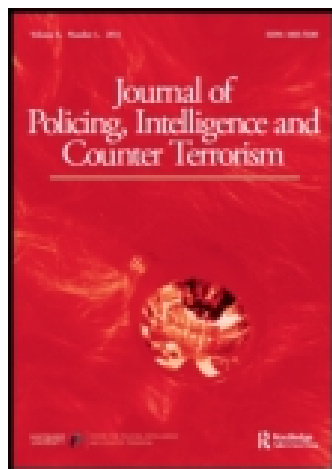


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Emerging Threats to Malaysia's National Security

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's security focus has progressed beyond the issues of defending sovereignty and national boundaries. Yet there are emerging security risks that could threaten the survival of the country. This article analyses Malaysia's security challenges and emerging security threats through the results of a series of semi-structured interviews with Malaysian academics and security practitioners. It is shown that domestic sources of threat are still perceived to be the main security challenges to Malaysia. Malaysia's fragile socio-political system continues to hunt its national security agenda, and hence like other developing countries the issue of nation building is of great priority. However, the study also shows that non-traditional security threats such as illegal economic migrants, environmental degradation, and trans-national organized crime are slowly beginning to dominate the security debate in Malaysia.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization have brought new dimensions to Southeast Asia's regional security challenges. The world's changing sociopolitical environment compels the international community to look through different and new lenses at its understanding of peace and security. Although it can be argued that the Cold War's security legacy continues to dominate regional security agendas, countries in Southeast Asia also have to adapt to new security risks and challenges, which need to be addressed well beyond traditional frameworks of sovereignty and state survival. Threats are no longer mainly military in nature and security is not primarily about defending national boundaries. These non-military risks have become one of the focal points of state survival, as well as to the survival of populations that live within the state's boundary.

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Malaysia's understanding of security has also been affected by the changing debate and nature of the international political environment. As one of the most strategic countries in the Southeast Asian region, Malaysia was caught in the ideological political rivalry between the two superpowers during the Cold War period. The country was also one of the important political theatres for the attempted expansion of communism in the region. For decades, since its independence from the British in 1957, Malaysia has continued to unite its fragile societal composition through integrated socio-economic developments that emphasized social and political harmony as one of the main strategies to build a more resilient state.

Yet in the face of current global challenges, Malaysia has to respond to a myriad of security threats that have the potential to pose challenges to its sovereignty and survival. It can be argued that Malaysia's security and threat perception have been influenced by two broad categories, i.e. the structural and the social. Structurally, the physical configuration of Malaysia, which has distinctive strategic geo-political features – the national territories are made up of west Malaysia (the Malay Peninsula) and east Malaysia (in the island of Borneo), and its sharing of physical and maritime boundaries with nearly all its Southeast Asian neighbors – has an important bearing on its conception of security. At the same time, Malaysia's security has been influenced by the country's political and social variables, for instance, on the multi-racial composition of the society. Living in a multiracial society requires an insight into other race's psyche and culture (Abdullah, 2009).

Hence, Malaysia's security threats encompass both external as well as internal dimensions. At the same time, the changing structure of international system, and challenges posed by the process of globalization have produced new and emerging non-traditional security threats. This article is based on extensive e-mail and focused face-to-face interviews, conducted between July 2009 and August 2010, with selected academicians and security practitioners. The focused face-to-face as well as e-mail interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu and English. However, the majority of respondents replied through e-mail in English. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with selected academicians and practitioners. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to delve and to seek their reflective opinion on subject.

Conceptualizing threats and security in Malaysia

Since independence, Malaysia's conceptions of threats and security have shared the traits of other developing countries, and differed somewhat from Western conceptions. Eliminating threats emanating from other actors in the state-dominated international system is one of the main approaches in protecting the sovereignty of the state. Caroline Thomas (1987, p. 10), however, argues that developing countries' insecurity emanates from their struggle first and foremost for political, and later economic, independence. Deteriorating economies produce domestic conflicts that not only affect a developing state's socio-political stability, but more importantly also threaten the regime in power. This is because regime survival is one of the important

elements in promoting national security in developing countries (Buzan, 1988; Collin, 2003; Ayoob, 1995; Azar & Moon, 1988; Singh, 2004). Although sovereignty lies with the people, it has been the government that defines security. Therefore, threat and security encompass a “broader spectrum of values held dear by the majority; otherwise the government would lose its legitimacy” (Singh, 2004, p. 2). Unlike with developed countries, this broad concept of security includes “domestic determinants such as crisis of confidence in the political leadership, internal war, poverty, social dislocation, income inequalities, secessionism, sabotage, and contested legitimacy of government” (ibid., p. 3). Furthermore, Nathan (1998, p. 515) argues that the “pursuit of national security in the Malaysian context has been governed not only by an emphasis on state survival, common to many developing countries, but also by ethno-national security doctrines that have evolved over time [...] Nation-building is an ongoing process [...] and Malaysia is no exception. It is an elite-led formulation of a national identity”.

Hence, in its early statehood (1957-1969), Malaysia (formally Malaya) was preoccupied with building and uniting a nation of diverse races and religions. Issues of development and race relations dominated the agenda of national security. At the same time, the Cold War rivalry of the two superpowers, the perceived threat from China, and the prospects of a regional expansion of communism loomed large, and forced the Malayan government to align itself with Western powers. Domestic communists led by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) further reinforced the regime's political control. Hence, Malaya had to form a security arrangement with its formal colonial master, Great Britain, through the Anglo-Malayan Defense Arrangement (AMDA) to ensure its early survival.

Notwithstanding, the changing regional power distributions (the fall of the democratic regime in South Vietnam and China's alarming power influence) provided further insecurity to Malaya. Realist paradigms dominated the thinking of policy makers, by bringing a realistic approach to Malaya's response to regional structural changes. Recognizing its limited capability, Malaya had no choice but to rely on help to protect its external security. Furthermore, a loose defense coalition, the Five Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA), was formed with Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Singapore. The FPDA was also part of confidence building measures between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore after the bitter separation process in 1965 (Kin Wah, 1992, pp. 199-200).

At the same time, the FPDA also raised suspicions that it was another post-colonial strategy for major powers to restore their power position in the region. Indonesia and the Philippines were particularly sensitive. For Indonesia, the FPDA did not go along with its strategy to empower Third World countries through the Non-Align Movement (NAM). Furthermore, the security arrangements delayed the possible political union between Malaya and Indonesia. The establishment of Malaysia in 1963 with the merger of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Northern Borneo shattered Indonesia's dream of unification and fueled anti-Malaysia sentiments. Although the formation of Malaysia was part of the Malayan and Singapore government's attempt to placate socialist influence, it was not well received by neighboring countries. Jakarta, together with

Manila, argued that the creation of Malaysia was part of a political game played by the United States and Great Britain to weaken and destabilize regional power distribution. Hence, Indonesia's Sukarno launched a *Konfrantasi* (Confrontation) against the newly established Malaysia in 1963; the military campaign went on for more than two years, until the Sukarno regime was toppled by General Soeharto (Mahmud, 2000).

Domestic determinants continued as one of the crucial factors of Malaysia's security agenda in the subsequent phases of its statehood. Given the multiracial and multi-religious nature of the society, it is no doubt that harmonious race relations are one of the important core values of national security. The irony is that although promotion for racial harmony has been on the political agenda since independence, government strategies appeared to have acted in the opposite direction. The education system inherited from the colonial period continued to allow four different types of school system, namely the Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. Under the unwritten social contract between the three major races prior to independence, the Chinese and the Indian were allowed to promote their identity and culture. The vernacular schools have since continued with minimal assistance from the Federal government. Furthermore, the Malay and English schools were subsequently amalgamated into a national school system in which a Malay-based Bahasa Malaysia was used. The three types of school nonetheless did not help the country to promote its unifying nationhood objectives. Instead it contributed to serious political tensions because the three major races failed to integrate with one another. As a result, tensions in race relations culminated in the outbreak of bloody racial riots on the 13th of May, 1969.

In recent years, globalization has added another pressure to Malaysia's political and economic security. Politically, Malaysia is still fragile, while economically the country is susceptible to a fluid international environment. Thus the process of globalization is not openly welcomed in Malaysia, given its struggle to restructure the society and to focus on poverty eradication projects by providing more development opportunities to its people. This does not mean that Malaysia has ignored the rapid process of globalization. It has in fact become part of the process by incrementally opening its economy to the outside world (Embong, 2000, p. 71). It cannot be denied that Malaysia has benefited from globalization. Its economic growth prior to 1997 was an average of 8 percent a year (Ariff, 2009, p. 2). It has successfully diversified its economy from being purely commodity-based to becoming an electronics-oriented exporting country. Although the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis temporarily shut Malaysian doors to the world, the country continues to enjoy moderate growth as a result of its open economy.

The globalization process has also been associated with political democratization. Malaysia appears to be a democratic country, with a Westminster style of government. It also holds a good record in holding general elections every five years, except for a period between 1969 and 1971 when the constitution was suspended due to the racial riots. Secret balloting and vote counting have been carried out fairly. Outside observers have been invited to monitor elections and determine whether they were conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Furthermore, opposition candidates could gain seats in the Parliament. In fact, the main opposition pact consisting of the Anwar-led Parti Keadilan Rakyat or Justice Party, Democratic Action Party (DAP) and PAS

captured five major states, namely Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor and Kelantan, in Peninsular Malaysia in the 2008 general elections. This suggests that democracy does exist in Malaysia.

However, critics have argued that democracy as practiced in Malaysia is not simply about “increasing political participation of the masses in the making of the rules, checking arbitrary rules and the replacement of unjust rulers” (Singh, 2000, p. 525). But rather is a oligarchic structure that is premised on the idea that “governmental authority rests on a small group of elites which, while in power, would seek to perpetuate its rule. Political elites in Malaysia themselves play a central role in democratization” (ibid.). How democracy is practiced depends “heavily on the interests, values, and actions of political leaders, whether ensconced, downwardly mobile, or at least potentially, upwardly mobile” (Bunce, 2000, p. 707).

Hence the major political debate in Malaysia is centered on good governance, justice and democratization. According to Sivapalan Selvadurai (2009), Malaysia will succumb to a political crisis if several reforms are not taken. Lack of able or trustworthy leadership can lead to loss of faith in the political administration. Furthermore, he argues that the “lack of decisive and consistent execution of institutional mechanisms (especially justice and rightful ethics) can lead to loss of faith and discredit governance systems (especially formal ones)”. Karminder Singh Dhillon (2010) further argues that there is deteriorating governance in Malaysia. Furthermore, “in the rest of the developed world [...] the trend is towards accountability, transparency and lesser government. There is no such trend in Malaysia. It can and will threaten the long-term political and social health of the nation” (ibid.). The problem with Malaysian political governance, according to both authors, is the absence of checks and balances within the branches of government. The monarchy, judiciary and civil service are increasingly lacking in power, legitimacy and the ability to perform their functions in the event of a breakdown of governance or a political crisis. Such impotence will become a threat if and when a political or constitutional crisis occurs. It is also argued that the breakdown of ethics in politics has become endemic within the Malaysian polity. Society has come to terms and accepted that politicians are unscrupulous, devoid of morals and corrupt. In fact, corruption has become accepted as a way of life in the nation, and thus nothing serious can or will be done about it (Dhillon, 2010; Ahmad 2010). Therefore, according to commentators such as Dhillon (2010), Malaysia is in need of political reform.

As a result, calls for more accountability and transparency have become common from nearly all quarters of the Malaysian social strata. The Anwar Ibrahim saga of 1998 added to the political confusion. Anwar Ibrahim, who was the Deputy Prime Minister under the Mahathir administration, was forced to step down for alleged involvement in sodomy and corruption. He was acquitted on the sodomy charge, but jailed for corruption. However, the charges did not prevent him from actively involving himself in politics, especially after his release from jail. He led a newly established Parti Keadilan Rakyat or Justice Party (PKR) and formed an unexpected alliance with the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS). Anwar then led the opposition coalition alliance under the banner of Pakatan Rakyat (People's Coalition) in the 2008 General Elections and created a political tsunami

when the opposition managed to challenge the decade-long Barisan Nasional's two-third Parliamentary majority. Moreover, the opposition coalition was also successful in taking over five states.

It can be concluded that Malaysia's threats and security challenges derive from internal as well as external variables. Its internal threats are fundamentally more challenging since, as a relatively young country, domestic cohesion is of the utmost importance to the survival of the state. The ability of the state to consolidate its internal sovereignty will also determine its resilience to external threats. Furthermore, like other developing nations, the idea of insecurity and threats are "almost inconceivable without the inclusion of the interests of the political regime, given the weaknesses of other institutions of the state especially in the light of the growing entrenchment of authoritarian political structure" (Singh, 2004, p. 3). There is also a gray distinction between state and regime security, given the domestic security issues such as poverty and development, racial conflicts and religious militancy will need the involvement of a strong regime to manage.

The contemporary and emerging threats

One may argue that Malaysia's conception of security and threat has not substantially changed over time. Since "security" and "threat" are regime defined, it is clear from the onset that internal variables and issues such as racial and religious harmony are Malaysia's core values. But these assumptions may limit one's understanding of Malaysia's broadened national security challenges both currently and in the future.

To identify and analyze the major emerging security concerns to Malaysia, email interviews were conducted between July and December 2009 to solicit selected practitioners' and experts' opinions. A total of 25 emails were sent in late July and August 2009 to selected respondents based on their occupational backgrounds. Twelve respondents replied. Out of these 12 respondents, eight came from academia (ranging from senior lecturers to professors, all experts on security), two were from the police, and another two were senior government officials. It should be emphasized here that the small number of respondents has made it difficult to generalize experts' as well as practitioners' opinions on the emerging security threats to Malaysia. However, the results can be considered as preliminary and to form the basis for further study.

The results are summarized in Table 1 below. The respondents' major security concerns can be divided into two sections: existing and continuous threats (structural), and emerging threats and risks (issues based). In fact, existing and continuous threats dominated the discussion among respondents. It can be implied from the replies that although they acknowledged the emergence of new security risks and threats, such as environmental degradation and economic security that have gone beyond the notion of state survival, they were also at the same time concerned with more traditional domestic challenges.

Existing and Continuous Threats	Emerging Security Risks and Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National integration and societal cohesion • Politicization of race and religion • Territorial and maritime disputes • Spillover effect of neighboring countries' political and economic crises • Religious fundamentalism, terrorism and political violence • Foreign intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contagious disease • Economic security • Environmental degradation • Illegal immigrants and refugees • Transnational organized crime, human smuggling and drug trafficking • Governance, justice and democratization • Poverty and food security • Cyber threats

Table 1 – Security threats to Malaysia

Respondents were ambiguous on the issue of emerging threats, although some did discuss it in detail. There was debate among respondents regarding what constitutes an emerging threat. Some argued that terrorism should not be listed as an emerging threat since Malaysia has faced the problem for years (Singh, 2009; Harun, 2010). Since independence through to the end of the Cold War, Malaysia had to face the CPM's insurgency. At the same time, Malaysia has also experienced scores of religious militancy attacks. Some groups, like the Kumpulan 4 Sahabat (Friend of Four Group), Ahmad Nasir Ismail Group and the Tabrani, held deviant interpretations of the Quran at odds with the official Islamic stance adopted by the state. They became security concerns when they decided to wage physical attacks against civilians and government security establishments. Ahmad Nasir Ismail Group, for instance, launched an attack on a police station in Batu Pahat Johor on 16 October 1980, which resulted in the deaths of eight people (Hammim, 2010, p. 11). Hence, threats such as terrorism and religious fundamentalism are placed under the "Existing and Continuous" section of the table.

It is not surprising that the majority of respondents appear to have come to a consensus that the fragile structure of Malaysia's socio-political system still haunts the national security agenda. The social process of nation building is of great concern due to the multiracial and multi-religious nature of the Malaysian society. After 50 years of nationhood, Malaysia is still grasping with the issues of social and cultural tolerance. The following quote is from Dr Karminder Singh Dhillon (2010), the undersecretary of the Policy Division at the Ministry of Defense, in the follow-up interview after the survey:

[The] lack of inter-cultural understanding amongst the different groups within the society especially by race, gender and inter-generation appear to create a fragmented society. We therefore need a common 'spirit' or 'soul' and at the same time space for diverse expressions. Otherwise solidarity and cohesiveness amidst freedom of expression amongst society cannot be achieved.

Dhillon's opinion is in line with the scholarly writings on Malaysian social and security challenges cited above. Shamsul (2005) and Abdullah (2003) argue that Malaysian society is still racially fragmented. The Malaysian political system is

racially based, with major racial groups being represented by political parties to protect their interests; the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MIC) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Although one may argue that Malaysia also has several influential multiracial political parties such as the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and People's Progressive Party (PPP), these parties are in fact politically dominated and led by one racial group. The DAP, for instance, is a Chinese-dominated party, whereas the PPP is Indian-dominated.

Malaysia's education system has also become racially politicized. The introduction of three types of educational system since independence, namely, the National (Malay), Chinese Mandarin and Tamil Indian, has failed to integrate the society under a common identity. The higher education system is also not spared. The decision by the University Malaya administration, for instance, to appoint a non-Indian to temporarily lead the Indian Studies Department created political furor within the Indian community (*The New Straits Times*, 8 July, 2009). The MIC, which badly lost voting support from the Indian community in the 2008 General Elections, demanded that the university authorities appoint an Indian to lead the department. The party also rejected the university's decision to rename the department the Department of Indian and South Asian Studies.

Other respondents who were interviewed also expressed their concerns on the issue of racial harmony. And some even suggested the possible recurrence of the May 1969 ethnic violence in which hundreds of people were killed due to continued racial hatred, economic disparity, and political manipulation. Some even suggest that racial riot incidents would continue as a result of continuous racial hatred. Their arguments have been further substantiated by several incidences of vandalism of religious places since December 2009. The occurrence of a series of attacks on religious places has been seen as retaliation to Malaysia's High Court verdict allowing *The Herald*, the Roman Catholic Church's main publication in Malaysia, to use the word "Allah" in reference to the Christian God (*The Star Online*, 9 January, 2010). The verdict has divided the Muslim population. Some agreed with the government's insistence that "Allah" is an Islamic word that should be used exclusively by Muslims, and that its use by other religions would be misleading. However, more liberal Malaysian Muslim scholars argue that non-Muslims should be free to use the word. For years attempts by Malaysian Christians to use "Allah" in Malay-language literature have been perceived by some Muslims as a plot to convert Malay Muslims to Christianity.

A new dimension has also been added into the fabric of inter-racial relations in the country. Malaysia not only faces inter-racial challenges but also intra-racial "class cleavage arising from economic imbalance or perceived lack of job opportunity among middle and lower strata" (Selvadurai, 2009). Continued economic growth in the last decade not only produced economic opportunities for all three major races but has also widened the gap between the rich and the poor. This situation is more acute in the Indian society, which has been neglected for decades. The economic slowdown in recent years could create dissatisfaction resulting in agitation and resistance tendencies (ibid.). It could also create a dysfunctional society, unable

to withstand the pressure of domestic, regional and international competition. Of particular concern is the tendency for interested racially and non-racially based political parties to continuously politicize race, religion, the media and education in order to take or remain in power (Dhillon, 2010).

Challenges to the interrelations of the Malay community center on the issue of class relations and, more importantly, religious politicization. For Ruhana Harun (2010) and Wan Shawaluddin Hassan (2009), the threat from Muslim fundamentalism could destabilize society. The question of the rightful interpretation of Islamic teachings has not only affected the political equilibrium between UMNO and Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), which champions the implementation of *syariah* (Islamic) law in Malaysia, but it has also created deep division within the Malay society. According to Jaffary Awang (2009), from the Department of Da'awah, Faculty of Islamic Studies at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, religious misinterpretation by some *Salafi* (fundamental) movements such as al-Qaida and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) has given Islam a bad reputation. They use terrorist acts and violence to achieve their political objectives and do not reflect the true teaching of Islam.

The survey has shown that "new" security issues have also increasingly become of concern to the population and to policy makers. It must be emphasized here that the majority of respondents did not single out globalization itself as a security threat, but that it is the secondary impacts of globalization process that are of concern. Most of the respondents also agreed that security challenges have gone beyond the state's boundary, and that these challenges affect human as well as state security. Based on the follow-up interviews, it can be concluded that threats such as the outbreak of contagious disease, environmental degradation and illegal immigrants, are likely to have a direct impact on societal well-being because of the increasing feeling of insecurity among the Malaysian population as a result of perceived inability of the state to deal with the threats effectively (Harun 2010; Cheng-Chwee, 2010; Dhillon 2010).

The influx of migrants, particularly illegal entries, has become one of Malaysia's major contemporary security concerns (Harun, 2009; Ahmad, 2009; Hassan, 2009). It has been estimated that the number of illegal migrants in Malaysia is between 450,000 and 600,000, but no one, including government security agencies, has exact figures (Ching, 2010). Some reports have estimated that Malaysia is a home to 750,000 illegal foreign workers (Malaysiakini, 20 March 20, 2010). The illegal migrants are of concern because their presence has created social problems in local communities. From the perspective of locals, illegal immigrants, particularly Indonesians, have hijacked their job opportunities by offering cheap labor. This is a major security concern in the Borneo state of Sabah, since it has not only to deal with thousands of undocumented migrants but is also the host of some 84,000 refugees from the Mindanao conflict (*The Star*, 27 July, 2010). Some of these refugees and illegal immigrants have managed to obtain formal documents such as identity cards that provide access to benefits like education, jobs and health. Illegal immigrant issues in Sabah have also put the State and Federal Governments at odds over who has the responsibility and power to control it.

In 2009 it was reported that 60 percent of women inmates in Kajang Prison, the biggest in the country, were illegal immigrants who soon would be deported (AFP Wire Report, 28 September, 2009). Furthermore, according to Malaysia's Prisons Department Director-General Datuk Zulkifli Omar, nearly one-third of prisoners nationwide are foreigners, a leading factor behind congestion in jails (Utusan Malaysia, 19 January, 2010). Indonesian inmates made up the highest proportion, at 5,000. Of this, more than 50 percent committed offences under the Immigration Act, which includes entering the country illegally. Out of the total of 32,130 inmates held at 31 prisons nationwide, 10,833 are foreigners. Malaysia's prisons have the capacity to accommodate 36,740 (ibid.).

Nonetheless, one may argue that putting illegal immigrants, particularly by focusing on the Indonesians, as part of Malaysia's security threat is itself a contradiction. According to Liow (2004, p. 25), the issue raises "potential for contradiction between the various dimensions of security associated with illegal Indonesian migrant labor, where, for example, the latter might threaten the societal security of Malaysian people whilst at the same time contribute to the economic security of the Malaysian economy".

It has been accepted that migrant workers particularly from Indonesia have contributed immensely to Malaysia's economic development. In the early 1980s, Indonesian migrants "were then perceived as *bangsa serumpun* who would eventually assimilate with the local *bumiputra*. Thus, in the long-run the Indonesian immigrants were regarded to have strengthened the Malays' electoral power vis-à-vis the non-Malays because it was assumed that they will be assimilated with the local Malays" (Abdullah, 1992, pp. 45-46).

Abdullah's argument, however, refers to the "first wave" of Indonesian migrant workers from the early 1970s through to the late 1980s. It is the "second wave" of Indonesian economic migrants, as a result of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, that is of current concern. These immigrants have made great sacrifices in order to look for a better life in Malaysia. But these groups of migrants have also created socio-economic problems in their new host country. They often live in squatter areas, illegally clearing government lands to start up Indonesian colonies. At the same time, they are subject to exploitation by unscrupulous Malaysian employers in need of cheap labor.

The sense of insecurity among Malaysians has been further fueled by the influx of illegal immigrants from areas such as India, Bangladesh and China (Ajis; Keling; Shuib; Mokhtar, 2009). Possible links between migrants and terrorists are of concern not only to the authorities but also to the public. They also have been blamed for the rise of serious crimes like armed robbery and rape, although a recent study shows that illegal migrant workers contributed to between only 2-3 percent of total serious crimes in Malaysia (Hashim, 2003).

Another noted emerging issue is threats from contagious diseases (Chwee, 2010; Balakrishnan, 2009; Hamin, 2009). Recent outbreaks of global contagious disease such as H1N1 influenza have put the international community on alert. The outbreak of H1N1 has so far infected 14,067 people in Malaysia, and killed 82 (*The Star Online*, 7 May, 2010).

Another major concern is environmental security. Issues of environmental degradation have recently been given serious thought by Malaysian political leaders. According to Sharifah Munirah Alatas (2009), climate change will mean that Malaysia will not be spared from drought, changes in sea levels, or a shortage of natural resources. Seasonal El Nino cycles, for instance, have created prolonged drought and haze problems for Malaysia. The problems in turn produced multiple effects on the Malaysian socio-economy such as the sudden rise of medical bills due to increasing numbers of asthmatic patients and loss of revenue due to the lower numbers of tourists.

Recognizing that environmental problems could affect its future survival, Malaysia has become one of the active players in mapping out a plan to reduce carbon emissions. During a speech at the 2010 Abu Dhabi's World Future Energy Summit, the Malaysian Prime Minister said that Kuala Lumpur plans "to reduce its dependence on fossil fuel, by such methods as increasing usage of energy from renewable resources to 2,000 MW by 2020 from 50 MW now" (*The New Straits Times*, 19 January, 2010). The plan is part of Malaysia's action in the global effort to cut carbon emissions and improve global energy security. In fact, Malaysia has been proactive in preserving the environment by introducing several incentives to promote renewable energy, including the Small Renewable Energy Program which provided for a higher purchasing price for electricity generated through renewable energy resources by the grid operator. Malaysia also launched the National Biotechnology Policy and the National Biofuel Policy in 2005. These policies seek to leverage on the natural strengths of Malaysia where at least 50 percent of land area remains forested.

Transnational organized crime such as drug and small arms smuggling, and human trafficking has become a major security concern in Malaysia (Ahmad, 2010). Furthermore, Malaysia has been identified as one of the major transit points of human trafficking in the Southeast Asian region. Human trafficking, which includes human smuggling for forced labor and military services as well as trafficking of women and children for trade, exploitation, and prostitution, has become a major issue. In early June 2009, a report by the United States government downgraded Malaysia's status from "watch list" (Tier-2) to "blacklist" (Tier-3) for its failure not only to comply with minimum standards to eliminate trafficking but also its inability to make significant efforts to do so. The Tier-3 status also meant that Malaysia has failed to control human trafficking cases and to formulate and implement concrete laws to overcome the issue. The report caught the attention of local leaders, the populace and the media. Media reports on the arrest of foreigners, who paid thousands of Malaysian ringgit to be smuggled by boats to Indonesia en route to Australia or elsewhere, fueled heated debates on the state's border patrol capability. Furthermore, there were also reports on the arrest of foreign prostitutes, mostly Indonesian, Thai and Chinese, who were lured into the business by local and international syndicates. There have been an increasing number of cases whereby foreign nationals were smuggled into Malaysia to work in prostitution. The numbers are alarming; the total number of Indonesian and Chinese nationals who were caught since 2001, for instance, reached 14,163 and 17,815 respectively (see Table 2). Only 188 people were charged for alleged

involvement in human trafficking activities under Malaysia's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 (*MalaysiaKini*, 30 January, 2010).

COUNTRIES	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	TOTAL
Cambodia	45	125	169	77	39	81	14	4	554
China	368	120	1971	1821	2824	2621	4379	3711	17815
India	9	43	51	39	50	28	18	200	438
Indonesia	2451	2155	2112	2204	1606	1284	1181	1170	14163
Laos	0	2	4	1	3	6	6	11	33
Myanmar	5	8	6	21	29	19	26	58	172
Thailand	785	946	1131	1124	910	971	900	892	7659
The Philippines	312	189	142	314	742	706	796	950	4151
Uzbekistan	112	139	90	33	71	16	29	32	522
Vietnam	35	296	174	133	204	224	287	470	1823
TOTAL	4122	4023	5850	5767	6478	5956	7636	7498	47330

Table 2 – Number of human trafficking victims working in prostitution in Malaysia 2001-2008 (Royal Police of Malaysia, Bukit Aman, 2009)

As expected, the US report received protest and denials from the Malaysian government and security forces. Kuala Lumpur vehemently denied the findings, arguing that Malaysia has introduced several measures including a tough Anti-Human Smuggling Act of 2008 to curb the problem. Nonetheless, several Malaysian NGOs agreed with the report and called on Kuala Lumpur to implement more serious efforts to deal with it (*The New Straits Times Online*, 22 June, 2010). The question, however, remains as to why Malaysia has become an increasingly popular transit point for human trafficking in the region?

From the above discussion it is apparent that structural or domestic determinants are not only the major sources of potential insecurity in contemporary Malaysia. As part of the international community, Malaysia is also affected by the changing nature of security threats. There are new issues such as environmental degradation, the inflow of illegal immigrants, and transnational threats that are beginning to be accepted as potential threats to the country's security. What is more interesting is that the acceptance of these new threats is no longer controlled or defined by state regime, but has evolved within society. There are several explanations for these changes. It can be argued that the expansion and the increasing role of civil society have contributed. Rapid economic development since the late 1980s, associated with increasing tertiary education for Malaysians, has generally expanded the politically and socially sensitive middle income cluster in society. This more educated cluster has become part of a new social force that critically examines the government's

policies and actions. They also form part of non-governmental organizations that demand greater transparency, accountability and political democratization – a call that the government cannot afford to ignore. As a result, this middle class cluster is also part of the securitizing process in the country.

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the use of multiple channels of societal communication via printed and electronic media, the Internet, and public forums is another explanation for the changing perception and understanding of threats in Malaysia. Media and Internet communication (either through independent electronic newspapers or blogs) not only disseminate fast-moving information but also become an avenue for society to express its security concerns, ranging from the public's concern over the rise of criminal activities associated with migrant workers, to the over-development of hilly areas that could trigger environmental disaster.

Hence, it can be argued that a securitizing process is taking place in Malaysia. This explains why new security issues such as transnational organized crime, human trafficking and smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration are of increasing security concern. Both the society and the state have perceived these as emerging threats to Malaysian security.

Conclusion

For the last 20 years, international systems have undergone several phases of structural change. These structural changes have inevitably transformed international security threats and perceptions. The process of globalization in the post-Cold War period, for instance, added a new dimension of security. Economic liberalization and political democratizations have produced new security challenges to individual states in terms of how well they could adapt to the new forces. The 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington further challenged the neo-realist security perspective by making it clear that threats could come from non-state actors, and could even destabilize international politics. At the same time, non-traditional security issues such as migration, environmental degradation, refugees, health, and human trafficking are taking increasing importance on global security agendas.

As part of international community, Malaysia is affected by the changing nature of security threats. There are new issues such as environmental degradation, the inflow of illegal immigrants and transnational threats that are beginning to be accepted as potential threat to the country's security. The acceptance of these new threats is not controlled or defined by the state but have instead evolved from within the society. It can be argued that the expansion and the increasing role of civil society have contributed to these changes. Rapid economic development since the late 1980s, associated with increasing tertiary education for Malaysians, has generally expanded the middle income cluster in the society – group which is politically and socially sensitive. This more educated cluster has become part of a new force in the society that critically examines government's policies and actions. They are also part of non-

governmental organizations that may demand greater transparency, accountability and political democratization. As a result, this middleclass cluster is part of securitizing process in Malaysia.

The advent of information and communication technology and the use multiple channels of societal communication via printed and electronic media, the internet, and public forum is another explanation for the changing perception and understanding of security threats to Malaysia. Media and internet communication (either through independent electronic newspapers or blogs) not only disseminate fast-moving information, but have also become an avenue for the society to express security concerns ranging from the public's concern over the rise of criminal activities associated with migrant workers, to the over-development of hilly areas that could trigger environmental disaster.

The article concludes with some important observations. Firstly, despite the current challenges of globalization and the changing nature of international systems, internally driven factors continued to be perceived as major challenges to Malaysia's security. Secondly, there are added dimensions to these internally driven factors that go beyond the prevalent understanding of the Malaysian security complex. The ethnic cohesion problem, for instance, has also to be understood in the context of political governance and transparency. Furthermore, globalization has given added dimension to Malaysia's internal as well as external sources of insecurity. Finally, like other countries, Malaysia shares some global issues such as climatic change, economic security, and transnational crime as emerging non-traditional security threats. These non-traditional security issues have increasingly been accepted as emerging threats among Malaysian academia, security experts and practitioners.

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