

ISIS FOCUS



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INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA
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ABOUT ISIS MALAYSIA

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983, in realization of a decision made by the Malaysian Government to set up an autonomous, not-for-profit research organization that would act as the nation's think-tank. ISIS Malaysia was envisioned to contribute towards sound public policy formulation and discourse.

The research mandate of ISIS therefore spans a wide area. It includes economics, foreign policy and security studies, social policy, and technology, innovation, environment and sustainability.

ISIS Malaysia today fosters dialogue and promotes the exchange of views and opinions at both national and international levels. It undertakes research in collaboration with national and international organizations, in important areas such as national development and international affairs.

ISIS Malaysia also engages actively in Track Two diplomacy, fostering high-level dialogues at national, bilateral and regional levels, through discussions with influential policymakers and thought leaders.

RESEARCH

Economics

Research in this area is generally aimed at promoting rapid and sustained economic growth and equitable development in the nation. We study specific (rather than generic) issues that concern the nation's competitiveness, productivity, growth and income. Areas of research include macroeconomic policy, trade and investment, banking and finance, industrial and infrastructure development and human capital and labour market development. The objective of all our research is to develop actionable policies and to spur institutional change.

Foreign Policy and Security Studies

The primary aim of this programme is to provide relevant policy analyses on matters pertaining to Malaysia's strategic interests as well as regional and international issues, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific Region. These include security studies, foreign policy, Southeast Asian politics and military affairs.

Social policy

Demographic and socio-cultural trends are changing Malaysian society and the social policy programme was established to respond to these developments. Research in this area is concerned with effective nation building, and fostering greater national unity. In particular, we look at issues involving the youth, women and underprivileged communities. In conducting its research, ISIS Malaysia networks with non-governmental organizations and civil society groups.

Technology, Innovation, Environment & Sustainability (TIES)

The TIES programme provides strategic foresight, collaborative research and policy advice to the public sector, businesses and policy audiences, on technology, innovation, environment and sustainable development. Its focus includes green growth as well as energy, water and food security. Towards this end, TIES has been active in organizing dialogues, forums, policy briefs and consultancies.

HIGHLIGHTS

ISIS Malaysia has, among others, researched and provided concrete policy recommendations for:

- Greater empowerment and revitalization of a national investment promotion agency;
- A strategic plan of action to capitalize on the rapid growth and development of a vibrant Southeast Asian emerging economy;
- A Master Plan to move the Malaysian economy towards knowledge-based sources of output growth;
- The conceptualization of a national vision statement;
- Effective management and right-sizing of the public sector; and
- Strengthening of ASEAN institutions and co-operation processes.

ISIS Malaysia has organized the highly regarded Asia-Pacific Roundtable, an annual conference of high-level security policymakers, implementers and thinkers, since 1986.

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING

As a member of the Track Two community, ISIS Malaysia participates in the following networks:

- ASEAN-ISIS network of policy research institutes;
- Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific (CSCAP);
- Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT); and
- Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC).

It is also a partner institute of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

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Are We Prepared for the Tsunami Threat?*

By Wan Portia Hamzah
Senior Fellow, ISIS Malaysia

Disasters are not uncommon in the Southeast Asian region. Of significance was the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami that hit fourteen countries in Southeast Asia, parts of South Asia and as far away as Somalia. Cities and villages were destroyed, thousands killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. Other disasters such as the 2008 Cyclone Nargis which affected Myanmar, and the 2009 Typhoon Ketsana which affected the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, caused deaths, injury and untold damage.

Then came the 2010 'triple disaster' in Indonesia -- the flooding in Papua, the tsunami in Mentawi islands and the Mount Merapi volcanic eruption. The 2011 earthquake that hit Myanmar, near the borders of China, Thailand and Laos, was significantly less powerful than the one that hit Japan on March 11, 2011.

The world also witnessed the 2011 flooding in Bangkok, and more recently Hurricane Sandy lashed the east coast of the United States with wind and rain. Southeast Asia is dealing with the damage from a powerful storm that has killed a number of people over the same period.

A recent workshop discussion indicated some interesting findings regarding disasters and climate change.

Generally, geological hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions are not influenced by climate change but by other geological hazards such as landslides and subsidence, because water tables and their sensitivity to rainfall are indirectly influenced by the changing climate. As for hydrometeorological hazards, including extreme temperatures, droughts, storms and storm surges, floods and



Huge tsunami waves crashing down on a crowd of people

**This is an expanded version of an article that was published in the New Straits Times, 19 September 2012.*

Are We Prepared for the Tsunami Threat?

forest fires, these are influenced by climate change. However, research findings have also indicated a changing relationship between global warming and extreme weather events such as tropical cyclone/typhoon activity in Asia.

That extreme weather events such as storms occur in phases — a phase of increasing storms and a phase of decreasing storms — may be quite difficult to comprehend. What must be noted is that the nature of storms has changed. They are generally becoming more intense. What is therefore important is the need for more basic research so that we can understand the nature of the relationship between extreme weather events and climate change. There is also a need for better historical data to study the trend of extreme events and resulting disasters.

However, funding for the collection of such data is a problem, not only within developing countries, but also developed countries. Studying trends helps to indicate changes in some extreme weather events or hazards, vulnerability, exposure, human-induced changes and disaster risks. Countries within the region are in the process of understanding the nature and extent of hazards in relation to climate change, the impacts of these events on communities and the underlying causes of vulnerability. There are also efforts to help communities understand the information in order to minimize their vulnerability to disaster risks.

In terms of preparedness, Malaysia has in place the 'End-to-End Early Warning System' aimed at empowering individuals and communities threatened by hazards so that they

... the need for more basic research so that we can understand the nature of the relationship between extreme weather events and climate change

Tsunami science and its significance will have to be translated and understood by all, including relevant stakeholders ...

can respond appropriately and in a timely manner to reduce the possibility of personal injury, loss of lives and livelihoods, and damage to property and the environment. The early warning system has all the necessary elements — risk knowledge, monitoring and warning service, dissemination and communications, and response capability — to raise awareness and to convince all concerned stakeholders that they should work to make cities and areas of concern resilient to disasters.

In a country that was once considered relatively safe and sheltered against major natural disasters, the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 demonstrated how such a phenomenon could impact the life and security of the people. It certainly changed the perception of policy-makers, the scientific community, aid workers, private donors as well as many others regarding the patterns of such catastrophes, and more specifically, about their implications, such as changes in societal vulnerability, and also imbalances in development.

It cannot be denied that numerous programmes and research activities have been instituted by the government much earlier to monitor activities pertaining to disaster prevention and to improve society's preparedness in facing disasters, but the 2004 tsunami raised questions regarding the nature of disaster and its 'globalization.'

The globalization of disaster is not entirely a new phenomenon according to one prominent researcher. However, due to the space constraint here, it suffices to say that the growth of information and communications technology and

greater ownership of receiving devices have all enabled descriptions and images of human suffering in disasters to be disseminated without delay. This has created a greater sense of participation. Coupled with rapid travel, it has enabled the international community to respond almost immediately, barring any political or sovereign 'sensitivities.'

In terms of the nature of disaster, why is there interest in tsunamis or about when they could strike Malaysia? Research and monitoring activities relating to earthquakes and/or tsunamis, especially since 2004, despite constraints in funding, is commendable, as is the sharing of findings through various discussion groups

A worldwide relief system exists, but response to catastrophes requires strong local and national preparedness ...

nationally and regionally. Drawing from a review of tsunami-related research literature, more often than not, only tsunamis of seismic origin have been investigated. Tsunamis generated by landslides or volcanoes have so far escaped the radar.



A tsunami approaching the Penang coastline

Are We Prepared for the Tsunami Threat?

Tsunamis generated by earthquake(s) in the Manila Trench (currently considered a major hazard in the South China Sea and parts of Sabah) have captured the interest of many. Sabah also faces potential tsunami threats from the Sulu Trench or from submarine landslides. Within the country, while focus is concentrated on tsunami generation and propagation in the South China Sea and the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea, attention is also given to the Straits of Malacca (potential tsunamis originating from the Andaman Sea/Indian Ocean). Tsunami simulation studies and the conducting of risk assessments are already underway.

Attention is also given to tsunami characteristics — arrival time, wave height, wave force, and inundation distances — in shallow and confined waters, as well as to impacts on coastal structures. But equally important, due to the uncertainty in predicting those earthquake characteristics that generate a tsunami, as already highlighted by several researchers, variations in magnitude and orientation must be taken into account in the evaluation of risk, and in developing risk maps/evacuation routes.

Aspects of disaster mitigation, emergency relief and safety provisions are already being tackled by the relevant Malaysian authorities but are they better understood? Will Malaysians cooperate and be more prepared? Tsunami science and its significance will have to be translated and understood by all, including relevant stakeholders involved in the planning and development processes, and by the vulnerable community, so as to recognize the threat and to respond accordingly. The role of the media is therefore invaluable.

To pursue economic and social well-being is important. Unfortunately, populations tend to concentrate in and around economic centres, and also areas dotting the coastlines (including hazard-prone areas). They generally populate these areas more quickly than protection measures for them can be devised or put in place. So when subsequently re-enforcement of structures is required, these may be costly.

Next, many Malaysians tend to be complacent; cooperation and response to tsunami drills is an issue. Therefore, at a time of real disaster, chaos may arise. During the March 2011 tsunami for example, in even a trained and experienced community such as the Japanese, the priority placed on saving loved ones and escaping by road had the effect of hampering the evacuation process leading to the loss of lives.

A worldwide relief system exists, but response to catastrophes requires strong local and national preparedness, and effort on the part of many players. Again, one of the challenges is to involve the general public in managing its own safety and security. While an increase in the knowledge of hazards is essential, equally important is better organization and a more concerted effort with respect to awareness, education, training, planning etc. Malaysia is an active partner in the Hyogo Protocol and the Asean Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER) but should not greater priority be given to risk reduction?

Vocational-Academic Divide: Mind the Gap*

By Mazlena Mazlan
Researcher, ISIS Malaysia

Vocational education is always mentioned in one way or another in discussions on the quality of Malaysia's education system. Very often, vocational education is seen as a savior of students ill-served by current arrangements. It is one of the current 'in' things in education policy. But I find it unfortunate that many of us have continued to internalize three false assumptions.

First, there has been an institutionalized idea that students can be exhaustively divided into two mutually exclusive groups; the academically-inclined who will undergo academic education and the 'hands-on' students who will adopt vocational education.

Recently I had the privilege of participating in a national conference for research on technical and vocational education, co-organized by Universiti Tun Hussein Onn, the Department of Polytechnic Education, the Department of Community Colleges Education and the Higher Education Leadership Academy. I was told that being under the Ministry of Higher Education, all lecturers in Polytechnic and Community Colleges are required to write and present research papers, like their peers in universities. The conference was therefore an excellent platform for this purpose.

But it was also an eye-opener. I was impressed by the many participants who presented innovations in their field. Many papers were well-written, though others had room for

**An abridged version of this article titled, 'Bridging the Academic-Vocational Gap,' was published in the New Straits Times, 16 October 2012.*



Vocational training

much improvement. These research papers are proof that integration between academic and vocational education is not inconceivable.

Nonetheless, the conference which I attended would have benefitted, and have been more balanced if there had been greater participation from educationists from vocational institutions under other ministries such as the Ministries of Human Resources, Youth and Sports, Agriculture, Rural and Regional Development as well as state level agencies. For a national level event, participation from these institutions was relatively low, save for that from the Ministry of Education.

At one point in our journey, we had taken a step towards bridging the vocational-academic gap. Beginning in 1995, all vocational schools were upgraded into technical schools. This move aimed to increase the number of students with a strong basis in mathematics and science, in addition to technical-based subjects. Vocational and skills streams were maintained in these schools.

Under the vocational transformation plan, technical schools have been converted back into vocational schools in preparation for upgrading into vocational colleges. But, it is too early to judge the impact of this exercise on the vocational-academic divide.

Second, people tend to assume that students who do not perform well in school are not academically-inclined and therefore will be better served by hands-on education. This assumption can be found if one reads between the lines of the many statements and documents, locally or abroad, that attempt to promote vocational education.

The result is everyone jumping on the bandwagon in appearing to appreciate the value of vocational education, although in reality, parents' 'not-for-my-child' attitude has not changed, and may even be reinforced. Vocational education remains a tough sell to parents and students.

There are many reasons for non-performance in school. It may reflect dissatisfaction towards the rote-learning system, the curriculum, or the teaching style. It may be a sign of learning disability, as seen in dyslexic students (although these students go on to do well in university if given adequate support). It may also be due to factors totally unrelated to learning capacity and ability, for example relationships with parents, teachers and peers.

More importantly, vocational education should not be seen as a dumping ground for students who are perceived as having little prospect in succeeding in mainstream education

There are also students who show neither aptitude nor interest in academic or vocational studies. Unless educators attempt to discover the underlying reasons, channelling students arbitrarily to vocational studies will not be really helpful. More importantly, vocational education should not be seen as a dumping ground for students who are perceived as having little prospect in succeeding in mainstream education.

Third, students with a hands-on tendency are often assumed to have limited intellectual ability and therefore likely to fail in academic education.

A reflection of this assumption is the reduced academic emphasis in the Basic Vocational Education (BVE) programme for lower secondary students, currently at the pilot stage. The Ministry of Education needs to assure parents of those students who choose or are chosen to participate in the programme that vocational education will not result in reduced literacy and numeracy skills.

Otherwise, two situations may arise. First, the vocational path may lose its appeal to students who possess the ability to perform in academic education, but have a hands-on inclination. Second, the perception of university as the single route to success may be reinforced. Indeed this is the popular belief, and not only in Malaysia. Newly re-elected US President Barack Obama was quoted as saying, 'A higher education can't be a luxury, it's an economic imperative that every American should be able to afford.'

Rather than gain in esteem and usefulness, vocational education may continue to be seen as second class, while students may continue to choose academic qualifications in subjects that have little value in the labour market.

The three assumptions above are major reasons for the limited success we have achieved

so far in closing the vocational-academic divide, though many have insisted that both tracks should be held in the same esteem. The line we have drawn separating academic and vocational education is actually manufactured, if not imaginary. So to close the gap, this line must be made as indistinct as possible, and the intersection of both tracks must be enlarged. But unless we disengage ourselves from the false assumptions, vocational and academic education will remain miles away from parity.



Vocational student receiving an award

Obviously though, changing an entrenched belief is easier said than done. Many policy analysts attribute the success of the vocational education system in countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland to the long history of apprenticeship and workplace learning, in their systems, going back as early as the 14th century.

Nonetheless, I believe that even in a country without such a history, one should not simply dismiss the prospect of eliminating the vocational-academic gap. There are countries that have successfully overturned the negative perception towards vocational education. Our neighbour down south, for example, has equipped its vocational institutions with state-of-the-art facilities and that has shifted the people's view of vocational education from that of a dumping ground to a sought-after track.

However, we should be mindful that vocational education eats up a significant amount of resources. Money may be poured down the

drain if not spent carefully and wisely. In Professor Alison Wolf's critical review of Britain's vocational education last year, she revealed that despite countless reforms and millions of pounds being spent, hundreds of thousands of British students have been put on worthless vocational courses. We have to avoid going down the same path.

That means ensuring that the curriculum and the resulting qualifications are valued by employers of today and the future, not the past. The vocational transformation plan is heading in the right direction by taking steps to allow those with vocational qualifications to enter into the civil service. But with the private sector as a larger employer of the country's workforce, the government needs to ensure that our vocational qualifications have the private sector buy-in too. In short, we can only safely say that the vocational-academic gap is bridged when it has the recognition of all stakeholders, namely students, parents and employers.

Foreign Policy Roundtable Discussion on 'Australia's Engagement with Asia'

IISIS Malaysia, in collaboration with the Australian High Commission, held a Roundtable Discussion titled 'Australia's Engagement with Asia,' at the Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur, in November 2012. This high-level closed-door discussion was led by The Hon Senator Bob Carr, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and moderated by Tan Sri Dato' Seri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Chairman of ISIS Malaysia. The discussion highlighted bilateral relations between Malaysia and Australia and the challenges brought about by Australia's White Paper, titled 'Australia in the Asian Century.' The discussion however was governed by 'Chatham House Rules' and therefore could not be reported. However, Bunn Nagara has analyzed the White Paper in an article in *The Sunday Star, Dots*, 18 November 2012 . ISIS Malaysia reproduces the article on the following page.



From left: Syed Hamid Albar, Muhammed Jawhar Hassan, Bob Carr and Miles Kupa

Down Under and All Over *

Behind The Headlines

By Bunn Nagara

Australia is still finding its place in the world, a work very much in progress.

TWO Sundays ago, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard released the White Paper “Australia in the Asian Century”. For many, it was a long-awaited document.

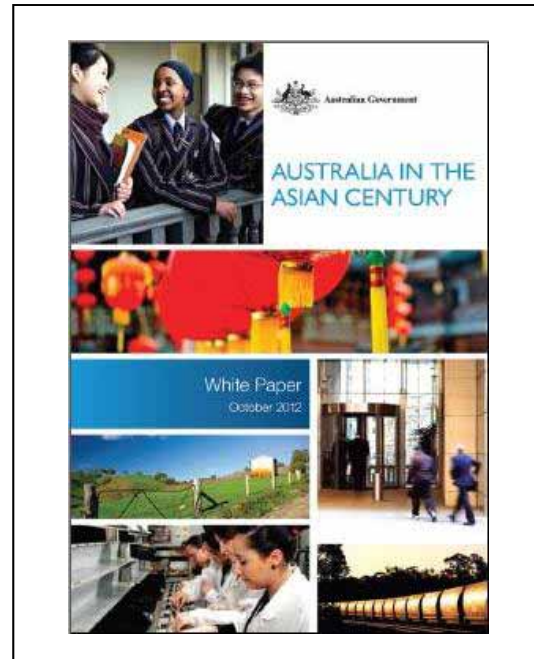
Australia’s history, polity and geography make for an odd mix. Anglophone settlers had to reconcile themselves with a strange terrain, unfamiliar Aboriginal people, isolation from mother country Britain, even conflict between allegiance to the British crown and incipient republicanism, and now a rising Asia.

White settlers “tamed” the land and established thriving outposts around the edges of the vast island. Asian immigration followed, driven by push-pull factors of a relatively undeveloped East Asia and a more developed Australia.

As the 20th century began, a racist White Australia Policy restricted non-white immigration while encouraging European settlement. It lasted half a century and took another quarter of a century to dismantle.

Meanwhile, the indigenous peoples suffered disproportionately lower levels of life expectancy, education, employment and higher imprisonment rates.

Then later in the 20th century, East Asian economies surged. Trade links with East Asia multiplied in number and volume.



The self-image of Australia, the largest country in Australasia, Oceania or the South Pacific, became more fraught. Its geography, history, politics and society were not characteristically Asian, yet it felt increasingly overwhelmed by a rising East Asia even as it experienced the prosperity.

When the Labour Party’s Paul Keating was prime minister in the 1990s, he “declared” Australia an Asian country. After he left office, he reversed that stand and admitted that Australia was not an Asian country.

John Howard of the conservative Liberal Party next became premier and distinctly identified Australia as a Western, US-led ally in the

* Reproduced with permission from *The Sunday Star*, Dots, 18 November 2012

... he wondered aloud whether the White Paper actually depicted Australia finding its way in the Asian Century or just getting lost in Asia

world. President George W. Bush affirmed that by saying Australia was not just Washington's "deputy sheriff" but its sheriff.

Labour's Kevin Rudd next became premier, and much was made of his fluency in Mandarin. This was to be an Asian Century of economic paramountcy, led by a rapidly rising China.

Interactions with Asia and Asians, particularly in economics, continued and grew. But Australia remained firmly rooted in the US-led Western sphere with its geopolitical concerns.

This added to Canberra's fuzzy regionalism and amorphous identity in relation to Asia. The more Asia grew in global stature and consideration, the more vexed Australia's strategic relationship with it became.

Amid these rising stakes, a White Paper as an official declaration of intent assumes considerable significance. But the heightened expectations produced general disappointment instead: most of the White Paper's 320 pages and nine chapters concerned Asia, but seen narrowly for Australia's own interests.

Reception to the document within Australia was reportedly supportive, but criticism from various quarters was also evident. There was more agreement over the need for the White Paper for an insular Australia than with the contents of this particular White Paper.

The parliamentary opposition criticised it for being long on rhetoric but short on detailed directions. The business community found it

redundant since it was already relating very much with Asia.

Evidently these business critics saw international relations only through the prism of their business deals. The social, cultural, strategic and other aspects of external relations typically escaped them.

The White Paper itself begins with a decent outline of an ascendant Asia, a vast continent with mounting prospects, growing middle classes and expanding markets combining to change Australia's priorities and "strategic environment". Where East Asia was once seen as the source of unwanted migrants, it is now regarded as the fount of fresh capital and trade orders.

Much of what follows is an Australia-centric diagnosis and prescription of what Australians should do to benefit from such an Asia.

That Australia itself is so moved by Asia's rise testifies to the cross-border nature of such fortunes, yet the White Paper remains centred on Australia's own concerns and interests, with scant consideration for Asia.

A commentary by the Australian-born veteran industrialist, technical consultant and academic Murray Hunter, who has spent a productive working life in Asia, is telling. Writing in Indonesia's *Jakarta Post* newspaper, he wondered aloud whether the White Paper actually depicted Australia finding its way in the Asian Century or just getting lost in Asia.

He said the document "reeked of Austro-centrism", one-way concerns to get what it wants from Asia, and "niggling China with its staunch loyalty to the US" even though "China saved Australia from a deep recession".

Action spoke louder than words, he said, and "Australia needs the region more than the

... the document “reeked of Austro-centrism”, one-way concerns to get what it wants from Asia ...

region needs Australia”. He said the country had to overcome its deep-set belief that its own cultural values were somehow universally accepted across the region.

Murray said “the White Paper is still haunted by Australia’s past”, with Asia “seen only as a means for Australian incomes” to rise. He found the document failed to provide the “vital key” of “accommodation of Asia to what Australia really has to offer” as an independent country “willing to put its lot with Asia and not with the US”.

A recent high-level bilateral forum organised by ISIS Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur examined several aspects of the White Paper. “Chatham House Rules” meant that speakers could not be quoted or identified, but several comments remained pertinent.

The White Paper was seen to omit, among other things, measures for building relations with Asean countries and Asean itself. Some questions were also raised.

It was then explained that the “US military base” in Darwin was more of a facility than a base, since it would host only a rotation of US troops rather than a permanent emplacement. Australia was said to respect China’s right to modernise its military, while feeling equally entitled to nurture its security with the US.

It was further explained that Australia’s role was originally to find ways to engage the US in the region. It was “in Australia’s DNA” to seek security from US involvement in the region.

In a brief exchange later with visiting Australian Foreign Minister Senator Bob Carr, I asked him how the White Paper positioned Australia differently from the past in its relations with Asia.

He said Australia now better understood that its economic future was dependent on Asia, adding that Malaysia’s development was an example of what a growing middle class in the region signified.

On how Australia could better partner with East Asian countries for mutual benefit, he pointed to good governance, a record of economic reform and an exchange programme with young Malaysian Muslims for better understanding.

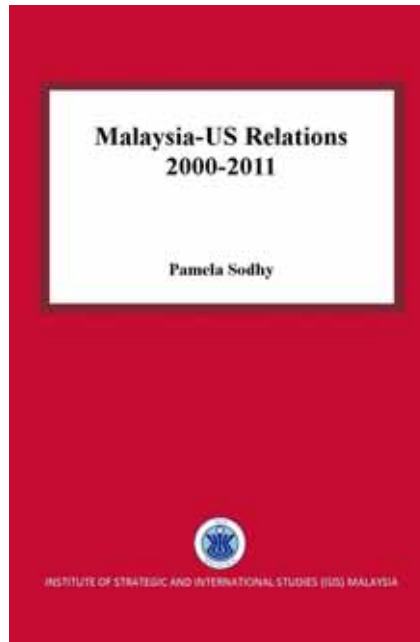
Carr said Australia should seek its security in Asia but not from Asia, while accepting Asean centrality.

He alluded to Australia’s role in the peace agreement in the southern Philippines brokered by Malaysia.

When asked about policy fluctuations between the Liberal and Labour parties, he said that although Australia is seen as a country with a security relationship with the US, there was more that could be said of that. He added that a country was entitled to look after its own security with its own foreign relations (Australia with the US).

Then when asked how Australia’s foreign policy was changing in respect of Asia, Carr said the fact that he was here in Malaysia while Gillard was in Vietnam, and both of them were heading to Bali (for an Asean-convened meeting), said it all.

The White Paper was seen to omit, among other things, measures for building relations with Asean countries and Asean itself



Malaysia-US Relations 2000-2011
By Pamela Sodhy
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia, 2012
126 pages E-book

This monograph looks at the present relationship between Malaysia and the United States during a decade-long period, covering the main political, economic, and socio-cultural relations during the prime ministerships in Malaysia, of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and Najib Tun Razak and the presidencies in the United States, of George Bush and Barack H Obama.

Download : http://www.isis.org.my/attachments/e-books/Pamela_Sodhy_Malaysia-US_Relations_Oct_2012.pdf

NOTES



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