

EDITORIAL NOTE: THE STATE OF MALAYSIAN SECURITY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC®

(NOTA EDITOR: SITUASI KESELAMATAN MALAYSIA, PENGAJIAN STRATEGIK SEWAKTU PANDEMIK)

ZARINA OTHMAN* AND BAKRI MAT**

This year marked the second year of SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies & International Affairs' publication and endeavoured to exhibit both local and international, as well as senior and junior writers in Politics, Strategic, Defence and International Affairs. Simultaneously, 2022 is a transition year towards post-pandemic. There is no doubt that concerted transnational efforts in dealing with the security threats of the pandemic Covid-19 have intertwined with a growing research agenda in understanding the nexus between pandemic and Strategic Studies. The threats of infectious diseases to human health and economic activity have caused an intensification and an organisational formalisation of Malaysian health diplomacy, both regionally and bilaterally. Such diplomacy has also established a basis for developing a wider set of cooperative relationships that go beyond responding to the threat of pandemics. As Malaysia approaches “developed” status, its health sector is becoming increasingly integrated into the global political economy through transnational joint research and development and international relations ventures.

Despite growing development and interest in Malaysian lessons in the pandemic, the recently launched the *12th Malaysian Plan, Defence White Paper, National Defence Policy, Focus in Continuity: A Framework for Malaysia's Foreign Policy in a Post-Pandemic World*, the 2030 Prosperity Shared Vision and other moratorium instruments, scholarly publication and broader public engagement over the current state of Malaysian security and health imperative, as well as its impact upon Malaysian strategic studies remained to be seen. After all, it was the favourite maxim

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* **First Author and Corresponding Author:** Zarina Othman, PhD (*Denver*) is a current Editor-in-Chief of *SINERGI*, and a Professor at the Research Centre for History, Politics, History, and International Affairs (SPHEA), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) 43600, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. She was consulted and has extensively lectured and published about contemporary international and human security and strategic studies, Malaysian and international affairs. Email: zo@ukm.edu.my / zaiothman02@gmail.com

** **Second Author:** Bakri Mat, PhD (*UKM*) is a current Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *SINERGI*, and an Associate Professor and Deputy Dean at the School of International Studies (SOIS), College of Law, Government, and International Studies (COLGIS), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Sintok, 06010, Bukit Kayu Hitam, Kedah, Malaysia. He was consulted and has extensively lectured and published about food security, human security, terrorism, ASEAN regional security framework and Malaysian politics and international relations. Email: bakri@uum.edu.my

of security as 'freedom from fear of threats' inspired policy language of securitisations, albeit how the ongoing pandemic and increasing digital diplomacy will guide the mantle of defence policy, strategic research, and international affairs of Malaysia.

In light of limited yet mushroomed literature on cross-contamination between pandemic, security, and strategic studies, the current volume comprises exciting, informative, insightful, and multidisciplinary articles, notably significant for academics, policymakers, and students interested in Strategic Studies and International Affairs. The first full-research article in this volume, entitled *Can Malaysia Feed Itself? Food Security Issues in Malaysia* written by Norhisham Hassan and Andrew Jia-Yi Kam. Both authors blended their practitioner and academic backgrounds from the Royal Engineer Regiment 1 Division in Kuching, Sarawak, and the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), UKM, Malaysia. Both Norhisham and Andrew were precise in their investigation of growing food insecurity concerns in which pandemic Covid-19 enclosure further incentivised to precisely locate and understand pandemic ramifications and four dimensions of food security, namely food availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability. Given turbulence and frequent shift in the prime ministerial posts, government changes, and cabinet reshuffles during the corona political crisis and public disillusion in Malaysia, few studies have investigated food security's actual cost and multi-dimension threat. The government increased more austerity subsidies and moratorium packages to ease the already overwhelming disruption burdens and transnational threats from the pandemic and increased economic and wellbeing costs of delayed mass vaccination and socioeconomic renormalisation strategies.

The second article in this volume is entitled *International Migration and Public Policy: The Study on the Decision-Making Process of Foreign Labour Policy in Malaysia [Migrasi Antarabangsa dan Polisi Awam: Kajian Terhadap Proses Penggubalan Dasar Pekerja Asing di Malaysia]* written in Bahasa Malaysia by Mohd Na'eim Ajis, Mohd Ramlan Mohd Arshad, and Aizat Khairi where individual authors are respectively based at the College of Government, Law and International Studies (COLGIS), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM Seremban), as well as the Institute of Marine Engineering Technology, Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL), in Malaysia. Blending their multidimensional approach to securitising the public policy discourse of foreign labours in Malaysia and within the global migrations, Mohd Na'eim, Mohd Ramlan and Aizat Khairi approached critical policymakers involved in the policymaking process of Malaysia's foreign labour policy. Through the elite style of interview methods, they have uncovered disturbing facts of two elements of obscured and directive confusion sources that sparked into unresolved disputes and prolonged problems in the management of foreign labour resources at both levels of critical decision-making as well as implementation (delivery) of the actual policy. As such, despite the robust features of the centralised foreign labours recruitment and registration system (including legalising undocumented migrants), the findings of their study have shown the danger of wrong priorities and misleading reasonings in the recruitment system where national interest and overall security stake of Malaysia has

been systematically compromised. While ongoing open border discussions and post-pandemic security arrangement between Malaysia and several vital countries that are involved as providers of foreign labour remained unabated, existing loopholes, security and transparency issues may, in the long run, create obstructions in which post-pandemic scenarios is just another pandora box moment for Malaysia's heavy reliance of foreign labours in various commodity and services sectors.

The third article of this volume is entitled *The Politics of Regional Security Threats in Nigeria*, written by Babayo Sule, Bashir Sa'ad Ibrahim and Muhammad Yusuf Adamu from various universities in Gombe State, Jigawa State and Abuja, Nigeria. Authors' contribution to this old debate of African solutions to African problems over the lingering issue of the Nigerian state's fragile capability in managing their internal regional security threat that, in the long run, challenges central authority attribute, security apparatus and federal state crisis to absorb all elements of threat from every internal provincial or region within the state of Nigeria. As one of the most populous countries in the West Africa and physically as one of the largest post-colonial states in Africa, evolution, and devolution discourse as part of state reforms and a more inclusive approach to deal with the state crisis is often subject to debate and politics of brinkmanship games by the ruling elite and political class. Thus, managing international and regional security threats that encompass 36 states is a constant security concern for this divest nation.

The fourth article of this volume is entitled *The Presidential Speeches and US-Iran Nuclear Deal: Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy Precepts on Freedom, Dignity, and Independence*, was written by Cristina Cabrejas-Artola from International Peace Doctors, the USA. Using the presidential speech narrative and analogy of renounced Presidents Roosevelt and Kennedy, she unravels the potential of universal languages of freedom, dignity and independence among Washington and Tehran negotiators. She revisits the negation and polemics of the peace process in the US-Iranian nuclear deal. Taking into consideration of ongoing ambiguity of the fragile nuclear deal during the transition from pre- to pandemic-period as well as a transition post-Trump administration of the US, Cristina established ongoing evidence that diversified and harmonious worldviews of alternative peace have to be explored as the new options and paradigms, especially in considering an emerging multipolar system, in which the US is no longer immune as uncontested unilateral power of the current global order and discourse of nuclear peace.

Apart from the full research article and the growing interest in non-traditional security, securitisation discourse and policies in overcoming pandemic effects, we selected a research note and commentary articles. Thus, the sixth article of this volume is a research note entitled *Amplified Inequalities among Migrants and Refugees: A Closer Look at Malaysia during Covid 19-Pandemic* by Rodziana Mohamed Ismail from the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM), as the author is also affiliated with the McGill University, Quebec, Canada. Rodziana highlights how the current global crisis and national response by the policymakers in the country drive inequalities rendering migrants and refugees particularly vulnerable to forced labour.

It further illuminates inconsistent policy strategies, public messaging and policy implementation that aggravate the risk of exclusion from protection among migrants and refugees in Malaysia.

The seventh article of this volume is a commentary entitled *Reviewing Al-Qaeda's Ideology: The Political Organisation of Terrorism*, written by Ararat Konstanian from the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia. Ararat highlight the complex operational definition of terrorism, even as the classical and well-established case study of the Al-Qaeda movement, since most commentators are dominated by contemporary themes of glorifying violent acts under the misleading pretext of Jihad theological arguments cherry-picking Quranic verses. The challenge remained between the obscured and analytical distinction between terrorism and political violence committed by other prototypes of armed struggles. A problematic measurement of the successful yardstick of the US global war on terrorism and counterterrorism is also contributed by the epistemic reality of Islamophobic assumptions within existing lumped of definition of Islamic terrorism. Moreover, the failure of the contemporary researcher to reconceptualise and reconsider the political and organisational structure of terrorist operations and the modus operandi of Al-Qaeda, as the finding of this article may serve more discussions in considerate the current threats of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) in the Middle East.

The eighth article of this volume is a commentary entitled '*Third World Remnant' in the Developing World – Malaysia's post-pandemic Reality and International Relations of the Global South* by Norman Sim from Universiti Malaya (UM). Norman is also the founder of the new youth forum, known as the Chamber of International Relations Scholars (CIRS), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. As he is deepening his interest in the non-western International Relations (NWIR) theory and advancing his readings of Malaysian politics, Norman argues the importance of revisiting NWIR theory. He argued the merit of such value in appreciating the remnant discourse of 'third world' in present efforts and polemics in public judgements of Malaysia's government efforts under Prime Minister Ismail Sabri to access more vaccine options for the ordinary populace.

For this volume, we have also received a book review article by Ruhanas Harun from the National Defence University of Malaysia (UPNM) over the book entitled *Rohingya Survivors: Regional Security Implications of Gender-Based Violence* (2018), which published by the USM Press.

Nevertheless, both Editor-in-Chief and Deputy Editor humbly honoured yet passionate believers in rigours and meticulous peer-review, copyediting, and publication activities of this July volume 2022. Despite the hurdle and our self-reflection on Malaysia, pandemics, and security at SINERGI, we will not be able to deliver this volume without arduous labour and constant encouragement from the multinational and intervarsity editorial board members, peer reviewers and authors. We were constantly indebted for the continued financial and logistical support of all relevant stakeholders, namely the Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College (MAFDC), the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), School of History, Politics, and

International Affairs (SPHEA), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH), and the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Press. Nonetheless, the materialisation of this second volume is only feasible with valuable, constructive appraisals from distinguished peer reviews and contributions of all authors and the technical executive editorial team members that work along the clock to meet the deadline of the journal's newly launched website.

In line with the hybrid norms of work yet a transformative requisite of a new journal to adapt to both 'glocal' demands, several changes are reflected with this current volume of SINERGI. First, apart from conventional hardcopy versions of each volume and issue, the journal is now available in an open-access format online and quickly accessible for all readers and prospective authors. Second, the new website is also integrated with the online submission system that eases and hopefully speeds up each manuscript's submission and publication process without compromising the fundamental reasons of academic journals, integrity, and rigorous deliberation. Thirdly, apart from the adoption of the Open Access route, additional information on e-ISSN/ISSN, document object identification (DOI) for each article, information on article history, author's affiliation as well as the declaration of acknowledgement and funding bodies are now becoming a visible feature of SINERGI's identity and academic reputation. As part of a long-term plan to be indexed in the Web of Science (*Clarivate Analytics*) and Scopus (*Elsevier*), we assured our audience that SINERGI has decided to increase our frequency of publication twice every year, July and December, biannually. We hope that this volume will be advantageous in further understanding and creating awareness of the field among academics and the public. We are also constantly communicating with potential partners alike from various countries.