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# focus



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA

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## Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA WAS ESTABLISHED ON 8 APRIL 1983 AS AN AUTONOMOUS, NOT-FOR-PROFIT RESEARCH ORGANISATION.

ISIS Malaysia has a diverse research focus which includes economics, foreign policy, security studies, nation-building, social policy, technology, innovation and environmental studies. It also undertakes research collaboration with national and international organisations in important areas such as national development and international affairs.

ISIS Malaysia engages actively in Track Two diplomacy, and promotes the exchange of views and opinions at both the national and international levels. The Institute has also played a role in fostering closer regional integration and international cooperation through forums and networks such as the Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR), the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC),

the Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT), the Network of ASEAN-China Think Tanks (NACT), the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT), and the Silk Road Think Tank Network (SiLKS). ISIS Malaysia is a founding member of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (OSCAP) and manages the Council's Secretariat.

As the country's premier think tank, ISIS Malaysia has been at the forefront of some of the most significant nation-building initiatives in Malaysia's history. It was a contributor to the Vision 2020 concept and was consultant to the Knowledge-Based Economy Master Plan initiative. It also produced the first ever National Interest Analysis to be undertaken on Malaysia's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

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# Editorial Letter

**T**he pursuit of peace and stability means, almost by definition, having to confront issues that are controversial, problematic and inconvenient. In this day and age, stifling discussion of issues is wholly pointless and even counter-productive. The information revolution has given rise to multiple and diverse news portals; each with their own commentaries, analyses and particular takes on matters. Keeping away from the fray, especially when carefully considered analyses are available, heightens the likelihood that unbalanced, sensationalist – and ultimately unhelpful – discourses will dominate.

The frontispiece of this quarter’s ISIS Focus is the long-awaited Arbitral Tribunal’s ruling on the South China Sea brought by the Philippines against China. Shahriman Lockman examines its implications for Malaysia, which he concludes to be “overwhelmingly positive”. He suggests that China, which has totally rejected the ruling, calling it a “farce”, could pursue a policy of “non-compliant compliance”. Whether it will do so remains to be seen; thus far China has taken actions to shore up its national position. Nevertheless, there are glimmers of hope that it, along with claimant states, are adopting relatively more conciliatory positions and we can only hope that this momentum will grow.

This quarter’s issue also carries important highlights from the successful 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable held from 30 May to 1 June 2016. The addresses of the Malaysian Prime Minister and Defence Minister, together with panelists’ and our own analysts’ contributions, from the psychology and history of South China Sea claimants to regional updates and countering Daesh and radicalism, make for essential reading on the factors affecting the peace and security in the region.

*The Editors*









# *The South China Sea Arbitration:* **A MALAYSIAN VIEW**

*The Hague Tribunal overwhelmingly ruled in favour of the Philippines, and the implications of the Award – at least in legal terms – are very positive for Malaysia. But China’s response has been to adamantly underscore its position: non-participation, non-recognition, non-acceptance and non-compliance. Is any form of resolution possible?*



BY  
SHAHRIMAN  
LOCKMAN

**I**t was on 29 June 2016 when the world was finally notified that the long, agonising wait was soon to be over. On that day, after months of rumours and speculation, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague announced the date for the conclusion of The Republic of the Philippines v The People’s Republic of China.

On 12 July 2016, at approximately 11am local time, the ponderously named Arbitral Tribunal Constituted Under Annex VII to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) would render its decision, or “Award”, on the arbitration brought by the Philippines against China over their disputes in the South China Sea.

It would be the most highly anticipated decision by any international tribunal in recent memory. Yet there would be no ceremony, no solemn reading of the Award by the judges in the Great Hall of Justice at the Peace Palace, the headquarters of the PCA. Instead, copies would be sent by email: first to the Philippines and China, then the observer states, and finally for general distribution.

Eleven o’clock on a summer’s morning at The Hague meant that the Award would be received at 5pm in Manila and Beijing. So would it be in Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur. Neither Malaysia nor two other Southeast Asian countries with claims in the South China Sea – Brunei and Vietnam – were parties to the case. Yet each had major stakes in its outcomes.

And with more than US\$5 trillion in global trade passing through the South China Sea annually, so did the rest of the world.

A lot had happened since the Philippines initiated the arbitration in January 2013. From the start, China insisted against participating in the Tribunal. Beyond the arbitration itself, the South China Sea dispute had developed in ways that few had anticipated.

Since the end of 2013, China has constructed artificial islands on seven of the insular features it occupies in the Spratlys: Cuarteron, Fiery Cross, Gaven, Hughes, Johnson South, Mischief and Subi Reefs.

Admittedly, the other claimants have also built on and expanded their own insular features. Malaysia, for example, has done so on Swallow Reef, which now has a small naval outpost and a popular resort for scuba divers.

But it's the scale of China's island building that has fundamentally altered the status quo in the South China Sea. By the middle of 2015, China had altogether expanded its reefs by about 3,000 acres – approximately 95 percent of all the land that had been reclaimed in the area over the past 40 years. Satellite images show that China has also built various facilities on them, including those that could potentially support high-end military capabilities.

**One artificial island** that has caused particular apprehension in Malaysia is Fiery Cross Reef. As the crow flies, it's only about 145 nautical miles from Swallow Reef. Possibly the most developed of all China's artificial islands in the Spratlys, Fiery Cross has port facilities and a three kilometre airstrip that can support almost all types of aircraft.

While President Xi Jinping has proclaimed that China “does not intend to pursue militarisation” in the Spratlys, that has hardly provided much reassurance. The facilities on those artificial islands – particularly Fiery Cross, Mischief and Subi Reefs – already possess latent military potential.

However one might define “militarisation”, it could swiftly take place if China chooses to respond to anything

it might regard as provocative. And that's something that cannot be dismissed when it involves China and the United States.

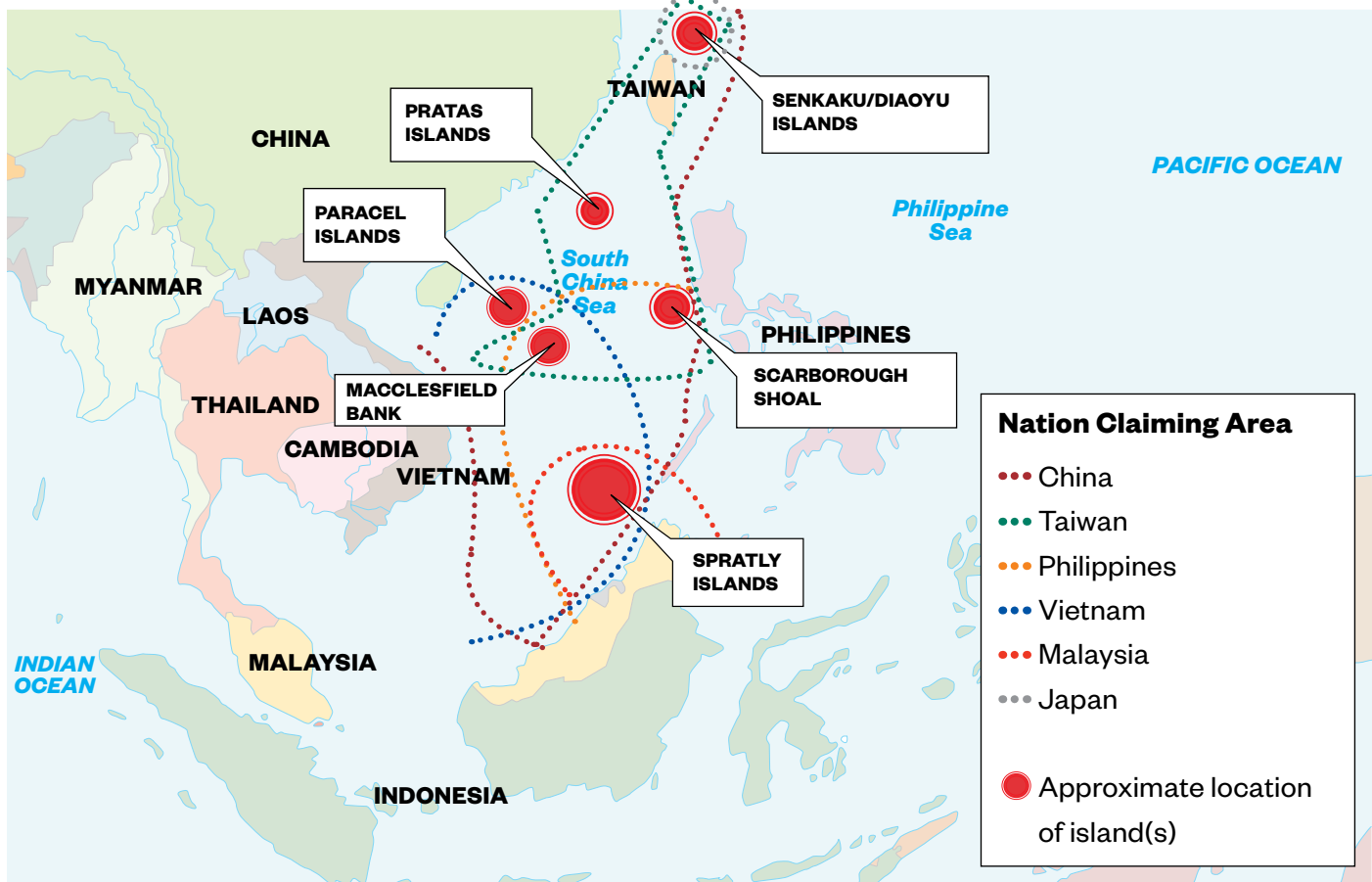
In recent years, the South China Sea has become less about the dispute between China and the Southeast Asian claimants. Rather, it has become more of a proxy for Sino-US rivalry.

In Malaysia, the presence of the United States in the South China Sea has been viewed with as much welcome and relief as suspicion and anxiety. The prevailing sense is that while the United States can be a stabilising force in the region, it could also precipitate an escalation in tensions with China, whether inadvertently or otherwise.

In any case, it has taken far less than a full-blown militarisation of the Spratlys to cause growing concerns in Malaysia.

In the past, Malaysia had the luxury of distance from the Chinese mainland. Until relatively recently, China's ability to project its presence in the southern reaches of the South China Sea was limited. As a result, disputes only used to become truly heated between countries further north, such as China, the Philippines and Vietnam.

But that began to change over the past seven years or so as tensions have risen in the South China Sea. Perhaps most disconcerting for Malaysia has been the growing presence of China Coast Guard vessels in Malaysia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) since 2013, especially in the waters around South Luconia Shoals.



**The ability to conduct** refuelling, resupply and low-level maintenance on China's artificial islands – without having to return to Hainan or the Chinese mainland – would enable that presence to be intensified. Malaysia suddenly found China present on its doorstep. No longer are the frontlines of the dispute at a safe distance.

Adding to Malaysia's quandary is the fact that, uniquely among the claimants, it is physically separated into two sizeable territories by the South China Sea. At the widest points, the distance between Peninsular Malaysia and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo is just over 800 nautical miles; at its narrowest, that distance shrinks to about 330 nautical miles.

Unsurprisingly, Malaysian defence planners have long regarded it in the country's strategic interest that no major power dominates the sea-air gap between those two major landmasses.

Furthermore, Malaysia has huge economic stakes in the South China Sea. Thanks to its offshore fields in the area, Malaysia is Southeast Asia's second-largest producer of oil and natural gas and the world's third-largest exporter of LNG. Depending on global energy prices, the sector has accounted for between 20 and 40 percent of the Malaysian government's revenue.

It was in this context that Malaysian policy makers and analysts viewed the Tribunal's Award.

The case was a complex one in which the Philippines had made 15 submissions for the Tribunal to rule on. In its Award, the Tribunal unanimously ruled in favour of the Philippines on 12 submissions – an overwhelming victory.

**The most consequential** decision by the Tribunal concerned the nine-dash line map, which predicates China's extensive yet vague claims in the South China Sea.

The sheer extent of those claims is best illustrated by the fact that the fourth of the nine dashes (counter-clockwise) on China's map is only about 24 nautical miles from the Sarawak coast. And while Beijing has implied that it doesn't claim everything within those nine dashes, its position has remained ill-defined and principally based on what it considers to be its historic rights.

In its Award, however, the Tribunal ruled that China had no legal basis to claim historic rights to the resources in the waters encompassed by the nine-dash line. Indeed, the Tribunal affirmed the primacy of UNCLOS in determining maritime rights and entitlements.

Another major ruling was that none of the insular features in the Spratlys constituted an island.

The difference between a rock and an island is not so straightforward. It rests on the interpretation of Article 121(3) of UNCLOS, which states that "rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own are not entitled to an EEZ or continental shelf".

So while rocks can only generate a maximum of 12 nautical miles of territorial waters, islands can create the full suite of maritime zones – including an EEZ of up to 200 nautical miles. The Tribunal's decision means that none of the features in the Spratlys is entitled to an EEZ.

For Malaysia, the implications of the Award – at least in legal terms – are overwhelmingly positive.

Admittedly, the Tribunal didn't go so far as to invalidate the nine-dash line map. Its decision in this regard was limited to China's claims to the resources beyond its EEZ in the South China Sea. Indeed, China could still use the nine-dash line map to roughly indicate the location of the various rocks that it wishes to lay claim to.

Nonetheless, the decision means that Malaysia's access to the resources within its South China Sea EEZ and continental shelf – including its oil and gas fields – is legally secure.

So is the legitimacy of Malaysia's claims in the South China Sea, given the ruling that none of the features in the Spratlys is an island. Indeed, the Tribunal found that Fiery Cross and Cuarteron Reefs – the two Chinese-occupied features that are closest to Malaysian waters – are rocks. Neither would be able to affect the limits of Malaysia's EEZ and continental shelf.

**China's response** to the decision has been to adamantly underscore its position on the Tribunal: non-participation, non-recognition, non-acceptance and non-compliance.

This was predictable given the determination with which it has pursued its claims in the South China Sea. The legitimacy of the Communist Party of China would be irreversibly diminished if it were to so much as hint at the possibility of accepting the Tribunal's rulings.

Domestic audiences would find such a move to be a humiliating capitulation to the United States, which China perceives as being the ultimate instigator of tensions in the South China Sea.

Cynics will say that China's position makes all of this moot. Perhaps. But the normative effect of the Award – which has now become part of international law – should neither be underestimated nor underutilised.

In the long run, it should be the aim of the international community, through careful diplomacy, to encourage China to move towards a form of non-compliant compliance with the Award. And that wouldn't be without precedent.

Take, for example, the case of *The Republic of Nicaragua v The United States of America*. In 1986, the International Court of Justice instructed the United States to pay reparations to Nicaragua for supporting the Contras and for mining Nicaragua's harbours. The United States initially denounced the ruling but eventually paid the reparations by packaging it as economic aid worth US\$500 million.

**Whether or not** China can be persuaded to take a similar route is uncertain. This is not a matter of a half a billion dollars. Rather, it involves what China regards as an inherent part of its territory.

One hopes that China ultimately wishes to be seen as a responsible power. So even if the chances are slight, it's still worth trying. It is also the best hope for peace in the South China Sea. ●

*Keynote Address &  
Official Opening of  
the 30th Asia-Pacific  
Roundtable, Hilton  
Kuala Lumpur,  
30 May 2016*

**I am delighted to be here this evening** on the occasion of the 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, or APR. This is a special milestone for the APR. The Roundtable has made major contributions to policy discussions about the Asia Pacific, while the region itself has undergone waves of significant strategic change. Let me congratulate ISIS Malaysia and the ASEAN-ISIS network for this enduring initiative. You have done well in maintaining the reputation of the APR as a premier Track Two security conference.

Governments will continue to look to current and next-generation Track Two thought leaders to anticipate the future Asia-Pacific landscape, and to provide frank and detailed assessments of developments that impact the region. The APR should remain one of the key platforms for discussing these issues.

Let us recall how different the Asia Pacific was 30 years ago. The countries of Southeast Asia were either emerging from decades of strife or grappling with the complex challenges of nation building. China was in the early stages of transformation. In the background, the fractious shadows of the Cold War loomed large across much of the world. Few could have imagined 30 years ago that ten distinct countries in Southeast Asia with diverse forms of government, a multitude of languages and cultures, and differing levels of development would be able to align their economic, political-security and socio-cultural interests.

But last year all ten member states came together for the Declaration of the ASEAN Community. We were proud that so momentous a step took place here in Kuala Lumpur, and under Malaysia's chairmanship.

Let us look at where ASEAN is today. Within the last decade alone, the total ASEAN



BY  
DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB TUN ABDUL RAZAK  
PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

economy has nearly doubled in size to US\$2.5 trillion. GDP per capita grew by 76 percent to over US\$4,000. If ASEAN were a single economy, it would already be the third largest in Asia and the seventh largest in the world.

If current growth trends continue, it will be the world's fourth largest economy by 2050 – at the latest. Of course, there remains much work to be done to consolidate gains and strive for further achievements; not just over the next ten years, to fulfil the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, but way beyond in pursuit of lasting peace, development and prosperity for the region.

**Around 65 percent** of ASEAN's 625 million population are now under the age of 35. The future of our Community along with its security, stability and prosperity clearly belongs to them. The shape of this future hinges on the bold, transformative plans that we undertake now for the next generation.

Ladies and gentlemen, here in Malaysia our economic plan has ensured the country's resilience despite global economic

uncertainties and plunging oil prices. Between 2009 and 2015, our Gross National Income nearly doubled. We created 1.8 million jobs. We increased the income of the bottom 40 percent of households by a compound annual rate of 12 percent. And our economy grew at five percent last year alone. We remain on track to achieving high income nation status by 2020.

We live in trying times today. The global economy is slowing down. But Malaysia's economy remains resilient. Thanks to the hard work of the Malaysian people, and the policies and programmes that the Government has put in place. I also firmly believe that in the effort to sustain a strong economy, we need to maintain close and healthy relations with our neighbours and friends, with whom we trade, connect and cooperate.

We do so regardless of political ideology and system, while maintaining an independent, non-aligned and principled stance in regional and international affairs. In the past, Malaysia took some unnecessarily confrontational stances, pretending that this was in Malaysia's interests and it meant that the country was



standing up for itself.

But I believe that politicians adopting intentionally antagonistic foreign policy positions just for the sake of personal popularity are selfish, shortsighted and self-defeating for their own countries. The national interest must come before personal political interest. Developing relations and economic partnerships with other nations promotes peace, stability and prosperity for the people.

That has been our approach – and we have seen the benefits. I have worked to deal with legacy issues with Singapore, for example, and our resolution of the Points of Agreement in 2010 after a 20 year deadlock is a good case in point. It was an example of how we chose to move forward in a spirit of friendship and mutual benefit and put a long-standing stumbling block behind us. We are now looking at building a high speed railway between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore to enhance connectivity, economic opportunities and people to people contact. And we expect to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in July.

**In the Philippines,** Malaysia facilitated the negotiations to resolve Asia's longest running insurgency, and we look forward to the final implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. Peace is an end in itself, and if we can help bring to a close a dispute that has cost so many lives, we would be honoured to do so. But stability will also allow the region to prosper, and make the seas between two neighbours safer. That will benefit both Malaysia and the Philippines.

We have built stronger ties around the world: with China, the United States, Japan and the European Union, among many others. Indeed, relations with both China and the US have never been so warm. And these relationships have borne concrete results. Since 2009, for instance, trade between Malaysia and China has been growing at over ten percent a year, and our many joint ventures – both those that are already underway and those we have planned – will play a huge part in Malaysia's continued development.

Malaysia is also a signatory to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers predicted would lead Malaysia's GDP to increase by up to US\$211 billion between 2018 and 2027, and would bring additional investment of US\$136 to US\$239 billion.

These are not just figures. Trade and investment bring jobs. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Malaysia's manufacturing

sector in 2015 is expected to lead to the creation of 66,000 new employment opportunities, while FDI in services will create a further 112,000 jobs. Transforming our economies, and increasing trade and ties with each other, is a path to peace, security and growth for all in the Asia Pacific, and a future that is based – to quote the title of this year's APR – on cooperation, not contestation.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** last year Malaysia worked with Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh to address the issue of migrants at sea. Over the years, we have taken in hundreds of thousands seeking refuge from war and persecution. Now, we have agreed to accept 3,000 Syrian migrants whom we will welcome over the next two years.

We will continue to assist in alleviating humanitarian crises near and far, just as we will continue to assist and lead efforts to counter radicalism and extremism. We recently launched the Regional Digital Centre for Counter-Messaging Communication in Kuala Lumpur, which will fight the terrorists' propaganda by exposing falsehoods and misinformation, and spearhead this important work in the region and beyond.

At the same time, I have consistently called for the practice of moderation to reclaim the centre and allow for mutual understanding. It is a priority at the national, regional and international levels. I am pleased that ASEAN adopted this concept last year in the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates, and we call for its adoption at the wider global level.

Malaysia is at the forefront in these and other areas, and I am glad that Malaysian leadership is increasingly being recognised around the world. This is why Malaysian companies are trusted to carry out important development projects far and wide.

By being outward-looking, open to trade and cooperation, dedicated to moderation and tolerance, determined to battle the scourge of violent extremism, and firmly focused on the needs and aspirations of our peoples: this is how Malaysia and the Asia Pacific can strengthen our mutual security as we move towards the third decade of what many have called "the Asian century".

Ladies and gentlemen, if we turn to our region and to ASEAN in particular, it is clear that we face a series of challenges, including some that are perceived to be growing alarmingly. The Asia-Pacific strategic environment is underpinned by a

complementary web of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral security arrangements. There may be a degree of scepticism about ASEAN centrality among some, but there can be no doubt that ASEAN has been successful in promoting dialogue among the major powers, in particular through the East Asia Summit.

The ASEAN-centred regional architecture may help to ameliorate the unstated competition for dominance and influence among major powers. As smaller nations, ASEAN member states must be able to effectively manage relations with these larger powers, while safeguarding their own national interests and collectively advancing regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Admittedly, these interests do not always neatly converge. As a Community forging ahead together, ASEAN member states must nevertheless strengthen our unity, solidarity and cohesiveness to ensure the continued credibility and relevance of ASEAN centrality at a time when the geopolitical regional landscape is shifting across the cyber, land, sea and air domains.

Developments in the South China Sea call for very careful handling by countries in the region and beyond. Within the context of ASEAN, we look forward to the expeditious conclusion of a meaningful Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. In the meantime, I urge all of us to recommit to the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

**Moving forward,** we will continue to rely on diplomacy and dialogue to peacefully resolve differences and disputes. We will do so in accordance with and in adherence to the norms, customs and principles of international law.

Ladies and gentlemen, predictions about the future are rarely precise. History is not always an accurate guide to what is to come. However, it is a useful reference point for what we want to achieve and what we want to avoid. The last 30 years in this region have seen both cooperation and competition among neighbours, friends, partners and adversaries.

The trajectory, however, has been promising, and in the next two days I hope you will discuss ways to help governments in the region increase that level of cooperation and dialogue – even as we are compelled to address the difficult challenges ahead. I wish you a productive and successful conference. It is with great pleasure that I now declare the 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable open. 🌐

# Regional Security in the Asia Pacific: *Present State and Future Trajectories*



BY

DATO' SERI HISHAMMUDDIN TUN HUSSEIN

**I want to begin by saying what a pleasure it is for me to** be here today at the 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR). I congratulate the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and its partners in the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) for successfully convening this historic occasion.

ISIS Malaysia has a profoundly personal significance for me. The idea to set up ISIS Malaysia was conceived during the premiership of my father, the late Tun Hussein Onn. After his retirement, my father served as the Institute's inaugural chairman from 1984 until his passing in 1990. The first APR in 1987 was therefore held under his chairmanship. I am pleased to see that it has remained true to its objective of bringing together various stakeholders for dialogue, with a view towards reducing tensions and enhancing confidence in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have been asked today to speak about "Regional Security in the Asia Pacific: Present State and Future Trajectories". I don't want to say too much because there will be an excellent and distinguished panel after me. However, what I will do is to share a few thoughts on this topic. These are of course necessarily informed by my being Malaysia's Minister of Defence. Malaysia, as a Southeast Asian, maritime and progressive Muslim nation, which is rapidly ascending the ladder of development, is in a unique position to offer its perspective on contemporary security and military challenges.

The "present state" of regional security in the Asia Pacific is of course well known. We are in an age of uncertainty, where challenges and threats to security often emerge or evolve faster than solutions to them. These security threats are of an entirely different nature and scale than previously thought, a sort of "globalisation of security challenges". Additionally, current responses to them appear increasingly inadequate. There is concern that as security in the region becomes more volatile, the region is not prepared institutionally for this volatility.

**Nation states are much less** threatened by one another than by the growing risk posed by non-state and often transnational entities, from religious extremists to cyber terrorists. Non-military threats have become more dangerous and widespread. This situation is attributed to the increasing number of non-state actors in international dynamics.

Again, the specific manifestations of these trends are well known. For one, the threat posed by returning fighters from the West Asian conflicts and self-radicalised individuals remain a clear and present danger. This can be seen by continued reports of arrests of militants across the Asia Pacific and, I must add, in this country.

With Daesh militants empowered by their propaganda success, the group has clearly overtaken al-Qaeda as the jihadist brand of choice. Terrorists always have the luxury of being able to pick their own target and strike at a time of their choosing. Authorities and security services to a degree are always playing catch up, plugging security gaps after the terrorists strike.

The only real choice for governments is to stop such attacks before they happen. The real tragedy of the Brussels, Paris and Jakarta attacks can be attributed to the failure of intelligence; to identify the networks and their members and to properly monitor their activities or penetrate them.

Such failures were compounded by the lack of communication between local agencies and their international counterparts. Security agencies need to advance their efforts and make cooperation a reality if we are to stand a chance of countering the well armed, well organised and well motivated terrorists within our midst.

Nevertheless, this must also be balanced by the fact that efforts by governments to stifle dissent and restrain media freedoms will fuel disquiet. Repression merely gives hardliners fertile breeding grounds to recruit disenfranchised individuals to their cause. Striking a balance between these two imperatives is the great challenge of our times.

**Next, we must not shy away** from the fact that territorial conflicts remain a sore point between nations in the region. The most pertinent is the South China Sea, which is a source of tension between ASEAN and its dialogue partner, China. Despite these geopolitical challenges, ASEAN must continue to remain united and speak with one voice.

Malaysia has always been consistent that this problem should be resolved amicably through peaceful means by all the concerned parties, in adherence to the Declaration of Conduct (DOC) and in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law. Malaysia also remains convinced that a Code of Conduct (COC) is the best way to govern the competing claims to the waters and urges

that consultations be intensified, to ensure the expeditious establishment of an effective COC.

In this regard, I would like to underscore that Malaysia is watchful of recent developments in the South China Sea, including the increasingly heavy reliance on coercive and military means to gain the upper hand in disputes. We call upon all countries to ensure that diplomacy prevails and that differences are resolved peacefully via multilateral platforms such as ASEAN.

Related to this is maritime security. The security of the maritime realm is crucial to the global economy, to say nothing of the Asia Pacific. The threats to maritime security that we face are complex in nature and include transnational challenges such as maritime terrorism, piracy and territorial disputes.

**Furthermore, the protection** of the environment, marine ecosystems and fish resources, and global warming require immense energy as well as attention. Phenomena such as flooding, hurricanes and droughts directly affect crop yields, infrastructure and food security.

We should acknowledge that food insecurity is a threat and multiplier for violent conflict. Food insecurity, especially when caused by higher food prices, heightens the risk of democratic breakdown, civil conflict, protest, rioting and communal conflict. Indeed, food insecurity is not the sole contributing factor for conflict. Like all cause and effect relationships, the link between the two forces is context specific and varies according to a country's level of development and the strength of its political institutions and social safety nets. It might not be a direct cause and it is rarely the only cause, but combined with other factors, for example, in the political or economic spheres, it could be the factor that determines whether and when violent conflicts will erupt.

Moreover, cyber security is also a continuing source of worry. Cyberattacks are growing in scale and complexity, from malware injections and phishing to social engineering and brute force attacks. The growth of social media and Internet of Things (IoT) have brought on several ancillary security challenges, such as Point of Sale threats as well as to sensors, gateways and end devices.

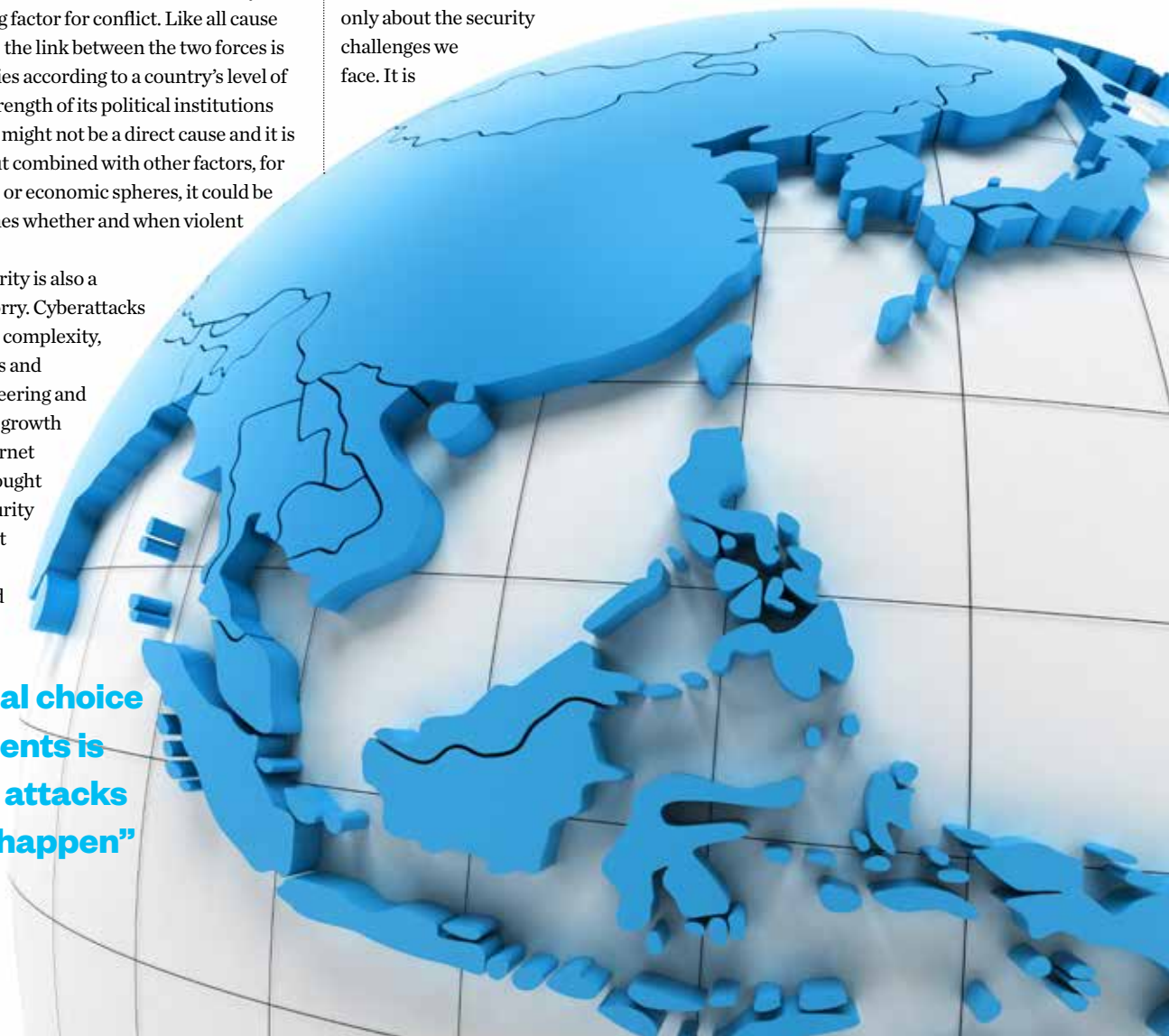
**“The only real choice for governments is to stop such attacks before they happen”**

These threats can cause a devastating impact across the network to smart grids and smart transportation, including aviation. Also, critical infrastructure (CI) and critical national infrastructure (CNI) remain especially vulnerable to cyberattacks. Future plots could be aimed at CNI rather than information breaches.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** this is hence the present state of security in Southeast Asia. What future trajectories can we ascertain? For one thing, I've come to realise that the categories we use to discuss and disaggregate security issues are becoming less and less distinct.

Some of those categories, while convenient shorthand, have always been artificial and perhaps misleading. For instance, the distinction between traditional and non-traditional security issues. Some countries may see terrorism as a “non-traditional security issue”. This, however, may be the exact reverse for others. For its part, Malaysia has grappled with insurgency and terrorism since the days of the Communist Emergency. More recently, the threat of Daesh has blurred the lines between traditional and non-traditional, conventional and non-conventional, military and civilian.

Conventional wisdom suggests that we should adapt to changing, mutable challenges by ourselves evolving. The redefinition of roles and categories is not only about the security challenges we face. It is



also about better utilising the wide array of capabilities that are brought to bear by militaries in cooperation with civilian elements, both governmental and non-governmental. One of the key instances here is the deployment of military assets for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).

To cite just one example, during the 9th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) last year, I invited my ASEAN colleagues to create an ASEAN Militaries Ready Group on HADR, which was approved. The Ready Group would serve as a dedicated force, comprising specialists in disaster relief and military medicine from all core ASEAN countries, which aims to achieve quick humanitarian assistance to ASEAN member states faced with disasters. This force would be trained together, and develop common procedures and interoperability under existing ADMM platforms.

In the event of a calamity, upon request by the host country, this force would be immediately despatched, taking its lead from a coordination centre. This ASEAN Militaries Ready Group on HADR will have special predetermined diplomatic clearance for entry, special lines of communications, and pre-identified human resource and equipment specialties in place to cater for the diverse needs of a particular disaster.

I can compare the formation of this force in a similar fashion to the United Nations Standby Arrangements System (UNSAS), whereby all of the contributing countries would set aside a portion of their military personnel and equipment for the force generation process, contingent-owned equipment, technical advice and developing generic guidelines for development; albeit in this case, it is skewed towards disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. It certainly would not be a combat-oriented force but would have the capability to operate at a similar tempo under severe adverse conditions.

There is also, as noted, a pressing need for us to better identify and protect our critical infrastructure from terrorists and insurgents. The wars of centuries past were fought over vital assets and trade routes in conflicts whose combatants targeted roads, bridges, fuel and food supplies and other vital assets. Securing these was often the key to success in war. Today, governments around the world need to establish complex plans to protect critical infrastructure and ensure the continuity of the essential services they provide.

**Most critical national** infrastructure is reliant upon its IT systems for the proper functioning of its physical security systems as well as its cyber security. That interdependence brings increased risks as well as benefits. The wider the security landscape, the more areas of potential attack there are. Security is, after all, only as good as its weakest link. With increasing reliance on IT systems, there is an ever greater need for cooperation and convergence between the roles of physical security and cyber security.

Which brings me to the issue of cooperation. This has become something of a mantra in security discussions. No one in their right minds would ever deny that cooperation is a good thing at all levels. Still, how it can be effectively

## “Interdependence brings increased risks as well as benefits. Security is, after all, only as good as its weakest link”

brought about remains something of an enigma.

Take for instance, ASEAN – Malaysia's primary platform for regional cooperation. Malaysia has championed the idea that a strong and successful ASEAN is not only an economic necessity, but also a strategic imperative. Malaysia believes that a strong ASEAN is a stabilising influence in the region. ASEAN has helped shape Malaysia's national and regional security policies. ASEAN members have always prided themselves on the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of its members. The “ASEAN Way” and “ASEAN Centrality” have been the prime factors behind all that the group has been able to achieve.

Nevertheless, this principle of non-intervention has come under repeated stress as the ASEAN communities get closer. The conundrum here is how to guarantee our individual sovereignty while giving member states the capacity to address security issues emanating from one state that may affect the region. Here, I am compelled to mention a quote by our Prime Minister Dato' Sri Najib Razak when he said, “I believe the biggest challenge facing us in the Asian region is domestic stability. International conflicts have often been caused by internal instability.”

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude therefore by offering a few questions which the participants in the session to follow may like to address:

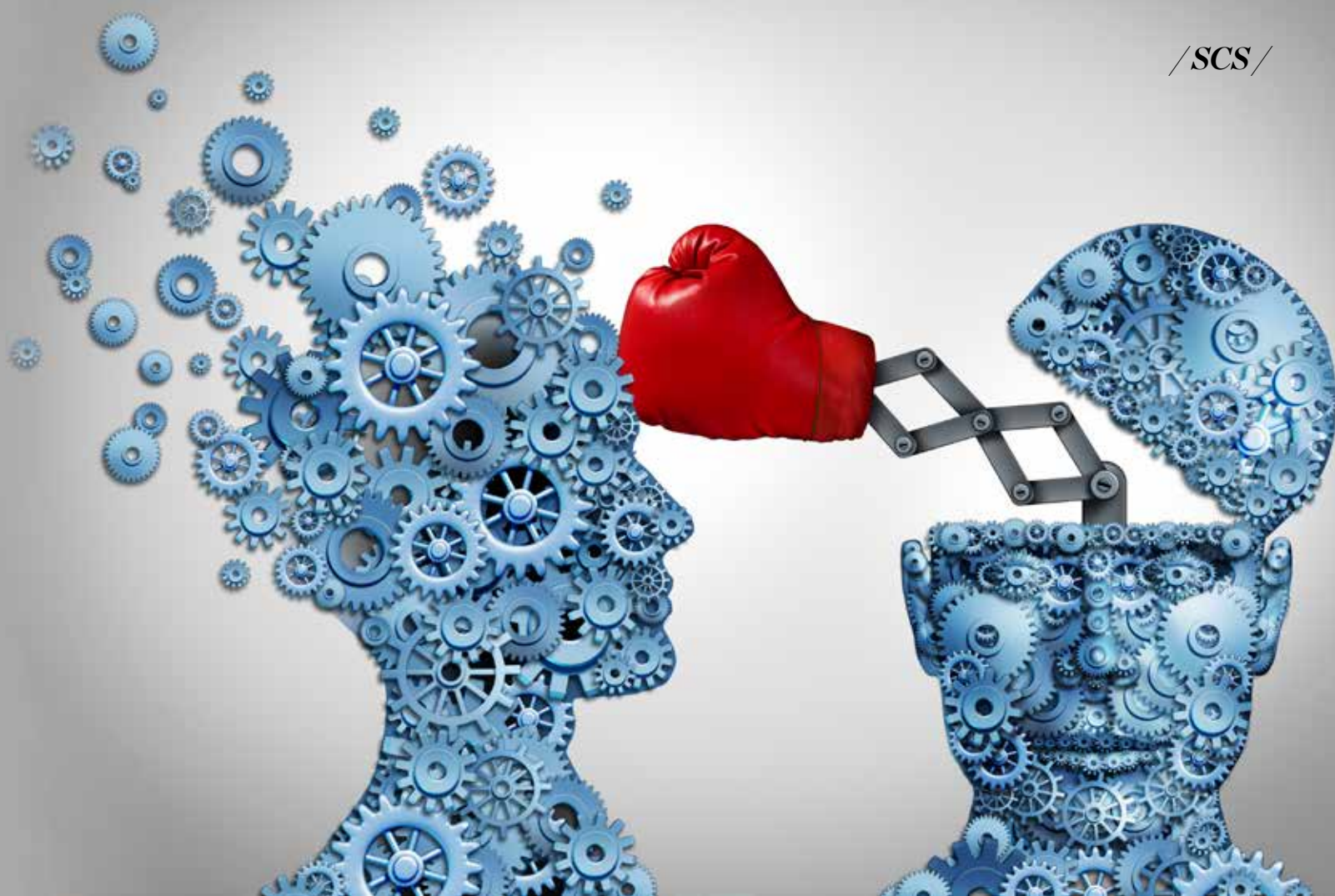
- What, if anything, can we or do we need to do to respond to the blurring of security-related issues? Practitioners have been aware of this for some time now: has anything changed? What can we look forward to in the future?
- What black swans could descend upon us, especially in the area of critical infrastructure protection? What are the questions no one is asking? What could catch us unawares?
- How can we ensure smarter and more effective security cooperation, especially in the Asia-Pacific context? What low-hanging fruit can we achieve? Should we be bold or more gradualist? What is currently within the realm of possibility?

I hope that, in the discussions in the coming days, you will always keep in mind the many complex issues that come in the wake of the blurring of lines between what is regarded as conventional and non-conventional, traditional and non-traditional and civilian and non-civilian.

Conferences like this provide the opportunity for frank discussions and the testing of ideas. I hope you will use the 30th APR to imaginatively explore solutions to some of the difficult issues that I've mentioned. I wish you all the best. ●

Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein is Minister of Defence, Malaysia. This is a transcript of the speech he delivered at the 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable on 31 May 2016





# The Psychology of the South China Sea



BY DAVID A WELCH

*In these waters it is almost certainly true that everyone is sincere about their claims, genuinely believes that they are justified, and interprets challenges as evidence of hostility. We need a new approach...*

**C**onversations about the South China Sea dispute have traditionally been dominated by history, politics, and law. Missing from the discussion is psychology. I would argue that this is a major omission, as only by adding psychology to the mix can we make sense of the nature of the claims, the pressures and constraints the claimants face, and the apparent intractability as well as the dangerousness of the dispute. Psychology is what ties the other three considerations together. Not only does adding psychology to the mix make the dispute easier to understand, it may also point the way towards novel, creative ways of managing it.

Let us begin with history. All claimants back up their claims with historical arguments and insist that their understandings of that history are indisputable. In fact, the only thing that is clear about the history of the South China Sea is that the history of the South China Sea is unclear. Quite simply, the documentary record is incomplete and



ambiguous. Small wonder that arguments about historical claims fall on deaf ears.

The South China Sea dispute is, of course, deeply political. But it is important to note that all claimant states have both domestic and international political reasons for staking out the positions that they take. In recent years, domestic politics has come to be a source of greater pressure, and to represent a greater constraint on claimant states' freedom of action, in authoritarian and democratic countries alike. China provides a good example. Until relatively recently, Chinese elites conducted foreign policy without significant domestic input. Nowadays, however, the Chinese people regularly voice strong opinions on foreign policy issues, and from time to time take to the streets to do so. The ruling Communist Party is acutely aware that its domestic legitimacy now rests in significant measure on upholding "core" interests such as sovereignty, and probably rightly fears the ire of a mobilised, nationalistic public.

**What about law?** At the end of the day, the South China Sea dispute is fundamentally a legal dispute. At stake are rival claims to territorial sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction. Such claims are claims of entitlement, and a "title" only makes sense against the backdrop of a widely accepted set of legal principles and procedures defining entitlements and establishing authoritatively how disputes are to be resolved. Under international law, history is usually relevant when determining territorial sovereignty, although it is not necessarily the only relevant consideration: principles (such as the self-determination of peoples), treaties, international recognition, and "generally accepted practices" can also come to bear. For maritime jurisdiction, however, only the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) applies. Of course, sometimes one cannot settle a dispute about maritime jurisdiction without first settling a dispute about territorial sovereignty.

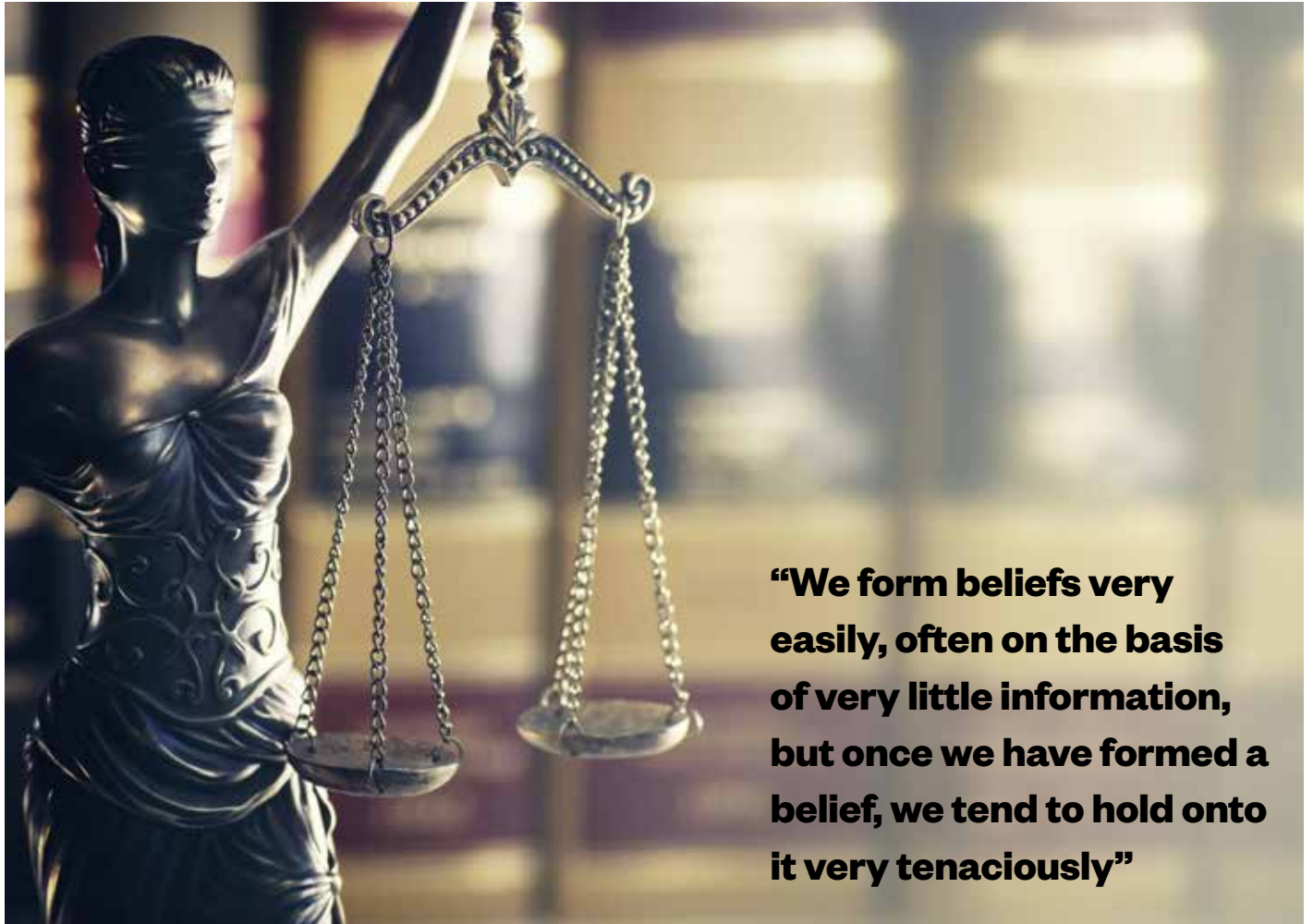
Where does psychology fit in? Psychology explains four key things: First, it explains why people believe so strongly and so confidently in their claims, even when those claims stand on shaky historical or legal ground. Second, it explains the stridency with which people assert their claims, and the inflexibility they display when those claims are challenged. Third, it explains why people react irrationally when their claims are challenged, often responding in ways that are counterproductive from the perspective of their own interests. And fourth, psychology explains why people assume the worst of people who challenge their claims.

Three particular bodies of theory and research in psychology are especially helpful for understanding the South China Sea dispute (and indeed any dispute over territorial sovereignty or maritime jurisdiction that inflames national passions). The first is schema theory. We all construct a set of beliefs about the world — a schema — with which to make sense of it, and we interpret new information in the light of that set of beliefs. Schema theory tells us that we form beliefs very easily, often on the basis of very little information (and sometimes very poor quality information), but that once we have formed a belief, we tend

to hold onto it very tenaciously. We have, as it were, a double standard for forming and for changing our beliefs. This is precisely the dynamic at work in Jane Austen's classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Elizabeth Bennet forms a very strongly negative image of Mr Darcy early — on the basis of one very brief interaction — and only changes it slowly and reluctantly. The amount of evidence she required to decide that Darcy was a man of fundamentally good character dwarfed the amount of evidence she required at the outset to decide that he was not. We see this dynamic in the South China Sea as well. Leaders and publics alike have formed beliefs about their entitlements relatively quickly (and, I might add, relatively recently, in historical perspective), and have done so on the basis of relatively poor quality information. Few people have actually bothered to look at the historical record; most people make up their minds about national entitlements simply by taking their leaders' or compatriots' word for it. Having made up their minds, they resist changing them.

**Beliefs about entitlement** are beliefs about justice. A second contribution psychology offers is insight into the nature and effect of the justice motive, or what I have defined elsewhere as "the desire to correct a perceived discrepancy between entitlements and benefits". The justice motive is ubiquitous: we all monitor the world for discrepancies of this kind, and when we perceive them — or when we see people challenging what we understand to be our legitimate rights — we experience a unique sense of moral outrage that increases our stridency, reduces our willingness to negotiate, increases our willingness to take risks, and sometimes leads us to violence. When our sense of justice is inflamed, we think with our hearts rather than our heads, and often do things that we would regret if we were thinking calmly and dispassionately. It is no accident that so many violent crimes are crimes of passion.

A third contribution psychology offers is "the Fundamental Attribution Error". It is perfectly normal for us to attribute actions we dislike by people we like to situational considerations, but to attribute actions we dislike by people we dislike to dispositional ones. Thus we tend to look sympathetically on friends and allies as being forced to do unpleasant things against their will, but to interpret the actions of our adversaries as the deliberate deeds of evil people. In the South China Sea, for example, rival claimant states (and the United States) interpret China's bold land reclamation activities as reflecting nefarious intent, rarely considering that they might actually be reactions to domestic or international pressures. Similarly, China tends to interpret American Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) as directed specifically at China, as parts of a deliberate strategy of containment, and as intended to undermine China's legitimate rights, when in fact they are nothing more than standard American practice designed to make a general point on a matter of legal principle, as is demonstrated by the fact that the United States has conducted FONOPs against friends and allies as well.



**“We form beliefs very easily, often on the basis of very little information, but once we have formed a belief, we tend to hold onto it very tenaciously”**

The upshot of all of this is that in the South China Sea it is almost certainly true that everyone is sincere about their claims, genuinely believes that they are justified, and interprets challenges as evidence of hostility. Accordingly, they naturally tend to see others (rather than themselves) as provocateurs and tend to underestimate the degree to which the behaviour of others reflects situational constraints, many of which are domestic. If parties made greater efforts to put themselves in each others’ shoes, they might actually perceive ways of ameliorating tensions and cooperating around the margins of issues in a way that would open space for a degree of trust.

One final point: the media can and should do a better job of making this possible. Most of the reporting on the South China Sea dispute has been inaccurate and unhelpful. Consider three examples:

1. It is now standard practice among Western news outlets to state point-blank that “China claims almost the entire South China Sea”, a locution that makes it sound as though China considers the South China Sea to be a Chinese lake. China has never said any such thing. Officially, China has only ever claimed the islands that fall within the “Nine-Dash Line” (the Spratly [Nansha], Paracel [Xisha], Pratas [Dongsha], and Zhongsha Islands) and their associated waters, but has never

precisely said which “islands” confer what maritime rights or exactly how far those maritime rights extend. Indeed, one of the challenges in managing the South China Sea dispute is that China, uniquely among the claimants, has not clearly said exactly what it claims.

2. The mainstream media routinely refer to China’s “aggressive” land reclamation campaign. But while the campaign has certainly been swift and dramatic, it has not necessarily been “aggressive”, a term that presumes a particular set of Chinese intentions and dispositions.
3. The mainstream media speak regularly of China issuing “threats” and “warnings” to other countries’ aircraft and vessels in the South China Sea, whereas in fact China has been very careful to avoid any kind of ultimatum, turning on fire control radar, or anything else that could actually presage a use of force. China only ever begs or pleads with ships and planes to leave, or complains about them after the fact.

This systematic demonisation of China is, of course, perfectly natural as well, and is no doubt a function of the very psychodynamics I have already discussed. But it only makes a very delicate diplomatic situation that much more difficult to handle. ●

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# WHOSE HISTORY?

## *Competing narratives and a history of “humiliation”*



BY  
THOMAS DANIEL

*The opacity of the Chinese state makes it hard to clearly determine China’s objectives, motives and calculations. But rising nationalism and the country’s self-perception must be understood if an outcome acceptable to all parties is ever to be found*

**D**evelopments in the South China Sea dispute in 2015 and the first half of 2016 point to a dangerous new trend. The dispute appears to be becoming less about that between littoral claimant states and more one between great powers, namely China and the United States. A key development leading to current tensions has been China’s land reclamation in the South China Sea, while

Chinese fishing fleets, supported by maritime militia and the China Coast Guard, are also now operating as far south as Malaysian waters off north Borneo and Indonesia’s Natuna Islands.

The United States, in response to what it sees as China’s use of aggressive, unlawful tactics in pursuing its claims, has conducted several widely publicised freedom of navigation and flight exercises within 12 nautical miles of

Chinese reclaimed features, and has sought to increase cooperation with other claimant states. China, in turn, has accused the US of provocative actions and of seeking to worsen tensions in the region. China also boosted its longstanding military presence on Woody Island, in the Paracels, and deployed surface-to-air missiles and fighter jets on the island in February 2016, sparking more accusations and counter-accusations.

Another potential tinderbox was The Hague’s ruling on the arbitration case brought by the Philippines. China refused to participate, claiming that the dispute was not subject to arbitration because it was ultimately a matter of sovereignty. Prior to the ruling, the early months of 2016 saw China going on a blitz among its diplomatic and trade partners with allegedly up to 60 countries supporting China’s position and calling for bilateral negotiations among claimant states. Observers have already warned that China risks possible pariah status, should it deliberately ignore the findings, or take actions in its aftermath that could be seen as worsening the dispute.



As we enter into this new paradigm, it is important for claimants, stakeholders and observers to understand how the dispute is viewed by China, whose intentions and motivations will have great consequence on how the situation develops. This however, is no easy task. While the opacity of the Chinese state does not allow external observers to clearly determine China's objectives, motives and calculations, it is possible to shed some light on how China ultimately views the dispute – which is underpinned ultimately by how China views itself.

First, we have the Chinese narrative on the South China Sea dispute. Ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it has claimed and sought to assert control over features and waters in the South China Sea – best highlighted by the infamous nine or ten-dash line map, which itself is predicated on the U-shaped line map released in 1948 by the then Republic of China. This legacy, along with charts, and historical artefacts that allegedly prove that ancient Chinese mariners were the first to navigate and claim the features of the South China Sea, form much of China's claim and belief that they have a historical right to much of the South China Sea.

**So ingrained is this belief**, that in a June 2016 BBC article on the alleged existence of a 600-year-old book apparently containing precise navigational instructions on how to reach the Spratlys from southern Hainan Island, the visiting journalist noted how government institutions, security forces, museums, ports, fishing communities and villages on the island seemed to revolve around upholding the narrative that the South China Sea is historically Chinese sovereign territory.

It is important to note, however, that China has yet to clarify exactly how far this claim extends. It has also remained silent on the maritime entitlements of those features. Nevertheless, this has not prevented the country from framing these claims in uncompromising and sometimes emotional terms. Government officials, academics and analysts, even those from the private and business sector, rarely if ever break from officially sanctioned positions. Those that do, even unintentionally, are often quick to correct themselves.

This narrative also sees the Southeast Asian claimants as having encroached on Chinese territory and exploited resources that legitimately belong to China. Thus China's actions to reclaim its territory are seen as

## **“It is important to note, however, that China has yet to clarify exactly how far this claim extends. It has also remained silent on the maritime entitlements of those features”**

a natural response to foreign occupation. Any country should and would utilise its instruments of national power – economic, political, diplomatic and military – to pursue and secure its national and strategic interests at home and abroad. In China's case, this includes reclaiming and defending its sovereignty in the South China Sea. In fact, China sees itself as patient and magnanimous in its attempt to negotiate with other claimant states in order to create a conducive climate to resolve the dispute.

This is seen through China's commitment to a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea and through offers of “joint development” of resources. In recent years, however, the biggest obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the dispute – from the Chinese perspective – has been the involvement of the US, which has not only undertaken actions and strategies to undermine what China views as its legitimate claims, but has also emboldened, at best, and instigated, at worst, vigorous opposition towards Chinese claims in the South China Sea by other claimants.

**This narrative** is underpinned by China's history, its experience with foreign powers and its current leadership, all of which frames how China views itself. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) since 1949, the country perceives itself to be an underdog and a developing nation – yet also a great civilisation whose rightful place in the world has been denied, trampled on and even carved up by Western powers and by its neighbour, Japan. While China's “Century of Humiliation” might be a historical reference for outside scholars, its significance to modern day Chinese thinking and self-perception is grossly underestimated.

Some observers believe that while the notion of China being constantly bullied by outside powers seeking to “control” it may not be entirely unfounded, it has also been deliberately engrained in the Chinese psyche by the CPC. This has been coupled with the notion that it was the CPC that finally liberated and unified China from its former imperialist

rulers – both domestic and foreign. This ties into anxieties by the CPC over the legitimacy it derives from the wider populace to sustain its rule.

A consequence of these narratives is that for many Chinese, decision makers included, it is inconceivable for them to view China as an aggressor or a bully in the dispute. To them, China seeks nothing more than to recover and maintain its legitimate territorial sovereignty and protect its strategic interests. Another direct consequence has been the rise of nationalism, which can be seen in Chinese sentiments expressed about the dispute in a variety of social media platforms.

Thus, it is unlikely that the Chinese leadership will compromise its stance on the dispute – even if it wanted to. This is why China publically and pre-emptively renounced the arbitration process brought by the Philippines and will not acknowledge or follow its outcome. The potential domestic cost far outweighs international opinion and implications.

These narratives run much deeper and broader than what has been outlined above. Nevertheless, it is imperative that an understanding of China's position and perceptions – and by extension limitations – is part of the search for a solution to the dispute that is acceptable to all claimants and stakeholders. In the short to medium term at least, it appears that any solution must be “seen” to benefit China and cannot be externally imposed or perhaps even inspired. The involvement of external stakeholders, especially the US, may be necessary in the eyes of many smaller claimant states, as it is the only power able to check Beijing's ambitions. But unfortunately it may also serve to provoke more assertive behaviour from China, and it lends credence to those who have always argued that foreign powers aim to keep China's rise in check. This poses a difficult challenge to all stakeholders, especially the smaller claimant states. But it is one that must be faced. 🌐

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# AN ASEAN REALITY CHECK



BY FIRDAOS ROSLI  
AND DWINTHA MAYA KARTIKA

**A**s the primary mover in regional cooperation, ASEAN has to stay relevant in an era of increasingly contending interests. This is especially so in light of the 2015 promise of a “people-oriented” ASEAN.

ASEAN, however, remains largely rooted in – some would say trapped by – its inherent structural characteristics.

It has reacted to internal and external pressures in three ways: first, symbolically, with fanfare but little apparent substance; second, partially, with responses going only as far as can be accommodated by national interests; or, third, not at all.

Symbolism can be important in inter-state

*Some progress towards integration has been made, but the tendency to settle for the lowest common denominator endangers cohesiveness and Community centrality*

relations. Far from being mere tokenism, it can communicate future intent. But symbolism can also disguise inaction and a lack of consensus.

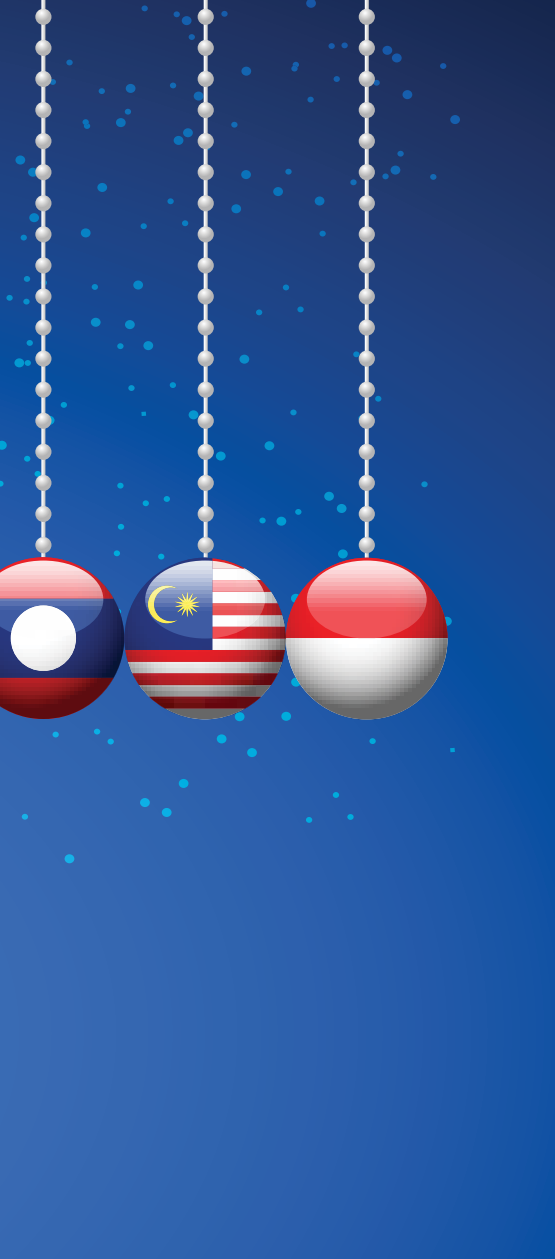
Equating the ASEAN Community, and particularly the Political-Security and Socio-Cultural Community Pillars, with the increasing number of “talk fests”, however, rings hollow by almost any standard.

If one looks at the so-called Blueprints associated with these two Communities, they

are to a great extent statements of future intent and are low on commitments of any significance.

ASEAN’s Economic Pillar is more responsive; although even here limits are apparent. The decision to embark on an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 as a result of regional integration schemes among advanced countries was a bold move for its time.





In 2000, the then Chinese premier Zhu Rongji mooted the idea of a China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA). Given the importance of China as a fast rising market, a framework agreement was signed two years later. This led to a proliferation of similar agreements with other dialogue partners.

Given the “spaghetti bowl” effect and the lightweight nature of these agreements, it was desirable that a more uniform, deeper and more comprehensive agreement be embarked upon.

This was especially so since four ASEAN countries (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam) decided to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, following the US decision to participate in 2009.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was launched in 2012 with the ASEAN-10 countries, together with Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.

Having embarked on the RCEP, ASEAN’s challenge is to conclude it, something that is easier said than done given the size and interests of the countries involved.

But ASEAN also faces the challenge of deepening its own integration so that it remains competitive, and central and significant to the economic affairs of the region. This too has proven to be a struggle, especially with respect to the dismantling of non-tariff barriers and the opening up of services.

As it stands, more than 70 percent of intra-ASEAN trade in 2015 was transacted among Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand alone.

Whether in the political, security, economic or social and cultural areas, member states do not want to make the hard decisions, and they also do not want supra-national institutions to make them for them.

Yet the ASEAN Community has to be functional in all of these areas, and specifically where they matter most.

**If, after five decades,** ASEAN proves incapable of being a lead actor in maintaining peace and security in, for example, the maritime domain, the real value of its Political-Security Community Blueprint will be laid bare for all to see.

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, former ASEAN Secretary-General, has also underscored the lack of ASEAN Community discourse in the member states’ parliamentary discussions. This signifies the lack of ASEAN import in the domestic political realm.

If, after five decades, ASEAN is unable to pique the interests of private companies outside and, perhaps more importantly, within the region, generating investment, employment and incomes, questions will be asked about the worth of its Economic Community Blueprint.

If ASEAN also cannot be vital to the social progress of lesser-developed member states such as Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, especially in the field of education, its significance will inevitably decline.

In order to give the Blueprints the appearance of seriousness, efforts are undertaken to monitor and review progress through the use of scorecards, as with the ASEAN Roadmap that preceded it.

With the possible exception of the Economic Community, however, these scorecards are known to be highly aggregative and lacking

in specific qualitative and quantitative benchmarks.

The Economic Community Blueprint 2025 contains the provision that commitments undertaken at the regional level will be translated into national policies and regulations; but it remains to be seen whether and how member states will comply.

**It is nevertheless** safe to argue that the AEC will remain the main achievement of the ASEAN Community, while the Political-Security and Socio-Cultural Blueprints lack cohesiveness and impetus and will lag behind.

In the worst case scenario, the latter could fall apart, as appears to be happening in the former with respect to the important issue of the South China Sea and China’s claims. According to Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak, Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, ASEAN will have to revisit its future growth model in order to stay relevant in years to come.

Yet even the AEC may falter, with member states demonstrating that they are prepared to strike more comprehensive deals with countries outside of the region. The case of government procurement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership is a case in point.

At some stage, even with fuller trade and investment integration, ASEAN’s momentum is likely to falter. For further progress to occur, member states will have to undertake more coordination of macroeconomic policies, something that they have studiously avoided to date.

Given present trajectories, even the ASEAN Community of 2025 would appear to still be very much a work-in-progress.

Tan Sri Dr Munir Majid, Chairman of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, believes that ASEAN is trying to cope with an era of globalisation and the contending interests of big powers. How far short of expectations it falls remains to be seen, but if national and other factors push ASEAN towards the lowest common denominator for integration, the Community will be fraught with unfulfilled expectations and this will incentivise centrality-sapping initiatives. ■

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# Strategic update: Europe



BY ALIZAN MAHADI

*With fault lines deepening on the continent, the EU's future role in global affairs is uncertain. What does it mean for ASEAN?*

**A** fractured Europe in general and the European Union (EU), more specifically, are grappling with multiple crises that threaten their own security and undermine their long term position in global affairs. From Brexit and concerns about immigration and the rise of the far right, to terrorism, relations with Russia and uncertainties about the future of NATO, there are fears about the unity of the continent and the future of the EU itself.

There are signs, however, that the EU's influence as a global actor is still perceived as positive. In a study commissioned by the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPi), more than 10,000 respondents from "strategic partner" countries were asked how important a role the EU plays in maintaining global peace and security. It found that 33 percent saw the EU as "very important" and 40 percent as "somewhat important", with only four percent viewing it

as "not at all important". The study concluded that, with the exception of Russia, the majority of strategic partners see EU leadership in world affairs as desirable and likely.

For the Asia Pacific, a pragmatic approach is likely to see Europe focusing less on hard security and more on trade and non-traditional security through bilateral, inter-regional and multilateral fora. With its vast amount of experience, expertise and technological capabilities, ensuring economic security and support for non-traditional security challenges such as water, food and energy security are likely to be the continent's main source of influence in the region.

In promoting a "connected Asia", alongside Japan, China and India, the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, released this June, highlights a priority to focus on ASEAN. The EU's relationship with the region spans more than 40 years and ambitions are to turn the relationship into a more strategic one.

In 1972, the then European Economic Community (EEC) was the first regional entity to establish informal ties with ASEAN. Since then, there has been an increase in dialogue and cooperation, as evidenced by multiple agreements, joint communiques and activities. This includes the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership, adopted in March 2007, and the EU acceding to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia in 2012, becoming the first regional organisation to do so. A joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council on "EU and ASEAN: A partnership with a strategic purpose" in May last year further outlined the EU's strategic intent.

**Despite the** rhetoric about striking a comprehensive strategic inter-regional relationship, if current trends remain, the focus will remain primarily on trade and on bilateral treaties and agreements with individual ASEAN member states.

ASEAN as a whole is the EU's third largest trading partner outside of Europe, while the EU is ASEAN's second largest trading partner. According to EU statistics, the two-way trade in goods stood at €201 billion in 2015, which represented an 11 percent increase on 2014. Exports from ASEAN to the EU amounted to almost €118 billion, while €83 billion went the other way.

However, it must be noted that Singapore is by far the largest trading partner, accounting for almost one third of EU-ASEAN trade, and about two thirds of investments between the two regions. The differences in political



## **“With the forces pulling the continent together weakening, those ripping it apart are becoming stronger; worst case scenarios are no longer unimaginable”**

systems, wealth and culture within ASEAN has arguably led the EU to place its emphasis on bilateral agreements and negotiations with individual member states.

This can be seen in the recently launched negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Indonesia. Having already completed bilateral agreements with Singapore (2014) and Vietnam (2015), and with free trade talks already commencing with the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand, EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem has said that the bilateral deals “serve as building blocks towards a future EU-ASEAN agreement, which remains the EU’s ultimate objective”. It remains to be seen if the individual agreements can lay the groundwork for future region-to-region agreements.

**Taking the** CEPA negotiations with Indonesia as a case in point, there are even observers that argue that the EU is taking advantage of the fact that Britain is barred from agreeing individual trade agreements until it leaves the EU – with a two year deadline after Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty is triggered. With talk of potential trade agreements in the future with allies of Britain, such as Commonwealth countries including Malaysia, there are fears of

a race between Britain and the EU that could further disrupt relations in Europe post-Brexit.

Issues such as the South China Sea are unlikely to be a focus for a region preoccupied by internal and external crises. For Asia and ASEAN’s security structure, Europe’s role may be limited to “stabilising interdependence” through enhancing capacity and confidence building to enable the region to act on its own, rather than being at the forefront of security efforts.

Maritime security and its peaceful settlement were highlighted in the EU Global Strategy. But it is unlikely that any military intervention will be considered, as the mechanisms to address this were identified as being mainly through dialogue and building maritime capacities. Its implementation can be seen through the EU jointly organising (with Indonesia and Malaysia) High Level Dialogues on Maritime Security Cooperation, as well as participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security.

In a broader sense, despite the obvious differences, ASEAN has always seen the experience of the EU itself as an exercise in regional integration. It has also been one of the EU’s aims to promote regional integration elsewhere. It is often argued that

inter-regional cooperation is hampered by the different nature of the EU and ASEAN, with dissimilarities in objectives and priorities, as well as capacities and wealth. However, since the fallout from Brexit, many pro-ASEAN commentators have highlighted the association’s distinctions from the EU, implying the latter in fact represents a failure of integration. Whether this will affect the EU’s role as a beacon for regional integration, or even inject uncertainty into ASEAN’s own ambitions may be the biggest effect of recent EU events on ASEAN’s future.

**To what extent** a preoccupied and resource-stretched Europe can devote its attention to Asia remains to be seen. Bulgarian President Rossen Plevneliev even warned that if the EU disintegrates, there could be war, with history showing how central the EU was in ensuring peace and stability for 70 years. With the forces pulling the continent together weakening, those ripping it apart are becoming stronger; worst case scenarios are no longer unimaginable.

In its introductory chapter titled “A Secure Europe in a Better World”, The European Security Strategy published in 2003 opened with the assertion that “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history”. Thirteen years on, and just after its successor strategy has been launched, how times have changed. ●

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# Mirage of stability



BY NURUL IZZATI KAMRULBAHRI  
AND NUR SALINA FAIRUZ SALLEH

*South Asia has long lived by the dictum “if you want peace, prepare for war”. What are the prospects for long-term stability – and an end to conflict in the region?*

**I**n its 2014 Election Manifesto, India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) underlined its commitment to revisiting India's nuclear stance. It stated that a victorious BJP would “study in detail India's nuclear doctrine, and revise and update it to make it relevant to challenges of current times”, and that the BJP would also “maintain a credible minimum deterrent that is in tune with changing geostatic realities”. Many believe this refers to a possible shift in the doctrine of “no first use” that India has long supported.

Since the BJP's victory, there have been few developments. But has India really been



## **“It has been estimated that the Taliban currently holds more ground than at any time since 2001. When they appear to be winning, why would they negotiate?”**

Notebook, Pakistan is expected to increase its stockpile of warheads to 220-250 by 2025. Presently, it stands at 110-130 – far higher than the US Defense Intelligence Agency predicted in 1999, when it said Pakistan would have only 60-80 by 2020.

Marie Izuyama and Shinichi Ogawa of the National Institute for Defense Studies in Japan contend that Pakistan should pursue two policies to achieve nuclear competence. First, to reinforce their air force to match India's, and second, to ensure their ballistic missiles and unassembled nuclear warheads can be safeguarded in the event of nuclear conflict. Thus far, Pakistan has yet to receive any kind of extensive assistance from its allies in its goal of achieving nuclear triad capability. The country will undoubtedly invest more in amassing expertise and welcome greater external assistance to develop better nuclear deterrence.

**With greater** deterrence comes greater possession of weapons of mass destruction. And given Pakistan's internal political conflicts and the fact that the country has been housing terror-related organisations, their pursuit of nuclear capability is controversial. Pakistan, on the other hand, argues that the Permissive Action Link (PAL) technology they are developing will hinder any possible misuse of their weapons.

But with the presence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban and the Taliban on either side of their border with Afghanistan, Pakistan cannot guarantee that, in the absence of PAL at this moment and without better C3I (command, control, communication and intelligence), local or international hostile organisations might find ways to gain access to these weapons.

India and Pakistan have long lived by the Latin saying, “si vis pacem, para bellum” – if you want peace, prepare for war. Escalating tensions along the Line of Control add more fuel to the fire. The establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has yet to succeed in bringing them together. Could India and Pakistan eventually summon the political will to heighten interdependence within SAARC? Or will the struggle for power projection inside SAARC

cause more bad blood? The current trajectory offers very little hope.

Adding to their already complex political and historical relations, the two nuclear powers have actively trumped each other's strategic moves in Afghanistan: India rebuilds the infrastructure, while some argue that Pakistan contributes to the country's destabilisation by backing the Taliban as a pro-Pakistan force.

Despite this, Pakistan presents itself as the key to peace in Afghanistan and in the war against terrorism. Sartaj Aziz, the de facto Pakistani Foreign Minister, has admitted that the Taliban leadership is in Pakistan with their families and that they are provided with facilities such as medicine. This confirmed provision of a safe haven has, to an extent, served as leverage for Pakistan to pressurise the Taliban to join peace talks.

After a series of failed negotiations, the US decided that Akhtar Mansour, the former Emir of the Taliban, needed to be eliminated. It is unlikely, however, that their new leader Haibatullah Akhунzada will decide that now is the time to revive talks. It has been estimated that the Taliban currently holds more ground than at any time since 2001. When they appear to be winning, why would they negotiate?

In order to move forward, core issues such as the presence of foreign powers and power sharing need to be addressed, and concessions will need to be made. This will be far from easy in a region with such a wide variety of overlapping security concerns.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the Taliban still maintains their political office in Doha, Qatar. When the office was first opened, it was revealed that one of the main aims in doing so was to “meet Afghans”. This could signal a receptivity to participate in negotiations with the Afghan government. Perhaps not in the near future, but with a new leadership supported by the heads of different factions, the Taliban may at some point be able to negotiate with a greater unity – and possibly reach an agreement that could bring peace at last to their country. ●

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tested by recent challenges in the changing geopolitical landscape?

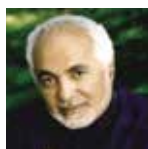
Pakistan has long topped India's security and foreign policy concerns, not least thanks to the former's persistence in pursuing maximum nuclear capability. What started as deterrence has become a never-ending arms race.

India's friendly relations with Japan – the strongest naval power in Asia – and the United States – the world's superpower – add greater tension to the equation. The transfer and sharing of know-how advances India's nuclear triad capability. It is only natural for Pakistan to pursue the same kind of expansion.

According to a recent report by Nuclear



# A Roadmap for Peace Against Daesh and Other Extremist Groups



BY IMAM FEISAL ABDUL RAUF

The West missed a golden opportunity to create a new global defence pact after the end of the Cold War. Nothing less than a new NATO – with all Muslim-majority countries, and all those of the old Warsaw Pact – is needed if the world is to fight, and defeat, extremists in all the spaces they occupy

**W**e in the Muslim world are fighting for hearts and minds – this in the midst of the wrenching wars that now convulse the Middle East. Alongside the battles on the ground is a war of ideology. The two conflicts are intertwined. For the violent words and images that have won Daesh recruits have also precipitated the deadly attacks we all

deplore. The losses are staggering. Hundreds of thousands are dead. Millions are displaced. Meanwhile, the cancer of religious extremism spreads worldwide.

To solve this problem we need to understand it. The problem has two prongs, one at the level of international strategic, tactical and military defence, and the other at

the level of the ideals that move and motivate young Muslims today – especially the ideal of the Caliphate, which has morphed into the idea – and ideal – of an “Islamic” state.

We of short memory likely forget what such rule, in all its flower, once was like. Most recently, it was embodied by the Ottoman Empire, especially in its later years. In the last decades of that empire, democratic ideals mingled with a long established culture of religious pluralism. If Islam was the established religion, it was also a protective canopy over all the peoples of the realm. Each could follow his own religion in a space commonly shared. Jerusalem was not a contested city but the city of peace its name



***“An Islamic state commits above all to justice as articulated in the six Maqasid. These are Orthodox Islamic affirmations of universal aspirations”***

implies. It is no wonder if, for those of longer remembrance, the world of the Ottoman caliphs conjures a lost ideal.

In an effort to recover the ideal of the Islamic state, the Sharia Index Project, under the aegis of the Cordoba Initiative, and with the generous support of the Malaysian government, recently gathered a team of scholars to study the matter. Their goal was to reach consensus, *ijma*, on what makes a state Islamic and how that shows in measurable ways. The scholars concluded that traditional Muslim jurisprudence offers up both a definition and a means of measuring Islamic statehood. It is the idea of the Objectives of Islamic Law, known as the Maqasid al-Shari'a.

The Maqasid are a codification of the principles of Islamic law. They turn on six universal ideas of life, mind, religion, family, property, and honour. In brief, the ideal of life is to protect and preserve it, and to assure health and security; the ideal of mind, to promote rationality, education and science;

of religion, to promote freedom of choice in religious practice, and respect for the deepest personal beliefs, whether spiritual or not; of family, to support the family unit, focused on marriage and care of children; of property, to safeguard private ownership and economic wellbeing; of honour, to guarantee human dignity and rights. The Sharia Index is a calibration of these ideals that allows a nation to measure how close it comes to them.

An Islamic state commits above all to justice as articulated in the six Maqasid. These are Orthodox Islamic affirmations of universal aspirations. Everyone seeks security in life and property, freedom of mind and belief, love of family, and dignity of being. The maqasid of religion, in particular, affirms the right of individuals to choose their religion. This is why Muslims have always protected other faith communities and why Islam, historically, found a friendly reception in so many places. The Ottomans in particular made room for a wide variety of

Christian churches, with a plurality scarcely to be found outside the borders of their empire.

The universality of the Maqasid shows in many ways. They are basically an amplification of the ideals later promoted by the American Declaration of Independence: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These are inalienable rights, given us by the Creator, as Jefferson also affirmed. But what is the pursuit of happiness if not the endeavour to realise the ideals of the Maqasid? To the extent that the United States realises these ideals, it is compliant with the Maqasid and Shariah. A state that upholds these rights is Islamic or Godly. A state that does not, is not.

Daesh fails the test of Islamic statehood on several grounds. The Maqasid are ideals of justice and compassion. A godly state cares for all, of whatever religion, especially the poor. The poverty may be of wealth or power. The most Islamic state most especially protects the weak and marginalised. It does not kill them for who they are. That is genocide, whether of Yazidis or LGBT persons. The Prophet was not sent except as a mercy. The primary divine attributes are compassion and mercy. Any person, community or state that fails to show these qualities is simply not Muslim, by the Quran's own standards.

**The scholars of the Sharia Index Project** offer up an alternative vision of Islam's integration with statehood. A call to realise that integrative partnership issues from the project. The Federation of Malaysia has already answered that call by adopting the Maqasid, as calibrated by the Sharia Index, as a measure of how well it embodies the ideals of Islamic statehood. But this call must resound worldwide. This vision of the ulama, or scholars, must become one of the ummah, or Muslim community. That is work for all Muslim leaders to assume. The need is urgent, and the need is now.

To beat Daesh we must fight them in all the spaces they engage. These are no longer just physical ones. We must fight them on the Internet, where they recruit their followers. We must engage them on the ground, with all the powers of our military, law enforcement and intelligence capabilities. We must interdict the sources of their income, whether from oil or anything else.

We are talking now at the level of



***“To beat Daesh we must fight them in all the spaces they engage. These are no longer just physical ones”***

geopolitical strategy. It is time for the West to partner with non-Western nations in a part of global strategic defence. The pact must include Muslim-majority states. They must set and enact policy against religious extremism. The task is of the magnitude of the space programme, or the Manhattan Project, or the West's old war with communism. Acts by individuals or NGOs are not enough.

All of world security today founders on a strategic mistake made by the West: its failure to partner with Russia when the opportunity arose.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, gifted the West with a new and transformative option to ally with Russia rather than oppose it. That was how the West had treated its enemies at the end of the Second World War. It enacted global security treaties with its former foes. There was NATO, which incorporated Germany. There was the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, which was

signed on the same day as the official peace negotiation with Japan in 1951.

For Southeast Asia there was SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) and for West Asia, CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). These security pacts upheld not only the political sovereignty of the member nations – but also their economies. For political instability soon undermines a nation's economy. The big money leaves. This only underscores how much rides on international agencies of strategic defence – and how much is at risk in their absence at the level needed.

Concurrent with the various treaty organisations that America orchestrated at the end of World War II, and to back them up, America developed its fleets. These were floating armies that could be quickly mustered to the defence of any ally nation under attack. They pre-empted war and kept the peace between the nations within the security pacts – Germany would never again



attack France – and with the nations outside it, most especially the USSR.

For the other point of the Western security pacts was to hold Soviet Russia at bay. The end of the Cold War, when the Berlin Wall fell, raised hopes for an end to the standoff between the United States and Soviet Russia, and all that that entailed – the proxy wars between them around the world occasioned by events in Cuba, Hungary, Vietnam and others. The West itself dashed that hope. The Warsaw Pact had been Russia's strategic security organisation. When the Berlin Wall fell, the expectation was that the old organisations of strategic defence – NATO and the Warsaw Pact – would fold. The Warsaw Pact did. NATO did not. The ex-Warsaw Pact nations were invited into the European Union. Russia was left to itself. The West sidelined and humiliated Russia. That was the grave mistake.

The nations of NATO and the Warsaw Pact should have merged into a global defence pact. If they had, a coordinated, worldwide force ready to contain the spread of religious extremism would have been at hand.

The West's failure to partner with Russia when the chance arose follows an earlier mistake that foretold the menace of Daesh. In the 1980s, America allied with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to foment militant Muslim groups in Afghanistan fighting against Russia. America armed and trained the so-called Mujahideen, including among their number Osama bin Laden. Other Muslim countries joined the effort. Egypt, for instance, found use for its criminals by sending some to fight. Here was a way for a country to employ its undesirables. Some died in battle. Those who did not came back with their militant training and began to trouble their home countries. Even Israel is partially responsible for creating Hamas as a counter to Fatah. The social welfare arm of Hamas operated with Israeli sanction, in Gaza, before the group turned more wildly, overtly militant.

The legacy of these two interrelated mistakes from the 1980s – arming Islamic militants, and alienating Soviet and post-Soviet Russia – haunt the West today. They weave the web that undermines security worldwide. If Russia entered the Syrian fray only lately – and ambiguously, from a Western standpoint – America has only itself to blame. America positioned Russia to run interference against it. The USSR was the

***“The nations of NATO and the Warsaw Pact should have merged into a global defence pact. If they had, a coordinated, worldwide force ready to contain the spread of religious extremism would have been at hand”***

prime victim and major world power brought down by militant Islam, aided and abetted by American might.

Russia's presence in Syria is informed by its inimical relations with America, which the US itself provoked by its policies of the recent past. Russia attacked the anti-Assad rebels, over American protests, because it does not want to lose its client state of Syria. So instead of a global security pact working to contain the violence in that country, we have had a virtual proxy war there between Russia and the United States.

Of course, the Middle East is a battle ground of local enmity and proxy wars. For some of this, the old Sunni-Shia split is to blame. But the violence between them has not been this bad since the days of Imam Ali, when the split first arose. Like other religions, Islam has always had to contend with extremists in its midst. The first were the Kharajis who rebelled against their own leader, Imam Ali, for not being radical enough. But extremist ideology is modern, too. It surfaced in the work of Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb, whom Nasser had hanged, and who is remembered by some as a martyr to Islam.

**Today's conflict** between Sunni and Shia nests inside the larger one between the United States and Russia. America in uneasy alliance with Saudi Arabia, and Russia with Iran, are the backdrop to the Sunni-Shia wars. The divide convulses the whole region. A bond of almost familial unity ties Iran to the Shia of the region, and Saudi Arabia to the Sunnis. So Iran defends the Shia in Syria and Lebanon, where Hezbollah thrives. Assad, too, remains in power because of Iranian support for his Alawi brand of Shiism. The Shia in Lebanon, east Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Bahrain all have Iran's eye, even and most especially in those Sunni-majority states.

But the West also bears responsibility for having unleashed religious extremism through its role in the Middle East. The result is failing states throughout the region.

Iraq is half destroyed and Syria borders on collapse. Afghanistan has not recovered. Pakistan and Egypt are challenged. Yemen is broken apart. Libya totters on the brink. If Bahrain has remained intact, it is in part because the United States has a naval base there. Meanwhile, streams of refugees pour from Syria into nations ill-equipped to care for them.

We are far from the days of the Ottomans. But even from their place in the past, they hold out an ideal to recover, of diverse peoples living in peace. Only a strong strategic partnership among the nations of the world can accomplish that today. The defeat of Daesh needs for the larger geopolitical conflict, between the United States and Russia, to be resolved first.

The two superpowers must partner in a strategic defence alliance that includes Muslim-majority states. Each of the nations in the new alliance must contribute its power, whether hard or soft. The alliance must have scope and power at the level of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. It must be as consequential as the old pact between the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan that unleashed the Mujahideen in the first place. The effect of this new partnership on the world will be equal and opposite to that of that old one. It will be equal in strength and breadth of consequence.

It will be opposite in the kind of Islam it promotes – not the Islam of the extremists, but of the empowered moderates who keep the peace. That is the root meaning of Islam. It is the peace Allah commands and models in the ever-repeated divine epithet: the Compassionate, the Merciful. There is still time for the nations to act. But the time is now. 🌐

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Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf is the founder and Chairman of The Cordoba Initiative, a multi-national, multi faith organisation dedicated to improving Muslim-West relations. His book, *Defining Islamic Statehood: Measuring and Indexing Contemporary Muslim States*, was published last year



# The Limits of International Military Coalitions



BY MUHAMMAD SINATRA

Daesh's unprecedented status as both a state actor and a terrorist group complicates conventional efforts to deal with it militarily. Moreover, there is a division between countries over whether its terrorism in West Asia or abroad should be the priority

**A**mong the most vital elements in the battle against Daesh is the involvement of the state. For many years, governments worldwide have been grappling with the task of neutralising terrorist activities that threaten the integrity of the state domestically while establishing global links with one another to effectively combat the transnational nature of radical movements.

This dilemma was well reflected in the

presentations of two speakers at ISIS Malaysia's 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable at the beginning of June. According to Asrul Daniel Ahmed, then COO of the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation, state actors must establish partnerships with relevant stakeholders within countries to stem the spread of radical messages domestically. On the other hand, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, founder of The Cordoba Initiative (see pages 22-25)

goes further to say that states must enter an international coalition to challenge terror groups' pervasive influence in physical and cyber space across nations.

An international military coalition is a manifestation of power politics that is as ancient as history. In the last 80 or so years, countries worldwide have formed such groupings whenever a crisis arose, from the Allies and the Axis powers in the Second World War, to NATO and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War. In these cases, countries assembled to balance or undermine the threat projected by certain state actors.

The attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent "War on Terror" brought a fresh



reiteration of military coalition. Close to 15 years ago, al-Qaeda was single-handedly responsible for the formation of a US-led coalition which brought prolonged military interventions to Afghanistan and Iraq. More recently, the success of Daesh has precipitated the creation of at least three military coalitions, led by Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States. These forces engage in airstrikes and play a supporting role to the Iraqi armed forces and Kurdish Peshmerga who carry out the bulk of the fighting on the ground against Daesh.

However, Daesh's unprecedented status as both a state actor and a terrorist group complicates the efforts of a conventional military coalition to defeat it.

Firstly, Daesh is not a static group with a centre of gravity in its captured territories in Iraq and Syria. Its subsidiary or affiliate groups also control limited zones in Nigeria, the Philippines and Libya.

This provides Daesh with a range of fall-back positions even while it is in retreat in West Asia. Theoretically, it would be possible for Daesh to transfer its strategic command, personnel and political structure to any of those regions and continue operating from there. Further, Francis Chan, Indonesia Bureau Chief of the Singapore *Straits Times* has warned that Southeast Asia might become Daesh's preferred sanctuary as it loses territory in Iraq and Syria.

A complete obliteration of Daesh in West Asia could also inspire these different groups to claim the status of the caliphate for themselves. If multiple claims are asserted, these groups could be locked in a power competition to prove their right to assume Daesh's mantle by projecting their terror prowess. This potentially translates into a higher frequency of terrorist activity worldwide.

Furthermore, my colleague Bunn Nagara, a Senior Fellow at ISIS Malaysia, has also argued that Daesh could resort to a more traditional form of terrorism in the wake of a possible West Asian defeat. In the event its self-professed state is eviscerated, Daesh could plug into the terror network it has established and use them to launch attacks. In Southeast Asia, these groups include Jamaah Anshar Khalifah Daulah Nusantara in Indonesia as well as Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, to mention just two.

It is imperative, therefore, for the coalition to sustain its operations post-Iraq and Syria. As Daesh's power shifts away from West Asia, the coalition must recalibrate its structure and approach to better suit the strategy to hunt

## ***“In the event its self-professed state is eviscerated, Daesh could plug into the terror network it has established and use them to launch attacks”***

down each and every one of the smaller parties that uphold the white and black flag of Daesh.

Secondly, Daesh exerts governance over a large number of men, women and children, including the local populations of its conquered areas as well as the 27,000 to 31,000 individuals who have migrated into its territory, according to the US-based intelligence organisation the Soufan Group.

This effectively blocks the agenda of annihilating Daesh, as in the moment of its fall, a victorious coalition would face the monumental task of rooting out fighters and supporters hiding among local populations. It also goes without saying that women and children cannot be targeted in such a termination plan. Meanwhile, many Daesh migrants have also severed ties to their countries of origin.

Thus, a decisive battle against Daesh does not solve the complex problem of those who live under its rule. The international community must find measures to deradicalise a large mass of Daesh's population and reintegrate them into society. The magnitude of this task suggests that more international coalitions with a socio-economic agenda will be needed.

Thirdly, Daesh poses different security threats to different countries in its capacity as either a quasi-state or a terrorist organisation. The United States and its West Asian allies, for example, are more concerned about the possibility of Daesh's conquests and ravages expanding beyond Iraq and Syria. On the other hand, the threat of Daesh-inspired or perpetrated terrorism is more pronounced in countries further away, such as France, Belgium, Malaysia and Indonesia.

If the countries above form an anti-Daesh coalition, for instance, the integrity of the alliance would suffer from an absence of a unified threat perception among them. The coalition would lose its focus as countries would not be able to decide whether containing Daesh's movement in West Asia or stemming its transnational terrorist activities would be the best course of action to take.

Adding to this problem is the different degree of operational capability that each member would be able to contribute. Some,

like the world's superpowers, have the human resources, military assets and financial capability to embark on the coalition's bigger operations. Smaller powers would not have this advantage as they try to balance between addressing domestic preoccupations and fulfilling the coalition's agenda. Worse, the mere involvement of a Muslim-majority country in an anti-Daesh coalition could risk backlash from Islamist and extremist quarters of its population, possibly involving violence. These last two factors could explain the reluctance of Malaysia and Indonesia to contribute military assets to any of the existing anti-Daesh coalitions.

**It is necessary** to comprehend countries' sensibilities and interests as they decide whether to join a coalition. Expecting all interested parties to take part in active military confrontation is unrealistic: many countries are more concerned with neutralising Daesh-linked terrorist activities in their own territory. Strong and decisive leadership, preferably by a superpower, is therefore key to galvanise a widescale international response. Alternatively, a military coalition could be broken up into two focus groups: one that aimed to remove Daesh from its stronghold in West Asia and another that specialised in regional-based counter-terrorism endeavours.

To conclude, the discussion above shows how a military coalition is an insufficient response to the threat of Daesh. Daesh has evolved from a mere offshoot of al-Qaeda into an entity that possesses the capacities of both a state and a terrorist organisation. An international coalition must adapt to the changing nature of Daesh to successfully mount a confrontation against it. Perceptions and expectations of an anti-Daesh military coalition must also be moderated so that it is not thought of as a silver bullet to all the predicaments created by the group. Rather, such a coalition must be part of a long term effort that combines the military, financial, humanitarian, law enforcement and counter-terrorism aspects all together. ●

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BY FARLINA SAID

**W**est Asia holds a powerful grip on the imagination of potential and actual fighters in Southeast Asia. As noted by Thomas Koruth Samuel, Director of Research and Publications, Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism in Kuala Lumpur, the avenues for recruitment include websites depicting the situation in Syria and Iraq, and Facebook friends who have been or are planning to go to Syria and Iraq, as well as Internet chat groups discussing developments there.

The implications are particularly stark when one considers the magnification of Daesh's messages in cyber space as well as the deliberateness of its online strategy. Asrul Daniel Ahmed, former COO of the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation, estimates that, for instance, a mere 79 individual Daesh Twitter accounts can garner up to 26,000 followers. The relatively small number of accounts indicates Daesh's control over the production of these tweets – and 70 percent of recruitment to Daesh in Malaysia is attributed to online campaigns.

Historically, significant Islamic political, economic and social thought from West Asia

and the Indian subcontinent has spread to Southeast Asia. West Asia's anti-colonial movements and the 1979 Iranian Revolution were mirrored by movements such as the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) and Jemaah Tarbiyah in Indonesia.

At the same time the Salafi movement rejected the amalgamation of politics, religion and state and called for a return to the religion practised by pious predecessors, namely Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Darul Arqam in Malaysia in the 1970s adopted these codes with the lifestyle and the garment of the Prophet.

In more recent times, Southeast Asia has once again been a recipient of political ideologies originating in West Asia, including notions of a legitimate Islamic state.

Anthony Bubalo's and Greg Fealy's 2005 study, *Joining the Caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia*, discussed the deference among certain Indonesian groups to senior West Asian Salafi figures. The Indonesian militant Islamist group, Laskar Jihad, was said to have been formed with the approval of prominent West Asian sheikhs. The group's disbandment, too, was triggered

by Saudi and Yemeni ulama. The ideological influence of West Asia on Southeast Asia is also evident in government interactions at the official level. Malaysian premiers, for example, have consistently recognised Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Muslim ummah.

Yet, the peoples of Southeast Asia have not always proven to be passive. The promotion of Islam Nusantara – or Islam of the Archipelago – in recent times by Indonesia's 50 million strong Nadhlatul Ulama explores the form of Islam practised in Southeast Asia prior to external influences such as Salafism.

However, there remain operational and ideological linkages between the network of fighters in West Asia and Southeast Asia. The concept of defending the Muslim ummah has long been widespread, as evidenced by Southeast Asians travelling to fight in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. The motivation to protect through violence can be traced back to the thoughts of Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and, later in Pakistan, Jamaat al-Islami founder Abu al-Mawdudi.

**Departed and returning** fighters retain and export this ideology to their countries of birth. Prominent Southeast Asian figures within Daesh such as Bahrin Naim and Muhamad Wannady Mohamad Jedi may be physically located in conflict zones such as Syria and Iraq, but they are able to orchestrate or encourage acts of violence in Southeast Asia primarily through social media.

The launch of local propaganda channels in June 2016 by Katibah Nusantara, the Malay-speaking arm of Daesh, has also shifted the focus of content to Southeast Asia – both as broadcaster and as recipient. This, according to Samuel, accords with typical global radicalisation patterns: Daesh's international rhetoric is repackaged to suit and include local grievances, nuances and issues. In the case of Southeast Asia, the flow of information emanates from West Asia and is targeted at audiences in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, where the language and narratives of Daesh are adapted to fit the local context.

While counter-narratives have to remain anchored in Southeast Asia, regional counter-terrorism efforts may stumble across challenges presented by porous ideological borders, the global aspirations of fighters and a transnational chain of command. ●

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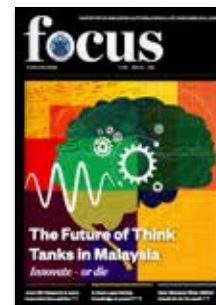
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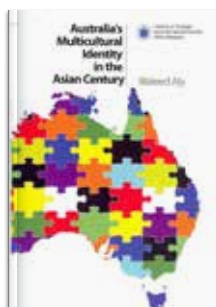
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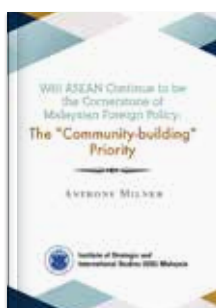
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