

ISIS ROUNDTABLE

The Future of Think Tanks and Nation Building in Malaysia

Wednesday, 27 January 2016
Venue: Conference Room, ISIS Malaysia

RATIONALE

Think tank is a popular term for organisations serving as ‘external brains’ of the government. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, overall growth in think tanks has been nothing short of explosive. There are many key influences that drove this growth: the information and technological revolution, the decline of governmental monopolies on information, the increasing complexity and technical nature of policy issues, the increasing size and scope of governments, the crisis of confidence in elected governmental officials, increased globalization and the growth of state non-state actors, and the need for timely and concise information and analysis.

In this increasingly complex, interdependent and information-rich world, governments and individual policy-makers face the common problem of bringing expert knowledge to bear in governmental decision making. For policy-makers in many countries, it is often not the lack of information that is the problem but the avalanche of it. Indeed, some are frequently besieged by more information than they can possibly use.

Think tanks in Malaysia engage in a range of policy-related activities and comprise a diverse set of institutions that have varied organisational forms. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the current relationship between think tanks and the policy-making process is imperative. The Roundtable seeks to discuss the current and future role of think tanks on the Malaysian policy landscape by asking the following questions – what do Malaysian think tanks do, why are they important, and how can they contribute to the final lap of Vision 2020 and beyond?

The Roundtable will also launch the *2015 Global Go Think Tank Index* ranking. The theme for this year’s launch of the Global Go Think Tank Index ranking is “Why Think Tanks Matter to Policy Makers and the Public”. The Think Tank Launch Events on January 26 and 27th at The United Nations, The World Bank, the University of Pennsylvania and 75 other locations around the world are intended to highlight the important role think tanks play in governments and civil societies around the world.

Tentative Programme

0900 – 0910 **WELCOMING REMARKS**
Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa
Chairman and Chief Executive
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

SESSION 1: WHY THINK TANKS MATTER?

Policy-makers need basic information about the world and the societies they govern, how current policies are working, possible alternatives and their likely costs and consequences. In a world filled with pressing humanitarian issues, the mass migration of people and transnational threats like illicit trade and climate change, what is the case or justification for support for think tanks that conduct research and analysis of these issues? What is the role and importance of think tanks in today's policy landscape in Malaysia?

0910 – 0930 **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**
Malaysia's Development Challenges and the Role of Think Tanks

Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram
Holder of the Tun Hussein Onn Chair of International Studies
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

0930 – 1000 Launch of the '2015 Global Go Think Tank Index' Report

SESSION 2: EMERGING POLICY CHALLENGES IN MALAYSIA

With its reputation for prudent macroeconomic management, Malaysia has achieved consistent growth since independence. It has moved from a largely resource-based economy to a multinational-led, export-oriented, industrial economy. Despite this success, Malaysia, like other developing countries, is currently at a crossroads in its history. There are new uncertainties with regard to its development policy and the political stability which have hitherto successfully held together a multi-ethnic, multi-culture, and multi-religious population. In this session a panel of experts explores the key emerging policy issues facing Malaysia and provide examples of the role think tanks could play in shaping and informing debate on those issues.

1000 – 1200 Panel Discussion

Moderator:
Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa
Chairman and Chief Executive
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Panel Speakers:

Economy and Trade

Prof Dr Rajah Rasiah

Department of Development Studies
Faculty of Economics and Administration
University of Malaya

National Unity

Distinguished Prof Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin

Founding Director
Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA)
National University of Malaysia

Environment and Sustainability

Prof Emeritus Dato' Dr Ibrahim Komoo

Chair, Centre for Southeast Asia Disaster Prevention Research
Initiatives (SEADPRI) and Principal Research Fellow
Institute for Environment and Development (LESTARI)
National University of Malaysia

Politics and Society

Assoc Prof Datuk Dr Marzuki Mohamad

Department of Political Science
International Islamic University of Malaysia

Foreign Affairs

Datuk Salman Ahmad

Director General
Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR)

Media and Democratisation

Dr Mustafa Kamal Anuar

The Penang Institute

Defence and Security

Lt Gen Datuk Azizan bin Md Delin

Chief Executive
Malaysian Institute of Defence and Security (MIDAS)

1200 – 1230 Question and Answer

1230 – 1400 Luncheon

SESSION 3: THINK TANKS IN MALAYSIA POST-2020

Think tanks seek to bridge the gap between knowledge and power. This is a simple and established definition of think tanks as institutions linking the two roles, that of policy-maker and analyst, specifically as synthesizers of ideas into a suitable format for policy-makers. This panel session would ask the question whether this definition captures the role think tanks in Malaysia play in informing policy. What is the value added by think tanks in the policy making process and public debate of key policy

issues? In a digital age where information and analysis are easily accessible on the web, radio, television and social media – are think tanks more important or less important? How do think tanks stay relevant in a rapidly changing political and policy environment? What is the narrative that effectively articulates why donors, policy makers and the public should value and support think tanks?

1400 – 1530

Panel Discussion

Moderator:

Dato' Steven Wong

Deputy Chief Executive

Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Panel Speakers:

Mr Wan Saiful Wan Jan

Chief Executive

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS)

Tan Sri Michael Yeoh

Chief Executive Officer/Director

Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI)

Dato' Charon Wardini Mokhzani

Managing Director

Khazanah Research Institute

Datuk Mohd Hasnol Ayub

Executive Director/CEO

Institute of Development Studies, Sabah

Datu Aloysius J Dris

Chief Executive Officer

Sarawak Development Institute

Dr Mazalan Kamis

Chief Executive Officer

Institut Darul Ridzuan, Perak

Dr Zakariah Abdul Rashid

Executive Director

Malaysian Institute of Economic Research

1530 – 1600

Question and Answer

1600 – 1630

Discussion on the Way Forward

1630 – 1645

Concluding Remarks