its sovereignty and national interests by expanding collaboration or access to technology, finance, and other economic resources. This strategic technique seeks to influence other nations' intentions yet restrain potentially harmful organisations (Sullivan 2014). Malaysia's multilateral efforts mainly focused on ASEAN while effectively fulfilling its duty as a United Nations member, expanding its partnerships with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other Non-Aligned Movement countries. As for the security front, Kuala Lumpur emphasises the Five Power Defense Arrangements with Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.

Malaysia's first-ever Defence White Paper strongly emphasises defending the nation's maritime interests. Among concerns in the bilateral relationship with China are the Spratly island, the South China Sea dispute, and China's oppression of its Muslim Uyghurs population in the autonomous region of Xinjiang. Similarly, as asserted by

(Gerstl 2020), Malaysia views navigation freedom overflight across the South China Sea as a globally vital sea line of communication, as important as a maritime trading nation, yet highly significant to Malaysia. Furthermore, Malaysia is taking a pragmatic approach to its foreign policy in balancing China. The US alliances for both hedging powers contributed equally to the nation's direct and indirect benefit, particularly in bilateral economic collaboration, security and social relations.

Malaysia's bilateral efforts toward the US and China's practical aims are for win-win collaboration to maximise harmonious relations with the hope that China will stop betraying Malaysia's SCS sovereignty. At the same time, the United States will be genuinely honest in providing the ICT security equipment to monitor piracy, smuggling, and kidnapping for ransom along the Borneo coast maritime. It is an aspiration for the world citizen in general and Malaysian to witness these two adversaries be more tolerant, considerate, yet respectful toward smaller nations across the globe. It is unquestionably the ideal time for the United States and China to put their egos aside and build a new world order that has been damaged and tarnished by a series of war crimes, human rights violations, and minority oppression for more than a century. Only by ending greed for the earth's natural resources, which both unwillingly sacrifice, can international relations be restored to harmony.

Consider the contemporaneous South China Sea dispute, where the power imbalance between Malaysia and China is visible. Aside from militarising its artificial islands, the number of China ship intrusions into Malaysia's Exclusive Economic Zones EEZ rose dramatically after 2013. The United Nations CLOS Tribunal verdict over China's large-scale land reclamation and construction of artificial islands as seven features in the Spratly islands, which are clearly within Malaysia's EEZ, found China had caused enormous damage to the coral reef environment and had violated its obligation to preserve, and protect fragile or endangered species biodiversity. The UNCLOS Tribunal also ascertained that Chinese authorities were aware that endangered sea turtles, coral, and giant clams were being harvested on a massive scale in the South China Sea (using methods that cause severe damage to the coral reef environment) and had failed to comply with their obligations to cease such activities (O'Rourke 2015). Previous Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahiaddin, ended the PRC's monopoly on the nation's economy by signing a trade collaboration with US-Microsoft USD1.7 billion in January 2021 (Mastura, Kalsom, Tangit, & Mohd 2013). Mahiaddin's diversifying bilateral approach was notable for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) from different countries. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) revealed that the US, Singapore, and Ireland are the top three FDI contributors to Malaysia, amounting to a combined value of approximately USD4.1 billion in 2020.

Similarly, the US holistic goal for the Asian region is to ensure the region remains free and open. Therefore, to accomplish the objective, the US may have to prioritise working with the ASEAN bordering maritime chokepoints, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, and

Vietnam, due to its strategic maritime trade in Malacca Strait and the South China Sea specified the US defence goals for promoting security and stability in Southeast Asia preventing China from establishing dominance in the South China Sea (SCS). However, developing a military partnership and alliances with the ASEAN required US soft power ability instead of hard power, given that the region was home to almost 350 million Muslims. From the Asian perspective, the US was not in favour of hedging due to the US's unfavourable track record in dealing with Muslim countries in the Middle East and South Asia. The US Islamophobia campaign under the name of 'terrorism' after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre claims to be misleading by most Muslim nations. Terrorists, according to the US Foreign Relations lexicon, are a war against Islam. The United States' discriminatory foreign policy toward Muslim countries has sparked outrage among the world's 2.3 billion Muslims. As argued by (Initiative 2009), The US is in a critical position to acknowledge its foreign relations impact on ASEAN Muslim nations, particularly Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia. United States policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict carries a negative perception due to its discriminatory IRs policy when it involves the rights of Muslim Nations. US's continuous support of Israel's aggression and apartheid regime over Palestinian spark anti-US-Israel sentiment across the globe that can hinder future military collaboration between the US and the countries. Additionally, China's ongoing oppression over its Muslim Uyghur in Xinjiang province confirms these two nations are unfavourable for Muslim countries to hedge with.

Malaysia is a nation fiercely opposed to any form of war yet prefers to maintain its status quo as a non-aligned movement country. The Ministry of Defense White Paper is an ideal aspiration of Malaysia and its citizens to stand distinctively united in defending its sovereignty. The Malaysian believe every human soul does deserve to live in freedom while bonded to the world's Law of the Universe. As a high tolerance society, Malaysia is firmly opposed to evil acts such as massacre, indiscriminate killings, genocide, and any other form of human rights violation under the name of racist, arrogant, greedy doctrines embraced by western counterparts. Thus, neglecting the teaching of hereafter life existence belief, embraced by almost all world theological, agreeing that death is inevitable for humanity.

On the contrary, a recommendation for US military engagement and security cooperation with Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam encourages China's prolonged aggressiveness in South East Asia's SCS maritime zones. The US military engagement and security collaboration with the ASEAN region offers the possibility of countering China's hostility, notably with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, due to its utmost geopolitical strategic location and maritime nations. Increased naval exercises and oceanographic collaboration between ASEAN and US will aid in reducing China's aggressiveness and monopolistic policies over the South China Sea resources. Open collaboration with Indonesia regarding the Natuna Sea will undoubtedly help highlight China's aggressive behaviour across SCS. On the other hand, Thailand has no claimants

over SCS and certainly refuses to collaborate with the US (Lin et al., 2020).

Moreover, harnessing Malaysia's membership in the Five Power Defense Arrangements (Emmers 2013), which includes Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, by recommending new channels of cooperation with the US will assist in balancing China's presence in the ASEAN region. As accentuated by (Mauzy & Job 2007), the US is well known for bullying foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East. The US invasion in Iraq, supporting Israel's Zionist Apartheid plus conducting surrogate warfare, has seriously damaged its foreign relations by undermining the norms of sovereignty, territoriality, and non-interference without UN approval, as witnessed by southeast Asian nations. Consequently, it will be difficult for the US to pave and re-established a long-term diplomatic engagement with the Southeast Asia community, notably Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and Southern Thailand. Instead of requesting a military presence in ASEAN, the US may focus on future economic collaboration or security equipment supplies. It has a significant opportunity to enhance its foreign policy toward South East Asia, given the fact the region had received USD 329 billion of US investment in 2018, surpassing FDI contributions from China, Japan, India, and South Korea combined, as well as supporting half a million jobs for US employment (Singh 2020).

Malaysia may diversify its S, FRs, and IRs benchmarks, by expanding through agricultural commodities to boost its diplomatic relations with India, the European Union, Pakistan, and Turkey (Kushairi et al., 2019). Malaysia Crude Oil Palm can be an instrument source for the development of diplomatic relationships with the Middle East, Canada, Latin America, and even with the African continent, given the term and conditions of relevant environmental sustainability concerns (F. M. M. Noor, Gassner, Terheggen, & Dobie 2017) pertaining the commodity raised by the respective councils have carefully addressed. From the researcher's perspective, Malaysia exercises unclear direction in its international and foreign relations when the US and China are engaged. Malaysia's IRs, FRs, and Defence and Security approach appear heavily impacted by the country's leadership and the Ministry of Defence minister in charge of political will. Despite Malaysia's alignment with the non-aligned movement (NAM), its foreign relations favour capitalism and socioeconomic gain in certain circumstances. However, Malaysia's multilateral relationship with its ASEAN counterpart is remarkable; its goodwill strategy as an ASEAN buddy works efficiently in numerous dynamic contexts due to ASEAN members' shared vision of harmony, equality, and cohesiveness. As agreed by (Hu 2021), with the ASEAN-driven approach, Malaysia will be more effective in managing disputes over SCS.

Finally, Malaysia International Relations appears to match the *Integrative International Relations* concept of jihad position for striving and remaining steadfast in balancing the hedging effort toward both authoritarian powers – the US and China. Malaysia needs to begin promoting the holistic understanding of jihad that Western society has severely misinterpreted for decades. According to western secular

relations scholars, jihad refers solely to *combat-mode*, a purely military or militant activity linked to the Arabs world (Hoskins & O'Loughlin 2011), (Bousquet 2012). Jihadists, as defined by (Hegghammer 2013) and (D'Angelo 2016), are Muslim fighters referred to as domestic or international terrorists who against western on a large scale was purportedly by western *weltanschauung* as a means for them to justify genocide and to kill over Muslims or to invade the Muslim nations across the world, particularly in Middle-East and across the globe. The truth is the western conception of jihad is erroneous, built based on faulty assumptions without referring to authentic Islamic teaching.

Whereby according to *International Integrative Relations*, Jihad is striving to protect national sovereignty from foreign invasion, struggling to avoid war, knowing that war will cause extreme damage to the nation, and remaining steadfast in conducting multilateral, bilateral, or international relations with foreign countries, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim nations, with peace and compassion (AbuSulayman, 1993). To a certain extent, Muslim political and international relations scholars have a fundamental responsibility to remain persistent in establishing Islamic Integrative Relations strategies to reduce the continual western polemic of misinterpreted and misguided the Jihad meaning in a holistic manner. Therefore, Malaysia holds a great responsibility to revolutionise and reverse this misunderstanding perception that has severely festered western nations, communities, and generations for centuries. Furthermore, Malaysia bears a significant obligation to uphold its Jihad endurance and steadfastness in balancing its hedging effort and strategy between the US and China and preventing the nation from becoming Middle-East of Asia.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the Muslim world considers the western Security, Foreign and International Relations paradigm troublesome. Moreover, there are issues with international law and human rights within this sphere created by western tradition. Similarly, after thoroughly assessing the literature, the present significant world power has concluded that Western international relations are transparently biased in favour of its national interests rather than global benefits. As posited by (C.-C. Kuik 2021), developing countries in Southeast Asia or Malaysia can remain neutral to safeguard their national security, prosperity, and autonomy even though the result may vary depending on which policy might best preserve the policy and prioritised. Choose to hedge with the US might risk becoming the second Middle East, yet reliance on China will cost the nation's security pawned. The slightest challenge in autonomy is expanding the strategic alliances within ASEAN nations, except Myanmar, due to its internal anarchy.

Nonetheless, the continuous period of the Covid19 pandemic across the world in 2021 has opened up new avenues for research. The once-ignored existential threat of infectious illnesses has awakened many of our eyes and changed our perspectives on how it might impact globalisation and establish new standards in human

interaction. Furthermore, it would be fascinating to see how contagious illnesses such as Covid19 might change the way countries undertake security cooperation. Lastly, the post-pandemic uncertainty and prolonged consequences of war or an invasion of particular countries may be a possible recommendation for future research.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Author2 acknowledged the FRGS/1/2021/SS02/UTM/02/16 for partially financing the fee of IFERP-ICMDRSE 2022 Conference Kuala Lumpur. The authors declared have no conflict of interest that would prejudice the impartiality of this scientific work. Authors recognised the Google Scholars articles alert, multiple feedback from the Malaysia Armed Forces Defence College (MAFDC) students, lecturers @cohort 2021 and LSA Academic House Kota Kinabalu, Borneo via email & Short Messaging System. Feedback for this article kindly emailed to Cdr Mohd Harris Sadi RMN sirloinmcgrill75@gmail.com or Jamaliah Jamil at jjamaliah2@graduate.utm.my

#### REFERENCES

- Abdullah, K. (2020). Malaysia's role in invigorating NAM's Bandung spirit. *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies*, 40(1).
- AbuSulayman, A. (1993). *Towards an Islamic theory of international relations: new directions for Islamic methodology and thought* (Vol. 1): International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT).
- Abuza, Z. (2020). Malaysia: Navigating between the United States and China. *Asia Policy*, 27(2), 115-134.
- Ahluwalia, P., & Toby, M. (2018). The Rohingya crisis: another failure of the international system. In: Taylor & Francis.
- Aliboni, R. (2011). The international dimension of the Arab Spring. *The International Spectator*, 46(4), 5-9.
- Alikhani, A. A. (2016). Fundamentals of Islam in International Relations. In *Islam and International Relations* (pp. 7-31): Springer.
- An-Na'im, A. A. (1987). Islamic Law, International Relations, and Human Rights: Challenge and Response. *Cornell Int'l LJ*, 20, 317.
- Anwary, A. (2020). Interethnic conflict and genocide in Myanmar. *Homicide Studies*, 24(1), 85-102.
- Arai, T. (2015). Diversity and conservation of coral reef fishes in the Malaysian South China Sea. *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, 25(1), 85-101.
- Arthington, A. H., Dulvy, N. K., Gladstone, W., & Winfield, I. J. (2016). Fish conservation in freshwater and marine realms: status, threats and management. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 26(5), 838-857.
- Baxter, K., & Akbarzadeh, S. (2012). *US foreign policy in the Middle East: The roots of anti-Americanism*: Routledge.
- Berger, M., & van Ham, P. (2010). *Religion and Islam in contemporary international relations*: Netherlands Institute of International Relations' Clingendael'.
- bin Mohamad Yusop, M. A. (2017). *The Najib administrations US policy: objectives, strategies and actions (2009-2016)*. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2017,
- Bousquet, A. (2012). Complexity theory and the war on terror: understanding the self-organising dynamics of leaderless jihad. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 15(3), 345-369.
- Brands, H., & Cooper, Z. (2018). Getting serious about strategy in the South China Sea. *Naval War College Review*, 71(1), 12-32.
- Chang, T., Deng, X., & Hwang, B.-G. (2019). Investigating political risk paths in international high-speed railway projects: The case of Chinese international contractors. *Sustainability*, 11(15), 4157.
- Cheng-Chwee, K. (2008). The essence of hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's response to a rising China. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 30(2), 159-185.
- Clarke, M. (2015). China and the Uyghurs: the "Palestinization" of Xinjiang. *Middle East Policy*, 22(3), 127-146.
- Cole, J. (2020). Missed Opportunities: The Trump Administration, Iran, and the Coronavirus Pandemic.
- Coy, R. J. (2005). *The National Guard Southeast Asian State Partnership Program Providing Support to the National Security Strategy and the Global War on Terrorism*. Retrieved from
- Cronin, P. M., Dutton, P. A., Fravel, M. T., Holmes, J. R., Kaplan, R. D., Rogers, W., & Storey, I. (2012). *Cooperation from Strength: The United States, China and the South China Sea*. Retrieved from
- D'Angelo, C. (2016). The Jihadist Imaginary: the contribution of sociology of the imaginary for the analysis of the spread of Islamic fundamentalist movements. *International Journal of Public and Private Management*, 3, 2.
- Dalacoura, K. (2010). US foreign policy and democracy promotion in the Middle East: Theoretical perspectives and policy recommendations. *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 2(1), 57-76.
- Derghal, M. (2019). The Impact of US Media Brainwashing on Promoting Islamophobia and Dogmatism against Muslims after 9/11 Attacks.
- Dossani, R., Harold, S., Chase, M., Chen, C.-i., Kotani, T., Lyn, C.-y., Taylor, J. Y. (2016). Maritime issues in the East and South China Seas. *RAND, Santa Monica*, 2.
- Dupuy, A. (2019). *Haiti in the new world order: The limits of the democratic revolution*: Routledge.
- Dussich, J. P. (2018). The ongoing genocidal crisis of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. *Journal of Victimology and Victim Justice*, 1(1), 4-24.
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE open*, 4(1), 2158244014522633.
- Emmers, R. (2013). *The role of the Five Power Defence Arrangements in Southeast Asian security architecture*: Routledge.

- Fergusson, I. F., McMinimy, M. A., & Williams, B. R. (2015). The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations and issues for congress.
- Finkbeiner, J. M. (2013). *Malaysia's great power balance and the South China Sea disputes*. Retrieved from
- Fravel, M. T. (2011). China's strategy in the South China Sea. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 292-319.
- Ganesan, N. (2010). Malaysia-China Relations: Domestic and structural imperatives. *P. Lam*.
- Gerstl, A. (2020). Malaysia's Hedging Strategy Towards China Under Mahathir Mohamad (2018–2020): Direct Engagement, Limited Balancing, and Limited Bandwagoning. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 1868102620964219.
- Goh, E. (2013). *Conceptualising the relationship between bilateral and multilateral security approaches in East Asia: A great power regional order framework*: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Haderiansyah, H., Habibah, M., Setiawan, A., & Hayat, M. A. (2020). A policy of China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy: The Influence Of Media In Forming Community Political Opinions. *DIA: Jurnal Administrasi Publik*, 18(2), 170-178.
- Haynes, J. (2021). Religion and international relations: what do we know and how do we know it? *Religions*, 12(5), 328.
- Hecker, S., Wicke, N., Haklay, M., & Bonn, A. (2019). How does policy conceptualise citizen science? A qualitative content analysis of international policy documents. *Citizen Science: Theory and Practice*, 4(1).
- Hegghammer, T. (2013). Should I stay or should I go? Explaining variation in Western jihadists' choice between domestic and foreign fighting. *American Political Science Review*, 107(1), 1-15.
- Hoskins, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2011). Remediating jihad for western news audiences: The renewal of gatekeeping? *Journalism*, 12(2), 199-216.
- Hu, L. (2021). Examining ASEAN's effectiveness in managing South China Sea disputes. *The Pacific Review*, 1-29.
- Huang, D., Licuanan, W. Y., Hoeksema, B. W., Chen, C. A., Ang, P. O., Huang, H., Affendi, Y. A. (2015). Extraordinary diversity of reef corals in the South China Sea. *Marine Biodiversity*, 45(2), 157-168.
- Hummel, D. G. (2019). Foreign Policy and Religion: US Foreign Policy Toward Israel. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Initiative, C. S. A. (2009). US Alliances and Emerging Partnerships in Southeast Asia: Out of the shadows. In: Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- Ismail, M. T., & Abadi, A. M. (2019). United States democracy assistance in Malaysia: the nature and impact of concurrent strategy. *The Pacific Review*, 32(4), 572-602.
- Jafari, Y., & Othman, J. (2013). Potential Economic Impacts of the Malaysia-US Free Trade Agreement. *J. Int. Glob. Econ. Stud*, 6, 33-47.
- Kaharuddin, A. F. (Undated). The Vulnerable Coral Reef Ecosystems in the South China Sea.
- King, C. A. (2009). *Second Line of Defense Megaports Initiative Sustainment Plan-Port Klang Malaysia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.osti.gov/biblio/1012528>
- Kok Wey, A. L. (2019). Western and Eastern Ways of Special Warfare. *Special Operations Journal*, 5(2), 143-150.
- Kolodziej, E. A. (2005). *Security and international relations*: Cambridge University Press.
- Krieg, A. (2016). Externalising the burden of war: the Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East. *International Affairs*, 92(1), 97-113.
- Krieg, A., & Rickli, J.-M. (2018). Surrogate warfare: the art of war in the 21st century? *Defence studies*, 18(2), 113-130.
- Kristensen, P. M. (2018). International relations at the end: a sociological autopsy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(2), 245-259.
- Kuik, C.-C. (2021). The Twin Chessboards of US-China Rivalry: Impact on the Geostrategic Supply and Demand in Post-Pandemic Asia. *Asian Perspective*.
- Kuik, C. C. (2016). Malaysia between the United States and China: what do weaker states hedge against? *Asian Politics & Policy*, 8(1), 155-177.
- Kushairi, A., Ong-Abdullah, M., Nambiappan, B., Hishamuddin, E., Bidin, M., Ghazali, R., Parveez, G. K. A. (2019). Oil palm economic performance in Malaysia and R&D progress in 2018. *Journal of Oil Palm Research*, 31(2), 165-194.
- Lin, B., Chase, M. S., Blank, J., Cooper, C. I., Grossman, D., Harold, S. W., Orner, P. (2020). *Regional Responses to US-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific*. Retrieved from
- Liu, H., & Lim, G. (2019). The political economy of a rising China in Southeast Asia: Malaysia's response to the Belt and Road Initiative. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 28(116), 216-231.
- Mandaville, P., & Hamid, S. (2018). Islam as statecraft: How governments use religion in foreign policy. *November, posted by Brookings*. Available at: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP\\_20181116\\_isl\\_am\\_as\\_statecraft.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP_20181116_isl_am_as_statecraft.pdf) (accessed November 15 2018).
- Mangu, D. G. S. (2017). The Efforts of Republica Democratica de Timor-Leste (Timor Leste) to be a member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and take an active role in maintaining and creating the stability of security in Southeast Asia. *Southeast Asia Journal of Contemporary Business, Economics and Law*, 13(4), 18-24.
- Mastura, J., Kalsom, K., Tangit, T., & Mohd, F. Y. (2013). Nature-based rural tourism and its economic benefits: a case study of Kinabalu National Park. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 5(4), 342-352.
- Mauzy, D. K., & Job, B. L. (2007). US policy in Southeast Asia: Limited re-engagement after years of benign neglect. *Asian Survey*, 47(4), 622-641.

- Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution.
- Mazza, M. (2018). *An American Strategy for Southeast Asia*: American Enterprise Institute.
- Menon, J., Todd, L., Hashim, A. W., & Alias, A. W. (2019). *ASEAN Integration Report 2019*: Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS).
- Mgba, C., & Ukpere, W. I. (2013). Religious Resurgence and International Relations Mainstream Theories: The Imperative for Theoretical Rethink and expansion. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(14), 535.
- Mohammad, A.-K. (2006). Rethinking international relations theory in Islam: Toward a more adequate approach. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 5(4), 41-56.
- Mubarok, S., & Candra, R. (2020). *Islamic International Relations as a Potential Tool to Indonesia's Soft Power Diplomacy*. Paper presented at the 1st Borobudur International Symposium on Humanities, Economics and Social Sciences (BIS-HESS 2019)(ss. 954-959). Atlantis Press.
- Mukherjee, K. (2010). The Uyghur question in contemporary China. *Strategic Analysis*, 34(3), 420-435.
- Mumford, A. (2013). Proxy warfare and the future of conflict. *The RUSI Journal*, 158(2), 40-46.
- Navvab, S. A., & Aliakabri, R. (2013). Survey of Islamic International Relations in Prophetic Tradition. *Religious Inquiries*, 2(3), 63-78.
- Ness, T. (2002). Dangers to the Environment. *War or peace in the South China Sea*, 43-53.
- Noor, E. (2019). Foreign and security policy in the New Malaysia.
- Noor, F. M. M., Gassner, A., Terheggen, A., & Dobie, P. (2017). Beyond sustainability criteria and principles in palm oil production: Addressing consumer concerns through insetting. *Ecology and Society*, 22(2).
- O'Rourke, R. (2015). *Maritime territorial and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) disputes involving China: Issues for congress*.
- O'Rourke, R. (2020). US-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress. *Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March, 13*.
- Oh, Y. A. (2018). Power asymmetry and threat points: negotiating China's infrastructure development in Southeast Asia. *Review of International Political Economy*, 25(4), 530-552.
- Ozkan, M., & Chatterjee, K. (2019). Islamic Values in Foreign Policy. *Values in Foreign Policy: Investigating Ideals and Interests*, 115.
- Ozturk, A. E. (2021). Islam and Foreign Policy: Turkey's Ambivalent Religious Soft Power in the Authoritarian Turn. *Religions*, 12(1), 38.
- Parameswaran, P., & Safe, P. I. (2015). Malaysia's approach to the South China Sea and implications for the United States. *Maritime Strategy Series, Maritime Strategy Series (Washington, DC, 2015)*.
- Pavličević, D., & Kratz, A. (2018). Testing the China Threat paradigm: China's high-speed railway diplomacy in Southeast Asia. *The Pacific Review*, 31(2), 151-168.
- Petri, P. A., Plummer, M. G., Urata, S., & Zhai, F. (2017). Going it alone in the Asia-Pacific: Regional trade agreements without the United States. *Peterson Institute for International Economics Working Paper(17-10)*.
- Rahman, R. B. (2018). *Global Muslims Doing Good: Islamic Humanitarianism in Practice*. The New School,
- Rauta, V. (2020). Proxy warfare and the future of conflict: take two. *The RUSI Journal*, 165(2), 1-10.
- Rinehart, I. E. (2015). *Malaysia: background and us relations*.
- Roy, N. (2013). *Managing conflict in troubled waters: the case of the South China Sea*. Rutgers University-Graduate School-Newark,
- Russel, D. R., & Berger, B. (2019). Navigating the belt and road initiative. *Policy File*.
- Şafak, O., & Çelik, K. E. (2018). Conflict in Syria: Is It a Proxy Warfare? *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2(2), 44-69.
- Salil, S. (2012). China's Strategy in the South China Sea. Google Scholar Database.
- Sandal, N. A., & James, P. (2011). Religion and international relations theory: Towards a mutual understanding. *European Journal of International Relations*, 17(1), 3-25.
- Sautman, B., & Hairong, Y. (2019). The "Chinese Debt Trap" and its Sri Lanka Example. *HKUST Institute for Emerging Market Studies*.
- Shah, A. (2016). Building a sustainable 'Belt and Road'. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development(7)*, 212-223.
- Sheikh, F. A. (2013). *Pursuing the International Relations of Islam: A critique of IR theory*: University of Leeds.
- Sangyen, M. C. (2016). *US Smart Power in Southeast Asia: More Hard or Soft Power?* Thammasat University.
- Singh, D. (2020). American Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 57-76.
- Smith Finley, J. (2007). Chinese oppression in Xinjiang, Middle Eastern conflicts and global Islamic solidarities among the Uyghurs. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 16(53), 627-654.
- Soekarno, A. A., & Utomo, T. C. (2019). United States Unwavering Support to Israel: Biased Foreign Policy in Israel-Palestine Conflict Under President Donald Trump's Administration (2016-2019). *Journal of International Relations*, 5(3), 492-500.
- Sokolsky, R. (2000). *The role of Southeast Asia in US strategy toward China*. Retrieved from <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA383669>
- Stephens, E. (2003). *United States policy towards Israel: The politics, sociology, economics & strategy of commitment*. London School of Economics and Political Science (United Kingdom),
- Stivachtis, Y. A. (2013). The English School and the concept of 'empire': theoretical and practical/political implications. *Global Discourse*, 3(1), 129-135.
- Sullivan, A. (2014). *Advancing US-Malaysia Security Cooperation in a Changing Environment*: JSTOR.

- Sun, H. H. (2008). International political marketing: a case study of United States soft power and public diplomacy. *Journal of Public affairs*, 8(3), 165-183.
- Sun, O. E., & Han, D. (2016). Malaysia's Relations with the Major Powers: China and the United States.
- Tayyar, A. (2018). Theories of International Relations I. *international relations*, 3, 4.
- Thayer, C. A. (2011). The United States, China and Southeast Asia. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2011(1), 16-25.
- Thomas, S., Tutu, D., & Tutu, D. M. (2005). *The global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations: The struggle for the soul of the twenty-first century*: Springer.
- Thompson, J., Pronk, D., & van Manen, H. (2021). Geopolitical Genesis.
- Tønnesson, S. (2002). The economic dimension: Natural resources and sea lanes. *op. cit*, 54-61.
- Tow, W. T. (2016). *Bipolarity and the future of the security order in East Asia*: ISEAS Publishing.
- Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis.
- Var, V., & Po, S. (2017). *Cambodia, Sri Lanka and the China debt trap*. Paper presented at the East Asia Forum.
- Wey, A. L. K. (2017). A small state's foreign affairs strategy: Making sense of Malaysia's strategic response to the South China Sea debacle. *Comparative Strategy*, 36(5), 392-399.
- Wike, R., Fetterolf, J., & Mordecai, M. (2020). US image plummets internationally as most say country has handled coronavirus badly. *Pew Research Center*, 15.
- Yazdani, E. (2019). Confrontation Between America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Sociology Study*, 9(4), 177-187.
- Yazid, M. N. M. (2014). The Cold War, Bipolarity Structure and the Power Vacuum in the East and South East Asia after 1945. *Journal of Global Peace and Conflict*, 2(1), 121-128.
- Yazid, N. M. (2015). The theory of hegemonic stability, hegemonic power and international political economic stability. *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, 3(6), 67-79.
- Zannettou, S., Caulfield, T., Setzer, W., Sirivianos, M., Stringhini, G., & Blackburn, J. (2019). *Who let the trolls out? towards understanding state-sponsored trolls*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 10th ACM conference on web science.
- Zanotti, J. (2016). *Israel: Background and US relations*. Retrieved from <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1020903>
- Zhang, H. (2018). Fisheries cooperation in the South China Sea: Evaluating the options. *Marine Policy*, 89, 67-76.
- Ziegelmeir, M. (2020). *The Politics of High-Speed Rail*. The Technical University of Munich.

## AUTHORS PROFILE

Author-1  
Photo

Graduated from Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College MAFDC Intake 2021. Twenty-five years in Royal Malaysian Navy service and currently work at Defence Cyber and Electromagnetic Division at MINDEF Malaysia.

Author-2  
Photo

LSA Academic House Research Manager. Postgraduate Researcher currently doing her PhD at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia with Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology MJIIT, UTM Malaysia. Her profile is accessible via <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jamaliah-Jamil-2>.

Author-3  
Photo

Author 2 supervisor. Senior Lecturer and Program Manager for MJIIT Faculty at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Dr Zulhasni Abdul Rahim's profile is accessible via <https://people.utm.my/zulhasni/>.

Author-3  
Photo

Author 1 supervisor. Senior Lecturer and Director for International School of Defense & Security at the National Defence University of Malaysia. Prof. Dr Adam Leong Kok Wey's profile is accessible via <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/adam-leong-kok-wey-a17b5853>