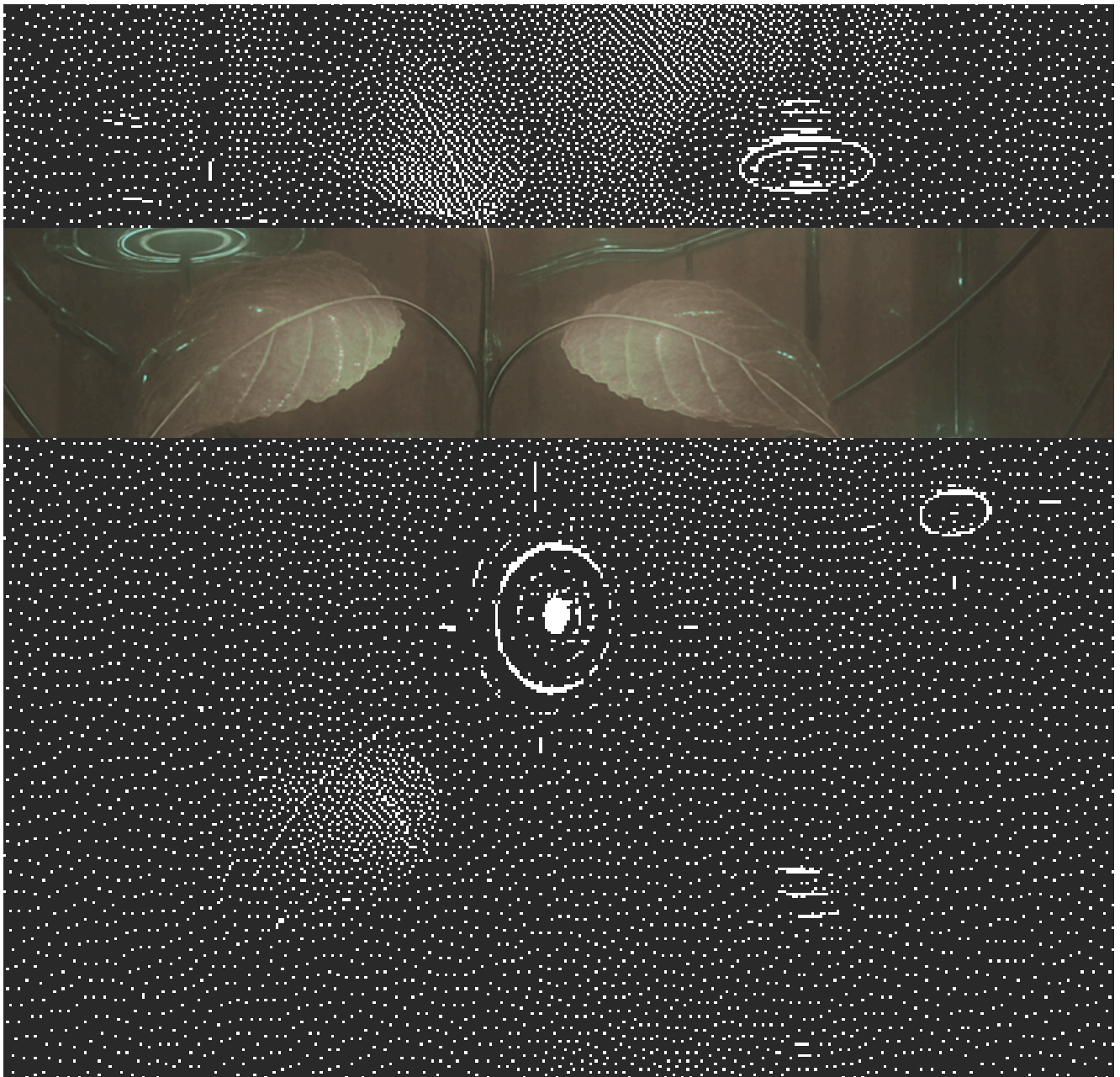


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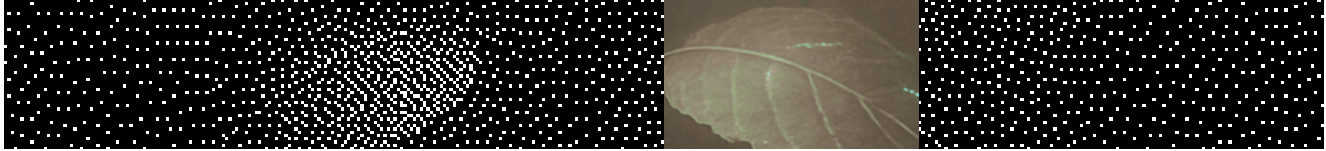
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**dash not for a trade deal
U.S. hegemony in retreat
care is capital**



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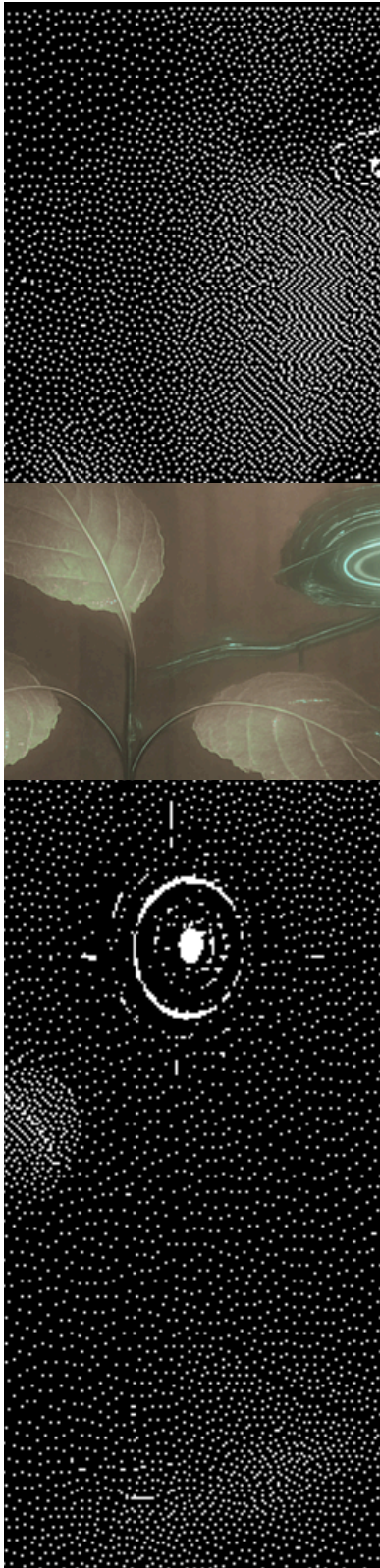


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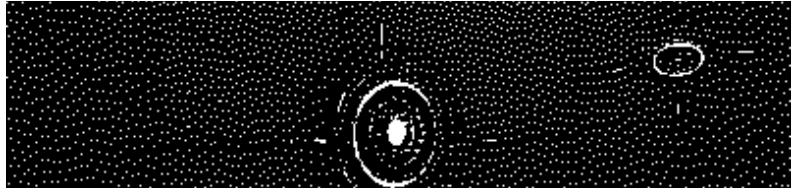
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framing global headwinds and domestic resilience: a Malaysian outlook

Dr. Anthony Dass
KSI Economic Adviser



In a world increasingly shaped by volatility, 2025 presents a pivotal moment for Malaysia. The global economy is being tested by new waves of disruption—rising geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainties, and the urgent demand for sustainability. Yet, within this turbulence lies opportunity.

This year, Malaysia finds itself straddling two powerful and opposing forces:

1. **Global Headwinds:** Trade wars, tariff escalations, and supply chain upheavals are reshaping how countries do business. From boardrooms to policy rooms, decision-makers are bracing for a more fragmented and politically charged economic order.
2. **Domestic Resilience:** There's a counter current. Malaysia is pushing forward—implementing bold fiscal reforms, modernizing its industries, and deepening its role within ASEAN. These efforts are designed not only to absorb external shocks but to help the nation leap ahead of them.

This dual reality—external turbulence and internal transformation—will define Malaysia's trajectory not just in 2025, but for the decade to come. "It's not about trying to stay afloat. It's about learning how to sail from future headwinds."

A Rough Ride for Open Economies

Malaysian economy thrives on trade, investment, and global partnerships. In 2025, storm clouds are gathering. From trade spats to geopolitical standoffs, the international landscape is becoming more challenging—and the ripple effects are being felt at home. Malaysia, as an open economy needs to stay alert in an increasingly unpredictable global arena.

Here's a look at the **five major global forces** Malaysia needs to watch:

1. **Trade Wars & Economic Retaliation:** The world is no longer playing by the same rules. Countries are raising tariffs, slapping on export bans, and using trade as a weapon. For businesses, this means more uncertainty, delayed deals, and disrupted supply chains. "One country's policy change can now trigger global consequences overnight."
2. **Cracks in Global Institutions:** Multilateral systems like the World Trade Organization (WTO) used to help keep the global economy fair and predictable. But now, more countries are going solo—cutting their own deals and ignoring the rulebook. This weakens the global safety net, making it harder to solve big issues like trade disputes or economic crises together.
3. **Shifting Supply Chains & Rising Costs:** COVID-19 taught companies a tough lesson: don't put all your eggs in one basket. Now, many are moving their factories closer to home or to friendlier countries—a trend called "friendshoring" or "nearshoring." While it adds resilience, it also adds cost—especially for small and medium businesses trying to stay competitive.
4. **Politics Meets Trade:** A Risky Mix: Trade is no longer just about business—it's about power. Tariffs and trade bans are being used to send political messages, especially among big powers like the U.S. and China. For countries like Malaysia, navigating these tensions takes skill, strategy, and a lot of diplomacy.
5. **Confidence Crisis Among Investors:** With so much instability, global investors are getting jittery.

Many are playing it safe—holding off on decisions, or shifting their money elsewhere. This volatility doesn't just impact big markets. It can slow down local projects, shrink capital flows, and put business plans on ice.

As the world becomes more unpredictable, Malaysia must be prepared—not just to survive the headwinds, but to find new ways to thrive in spite of them. The question isn't just how we weather the storm, but how we build a better ship.

Malaysia's Domestic Resilience in 2025

The country's domestic resilience is to build strength from within. As the global dynamics is becoming more fluid, Malaysia will have to lay down roots for a more resilient, future-ready economy. Malaysia cannot stand still as 2025 is shaping up to be a turning point—a year where the country will have to take bold steps to future-proof the economy, reform its finances, and strengthen its role in the region.

What should Malaysia do to be stronger and smarter?

1. **Fixing the Fundamentals:** Fiscal Reform: Malaysia is tightening up its financial playbook. From rethinking subsidies to strengthening tax systems, the goal is to reduce waste, raise efficiency, and make every ringgit count. "It's about spending smarter—not just more—so we can invest in things that really matter, like education, health, and innovation."
2. **Upgrading Our Industry Game:** The days of just being a low-cost manufacturer are fading. Malaysia is climbing the value chain—investing in high-tech industries, automation, and green technology. It's a big part of our plan to attract quality investments and become a serious player in the global economy.
3. **Deepening ASEAN Integration:** Southeast Asia is our home turf—and our growth engine. By working more closely with ASEAN neighbours, Malaysia gains access to a bigger market, smoother trade flows, and stronger supply chain ties. This regional push helps cushion us from global shocks, while opening new doors for local businesses.
4. **Championing Innovation & Digital Economy:** From fintech to e-commerce, Malaysia is doubling down on the digital economy. Government initiatives are helping SMEs go online, encouraging tech startups, and boosting digital infrastructure—even in rural areas. This isn't just about keeping up—it's about staying ahead.
5. **Driving Sustainability from the Ground Up:** Green is no longer optional—it's essential. Malaysia is making sustainability a core part of its development, from renewable energy projects to ESG-driven investments and circular economy models. The aim? Growth that's not just fast—but future-proof.

While global challenges may test us, Malaysia's focus must be clear: strengthen from the inside out, build a more resilient economy, and rise as a confident regional force. In the face of uncertainty, resilience is our greatest currency.

The State of Global Trade: Is It Still Free and Fair?

Global trade was once hailed as a rising tide that lifts all boats. But in 2025, the question on everyone's mind is: Does "free and fair trade" still exist—or has it become just another geopolitical tool?

There's no denying that international trade has grown dramatically over the past few decades. But somewhere along the way, the ideals of fairness and openness have been tested—and in some cases, compromised. Once seen as a neutral platform for mutual prosperity, global trade is now increasingly shaped by the strategic interests of powerful nations.

Tariffs are no longer just about economics—they're tools of negotiation and leverage. Access to markets can be granted... or withheld. And multilateral institutions that once helped keep the rules fair are finding their authority questioned more than ever.

To understand how we got here, let's rewind the clock and trace the evolution of global trade through three pivotal eras.

2000–2010: The Golden Years of Global Trade

This was the decade when the world truly believed in the promise of globalization. It kicked off with China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001—a move that sent ripples through global markets and supercharged international commerce.

During this period:

- Tariffs dropped, borders opened, and companies rushed to offshore production.
- Free trade agreements multiplied—think ASEAN-China FTA, the expansion of the European Union, and NAFTA powering North America.
- Multilateralism flourished, with global institutions playing a key role in keeping trade flowing smoothly.
- For many, it was a golden age of interconnectedness, efficiency, and economic boom.

2010–2020: The System Starts to Crack

But by the next decade, the shine was wearing off. The collapse of the WTO's Doha Round negotiations symbolized a growing disillusionment with global trade liberalization.

Key developments during this era:

- Protectionism returned—slowly at first, then more forcefully.
- China's rise and its state-driven model created new tensions. Issues like intellectual property, currency and excess capacity flooding the global market.
- Countries began to question whether trade was still about mutual benefit—or national strategy.
- Under President Trump's "America First" doctrine, the U.S. imposed tariffs on allies and rivals alike, breaking long-held trade norms.
- Global trade hadn't stopped, but it had definitely changed course.

2020–2025: The Age of Geoeconomics and Fragmentation

Then came COVID-19, and the world's supply chains were turned upside down. From semiconductors to surgical masks, countries suddenly realized just how vulnerable their global dependencies were.

This era has been defined by:

- Reshoring and friendshoring—companies bringing production closer to home or to trusted allies.
- The continued U.S.-China decoupling, with two superpowers building parallel trade ecosystems.
- The Russia-Ukraine war, which disrupted energy flows and reminded the world that trade routes are not just economic corridors—they're geopolitical flashpoints.
- Instead of pursuing global efficiency, countries are now prioritizing strategic resilience.

So, Where Do We Go From Here?

It's clear that the old playbook of globalization no longer applies. While trade is still alive and well, it's increasingly strategic, fragmented, and politicized. The challenge now is finding a new balance—protecting national interests while keeping the spirit of global cooperation alive.

As an open economy, Malaysia is walking on a tightrope. While engaging deeply with global markets, we must build resilience at home and trade diversification. We must maintain and advocate neutrality. In this new world order, trade is no longer just about economics—it's about strategy, security, and survival. Equally important is realism.

We need to understand our strengths, weakness and limits in the regional and global game. With that and supported by policy coherence, Malaysia could move from being a "price taker" to a "rule setter" in the regional economy. Other countries are moving fast — Malaysia should too.

What Malaysia should do across several critical fronts:

1. **Lead in Niche Areas, Not Everything:** Malaysia cannot—and need not—compete with every major economy in all sectors. But we can lead in targeted areas that play to our strengths. Double down on Halal standards, Islamic finance, green palm oil, or digital trade governance in ASEAN. Push for regional adoption of Malaysia-led standards or frameworks in these areas.
2. **Align Domestic Reforms with Regional Ambitions:** We can't shape regional rules if our own house isn't in order. Domestic competitiveness is the bedrock of regional influence. Ensure policy consistency across ministries—especially in industrial policy, trade, education, and investment. Cut bureaucratic red tape, strengthen institutions, and build a future-ready workforce. Implement fiscal discipline without sacrificing key growth enablers.
3. **Build Coalitions in ASEAN – Principle of Neutrality:** ASEAN operates on consensus. Malaysia can't dominate, but we can influence by building coalitions supported by neutrality. Take the lead in areas where we have comparative advantage like ASEAN supply chain resilience, carbon markets, or regional digital connectivity. Complement with other members to ASEAN nations. It is to ensure shared ownership and wider support under the principles of "neutrality".
4. **Invest in Strategic Capabilities:** Bold strategies are only as strong as the execution engine behind them. Strengthen Malaysia's think tanks, trade negotiators, and policy research ecosystems. Create a national strategy unit to ensure coherence between economic, foreign, and digital policies. Build data-driven policy capacity to anticipate trends and craft better responses.
5. **Own a Regional Narrative:** Influence is not just about policy—it's about ideas. Champion a "Prosperity with Trust" narrative. Growth that is inclusive, green, and neutrality. Use platforms like the ASEAN Chairmanship (in 2025) to introduce big ideas and shape the discourse.

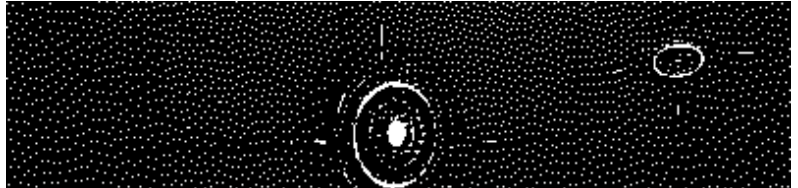
Final Thought

Malaysia can move from a “price taker” to a “rule setter”—but this requires a long-term vision, strategic courage, and political will. The regional race is real. Indonesia is rising. Vietnam is reforming. Thailand is repositioning. Philippines is catching up. Singapore continues to lead as a standard-setter.

To stay ahead, Malaysia must move “cautiously and confidently”. We may not out scale our neighbours, but we can out-strategize them with bold and rational thinking by taking into account of expected and unexpected shocks, smart coalitions, and a strong national compass.

framing global headwinds and domestic resilience: a Malaysian outlook

Dr. Anthony Dass
KSI Economic Adviser



doing away with rights

Luqman Al-Hakim | Editor
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Origin of Rights

The modern doctrine of “rights”, whether it is the right to life, liberty, property, speech, or security, was not handed down from the heavens, nor did it blossom from the soil of some eternal moral truth. It was born, rather, from the dust and contradiction of a world in transition. It was the child of collapsing empires and rising merchants. Crafted not to unify humanity, but to give a moral face to a new structure of power. Rights, as we know them today, were conceived in the salons and studies of Enlightenment Europe by men such as Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, each writing with a quill in one hand and a commitment to their class interest in the other.

When I first conceived of KSInsights, it was with the intention of creating a platform not merely for passive consumption of policy commentary or political punditry, but as a space where theoretical contention, ideological exploration, and structural critique could be cultivated and meaningfully contested. It was to be a place where intellectual discomfort could be generative, a space for radical thought to find articulation and momentum. In many ways, KSInsights was envisioned as a response to the sterile technocratic language that dominates policy discourse in Malaysia and beyond. Where the world demanded pragmatic solutions, I wanted to create room for dangerous questions.

I have often imagined what Edward Said might have felt when first sketching his ideas in obscurity, or what Khalil Gibran must have carried in his chest before penning verses that no one in his own lifetime could yet fully appreciate. These men, and so many others, spilled ink without applause, and yet somewhere, far removed by time and geography, their thoughts found me. Someone from Malaysia who could barely keep pace in casual English conversation now finds companionship and courage in their words. How could I not write back?

The smallest ripples in the ocean may take years to reach the shore, but when they do, they arrive not as noise but as a solace for those who ponder beyond the horizon.

And so I write this, syok sendiri if you must call it that, out of deep love, for my people, for knowledge, and for the long arc of history that asks us to plant seeds we may never live to see bloom. If my memory is to be eroded by time, let only the idea remain, the spirit of speaking freely, thinking dangerously, and sharing earnestly.

Let this be my first foray into introducing and defending a radical idea, a nucleus of political belief I hold with seriousness and sincerity.

Let me be unequivocal: *we must abolish the concept of “rights”, in all its forms, and in all its ideological trappings.*

This may sound inflammatory, even nihilistic. However, it is, in fact, the only position consistent with a rigorous analysis of the evolution of political and legal liberalism. This is not a call to deny people the things they need; it is a call to reframe what liberation and dignity should look like beyond the framework that has been handed down to us by bourgeois institutions.

Before rights, society was carved by feudal obligation. Life was defined not by what you were owed as an individual, but by the role you inherited: peasant, lord, servant, serf. With the slow disintegration of that order came a new need, a new narrative. The rising bourgeoisie, wealthy but politically stifled, needed an ideology to justify their ascendance and to delegitimize the old world of kings and crowns. They found it in the language of individual rights.

Rights emerged in this moment as both shield and sword: a shield to protect the economic interests of the new class from the meddling of monarchs, and a sword to cut away the collective responsibilities that tied man to feudal society. The world was no longer to be built on mutual obligation, but on contract. On transaction. On ownership.

The American and French Revolutions are often draped in the garments of liberty, fraternity, and equality, but these were not revolutions for the many. They were, at their heart, revolutions of realignment, where one class, the bourgeoisie, rose to claim what the aristocracy had long held. They broke the scepter, only to lift the ledger. The “rights of man”, declared so loudly in constitutions and declarations, were in truth rights of the propertied subject, written to protect wealth from taxation, capital from interference, and commerce from regulation.

And when they cried “liberty”, it was not the liberty to live freely in community, but the liberty to profit, to own, to accumulate. It was liberty through the logic of the market. The individual, atomized and armed with legal entitlements, became the ideal citizen, not the collective, not the worker, not the peasant.

In this framework, liberal rights were never neutral. They emerged to serve a mode of production, capitalism, and they carried within them the DNA of its values: competition, exclusion, and property. They were never meant to liberate all. They were designed to justify a world where some could have everything, and others could have just enough to be told they were free.

Rights as Reified Class Ideology

The concept of rights is not simply limited or misused; it is fundamentally shaped by the capitalist system and serves its interests. I see rights not as neutral tools of justice but as ideological constructs that reflect and reinforce the existing social order.

Liberal rights framework is built around the figure of the individual, specifically, the isolated, self-interested person who exists in competition with others. This model of the individual aligns closely with the needs of capitalist society, where people are expected to act independently, sell their labor, and pursue private gain. Rights do not bring people together or create solidarity; they assume and preserve the separation between people. Rights are presented as universal, but they are grounded in a very particular idea of human nature, one that reflects bourgeois, not working-class, interests.

For example, the rights to property is not a guarantee of housing or communal well-being; it is the right to own, exclude, and profit. What appears as freedom is, in fact, the legal protection of inequality. This is the protection of “egoistic man”, a person stripped of their social nature, existing only in relation to private property.

The liberal idea of freedom, like freedom of the press or freedom to own property, exists only in form, not in substance. Such freedom is “freedom for slaveowners”, because in a society where the means of production are privately owned, freedom can only benefit those who already possess capital. Everyone else is left with formal rights they cannot meaningfully use.

Rosa Luxemburg stressed that rights are hollow if people lack the material means to exercise them. She supported political freedoms, but warned that under capitalism, these freedoms are limited by class structure. A worker might have the right to vote or speak freely, but if they are economically powerless, those rights mean very little in practice. Real freedom, she argued, requires control over economic life, not just legal guarantees.

Rights, in essence, is not the pathway to justice, but a tools that help maintain the capitalist status quo. They analyze rights as ideological in nature: they mask inequality, reinforce individualism, and prevent people from understanding the deeper causes of their oppression. True liberation, in this view, cannot come from expanding rights within the system; it must come from changing the system itself.

Rights as counter-revolutionary tactic

Liberal democracies have historically expanded the scope of rights, not out of moral progression, but as *containment strategies*. Rights are granted not to liberate, but to pacify. And every time the masses threatened rupture, the state responded with concessionary rhetoric of rights and representation.

But then, if ‘rights’ is indeed a class ideology that serves more as a guise and cage for the common people, then how come, say, the civil rights discourse in our contemporary time sounds so progressive? Here, I contend that the perception of expansion is driven by two things:

1. A strategic concession by the system; and
2. A containment strategy to reduce the revolutionary potential arising from contradiction and crisis

These rights, be they civil, social, or cultural, are often granted precisely at the moment when political unrest or systemic failure becomes visible. Rather than addressing the structural roots of inequality, rights are extended just enough to redirect pressure. When mass movements threaten the established order, the system responds by offering legal recognition and symbolic inclusion. In doing so, the fundamental arrangements of ownership, power, and labor remain untouched.

Historically, the earliest set of rights focused almost exclusively on protecting property, particularly the right to own, buy, sell, and inherit private assets. This was central to liberal thought in the 17th and 18th centuries. As capitalist economies matured and industrialization advanced, the contradictions of capitalism became sharper. The working class began to organize, demanding not only economic justice but political inclusion. To contain these demands, liberal democracies gradually extended the rights discourse beyond property to civil and political spheres.

The right to vote, for instance, was first granted only to propertied men. Over time, as social pressure grew, this was expanded to include wider segments of the population, including the working class and eventually women. But this expansion was carefully managed; it gave the appearance of empowerment while leaving the control over capital and production untouched.

In the 20th century, particularly after the Great Depression and the rise of socialist movements, liberal states incorporated social rights, such as the right to education, healthcare, and social welfare, into their constitutional framework. This was not the result of moral awakening, but a strategy to absorb and neutralize revolutionary movements. The welfare state became a tool to stabilize capitalism, not to dismantle it.

In recent decades, with the rise of identity politics and post-colonial movements, cultural and recognition rights have been added to the framework. These include rights related to gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual identity. While these shifts are important in acknowledging historical injustices, they are still shaped by the same underlying capitalist logic to offer symbolic inclusion without addressing structural exploitation.

Thus, what appears as an expanding universe of rights is a historical sequence of defensive maneuvers. Each expansion corresponds to a moment of systemic stress. Each new right is introduced not to transform the system, but to preserve it. The right to property remains intact, and in many cases, even more deeply entrenched, while all other rights are layered on top, carefully bounded and managed by the state to prevent deeper rupture.

Each new iteration of rights acts as a pressure valve, releasing enough social tension to protect the core of capital accumulation and private control. The edifice remains intact precisely because the language of rights creates the illusion of transformation. The master's house is never threatened, only renovated.

In effect, rights have become the *ideological currency* of capitalist modernity, a means through which power maintains its legitimacy while conceding little of substance. Rights are declared, publicized, and celebrated, but their realization is always deferred, always conditional, always mediated by the state and the market.

Danger

What makes the rights framework not just inadequate but dangerous is its function as a mystifying ideological form. It does not simply fall short of solving systemic problems, it actively reshapes them into forms that the system itself can absorb and neutralize. Rights convert broad structural injustices into narrow, manageable legal disputes. They take what are fundamentally political questions, about power, production, exploitation, and transform them into matters of technical legality, procedure, and individual entitlement.

- It **atomizes** collective movements into individual claims, breaking the solidarity and shared struggle that are necessary for systemic change.
- It **channels dissent** into state-administered processes like courts, petitions, or parliamentary debates, removing it from the street, the workplace, or the commune where real power could be built.
- It **renders structural oppression**, poverty, racism, patriarchy, imperialism, as issues of policy oversight or regulatory gaps, rather than products of capitalist production and global hierarchy.
- It **depoliticizes suffering**, encouraging people to see their hardship as unfortunate or unjust, but never as the predictable result of how society is organized.
- It **preserves the authority of the state**, which retains the exclusive power to define, interpret, grant, and withdraw rights at its discretion. Rights are not something the people own; they are permissions given by the very institutions that produce the conditions of inequality.

This process is not neutral, it is fundamentally political. Rights, when elevated as the primary framework for justice, end up substituting recognition for liberation. They become the language in which people beg for scraps rather than seize control. As such, rights displace the more urgent project of structural transformation: the reorganization of political, economic, and social life on collective, democratic terms.

When the fight becomes about being seen, being heard, or being counted within the system, the deeper struggle to dismantle and rebuild that system is postponed indefinitely. Rights are the vocabulary of inclusion, not transformation. They are the grammar of managed dissent.

In this way, the rights framework serves to contain revolutionary potential. It not only fails to challenge capitalism, but it also helps it endure. It domesticates anger, legalizes outrage, and transforms rebellion into reform. It turns what could be the basis of collective action into the performance of individual grievance. And all the while, the machinery of capital rolls on, uninterrupted.

NGOs/CSOs: The Institutionalization of Containment

Contemporary NGOs and civil society organizations have become, in many cases, the professional class managing the discourse of rights. They convert what should be a popular uprising into "stakeholder engagements". They reduce revolutionary demands into grant-friendly objectives. Their funding, language, and legitimacy are tethered to the very system they claim to critique.

Instead of disrupting power, they **administer** it.

A rights-based NGO might campaign against housing discrimination, yet never challenge the commodification of housing. It may advocate for indigenous recognition, but remains silent on extractive capitalism. They present rights as achievements while the material conditions remain untouched. They seek impact metrics, not political rupture.

To elucidate my point, take the CSO/NGO movement in Malaysia. The system has effectively neutralized genuine oppositional power by absorbing it into formal, bureaucratic frameworks. What once began as movements demanding deep, structural transformation, on issues like inequality, land rights, worker justice, or political accountability, have been reshaped to align with the procedural norms of liberal democracy. These movements are now guided by strategic plans, project cycles, and donor reporting templates. They are judged not by how well they mobilize people or shift material conditions, but by their ability to tick boxes, run workshops, and produce quarterly deliverables.

This transformation is not an accident, it is an intentional strategy by the state and international donors to depoliticize civil society. By locking these movements into the imperatives of policy advocacy, legal reform, and institutional 'dialogue', they are slowly drained of their radical energy. They may win a law, influence a guideline, or sit on a committee, but all within the boundaries set by the existing order. In fact, when these movements do "succeed", their success often reinforces the very institutions they once sought to challenge. It provides those institutions with a democratic facade, a claim to responsiveness, and the appearance of progress.

In this framework, the language of empowerment becomes a substitute for real power. Mobilization is replaced by consultation. Protest becomes a panel discussion. What remains is the performance of dissent, managed, measured, and ultimately sanctioned by the system itself.

And this is no accident. The NGO-ization of resistance was a strategic move, advanced in the late 20th century by liberal foundations and Western states to reorient postcolonial and working-class movements away from revolutionary politics. In this framework, advocacy replaces organizing, and the language of empowerment becomes a substitute for power itself.

This is not resistance. It is the bureaucratization of dissent.

From Rights to Collective Power

We must move beyond rights toward a politics of collective agency and class empowerment:

- Food, shelter, education, and healthcare should not be rights, but non-negotiable functions of a decommodified social structure. These must be produced, distributed, and maintained collectively, not as commodities to be accessed through market mechanisms or bureaucratic entitlements. Access to life's essentials should not be contingent on income, identity, or negotiation, it should be embedded in the very design of society. When housing is a right on paper, but a privilege in practice, the system has already failed.
- Freedom of expression should not depend on access to privately owned platforms, but emerge from democratic control of media and discourse. This means breaking up concentrated media ownership and building platforms rooted in communal oversight and accountability. A society where only the wealthy can afford visibility is not a free society; it is one where truth is owned, curated, and sold back to the people. Democratic communication must be practiced, not promised.

- Political voice should not be cast as a ballot every five years, but as active participation in a worker-led, directly democratic governance model. Institutions of governance must be restructured so that people have direct, ongoing input into the decisions that shape their lives, not mediated through parties, elections, or representatives that serve capital. True democracy is not simply voting, it is having power over the conditions of your life, every day, in every way.
- Ecological balance should not be enshrined in climate agreements, but ensured through the dismantling of the extractive logic of capital. Real environmental justice will only be possible when land, energy, and natural resources are removed from private control and managed for the collective good. Carbon credits and green branding cannot undo the devastation wrought by systems that treat the Earth as an externality. If we can so easily tear down the temples and shrines dedicated to our God(s), then we have no guarantee that we won't do the same to constitutional shrines and temples dedicated to Earth.
- Labor must not be governed by contracts that commodify human life, but by principles of dignity, solidarity, and co-determination. We need to move beyond labor protections and toward democratic control of workplaces, where workers do not just demand better conditions, but own and govern the institutions they labor within.
- Safety and security should not be tied to surveillance, policing, or militarization, but grounded in social cohesion, equity, and care. The apparatus of state violence has too often been the enforcer of property rights, not human well-being. A liberated society must dismantle carceral institutions and invest in infrastructure that nurtures resilience and healing.

These are absolutely not utopian demands, they are the starting point of what it means to organize society around people, not profit. **Imagine how crazy and demented our contemporary life is to even when voicing the basic minimum viable vision of a better society, we immediately think of these as utopian, as if slaving away our lives is optimal.** These reflect the political maturity to recognize that rights frameworks were never designed to challenge the system; they were designed to regulate discontent. Where the chains of capitalism still remain, the so-called rights of freedom are but a hollow illusion. Rights serve to conceal class antagonism rather than resolve it.

This line of thought offers us a framework not only to critique the limitations of rights but to imagine and build something beyond them. The transition to the next phase of society would allow us to move "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs, a formulation that breaks entirely from the rights-based logic of entitlement and exchange.

Kollontai, writing on the role of women, argued that rights and reforms could never emancipate women in a meaningful way, since they left the economic structure untouched.

“The woman worker cannot use these rights and liberties, her slavery is not simply a question of lack of rights...it is a question of bread.”

Angela Davis, reflecting on the American context, similarly pointed out that the civil rights victories of the 20th century, while important, were always constrained by the structures of racial capitalism.

“The absence of genuine economic justice meant that legal rights became a facade, behind which inequality continued to flourish.”

The abolition of rights, in this sense, is not the erasure of freedom; it is the radical expansion of freedom. A world beyond rights is not a world without protections. It is a world where we no longer need to ask for what should never be denied. It is a world where survival is not negotiated, where participation is not symbolic, and where dignity is not conditional. It is a world where justice is embedded in the material fabric of society, not abstracted through paperwork, litigation, or selective visibility.

The call is not for fewer freedoms, but for different foundations, foundations built on solidarity, material democracy, and social ownership. The goal is not to perfect the legal grammar of rights, but to rewrite the structure of society entirely, from the ground up, with new institutions and new relations of power.

What we need is not more rights. What we need is **power** - collectively held, democratically organized, and structurally rooted.

Waves to the Shore

I get it, and I understand, that this is not a widely accepted thesis. Everything that I labored here screams “its so out there mann!”. Alas, I do not expect it to be. This is precisely what KSInsights was meant to do: not to echo consensus, but to provoke rupture, deliberate, thoughtful, and rooted in a genuine desire for transformation. It is in the rupture, after all, that new horizons can emerge.

I know that the philosophical questions of rights and the practical struggle to obtain them are often seen as the dominant, if not the only, legitimate mode of dissent today. And to be clear, I hold deep respect for the labor, the scholarship, and the sacrifices made by those who have fought in the name of rights. The work they’ve done is not in vain. Blood has been spilled, sweat has soaked the ground, and many have died for the simple dignity of recognition. That is exactly why I feel compelled to ask: Is it enough? Will it ever be enough?

This question is not born out of contempt, but care. I offer this critique not to undermine those who struggle, but to push us further. To ask what if we are fighting for is truly freedom, or merely permission. My hope is that by re-examining the foundations of our political beliefs, we might be swayed, together, toward the most just, most honest path forward.

Another reason I begin here, with this piece, is that I believe this is the right place to start a journey of essays that will unravel and reimagine our politics. This, for me, is the foundational negation, the refusal to be uncritically included in the political assumptions I no longer accept. I do not write as someone seeking to conform to either side of the existing ideological spectrum. I write because I refuse to be boxed in by discourses that demand allegiance over thought.

And so, from this negation, from the negation of the liberal sanctity of “more rights”, I try to tease out a different paradigm. Something new, or at least something we have forgotten how to remember. A seed, maybe. And like any seed, it does not need to grow tomorrow. But it must be planted today.

There is a certain beauty in knowing that intellectual labor, however marginal today, may one day awaken another. Perhaps in a place like Malaysia. Perhaps in someone like me. Perhaps in someone yet to be born. That even in the absence of immediate recognition, even in the obscurity of today’s noise, a single paragraph might become a lantern for someone wandering in political confusion.

Ideas endure. Rights do not. Because ideas can be reimagined, reembodyed, and reborn, while rights, as they are currently structured, are always circumscribed by the state and the economy that define them. Rights are meant to fit inside what already exists. Ideas will into existence.

Isn’t this all what life is all about? From “syok sendiri”, we partake in the magnificent labor of creation, celebrate newness, and add beauty to the world.

Let us begin again **by doing away with rights.**

doing away with rights

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dash not for a trade deal

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Trump's recent round of reciprocal tariffs is very different from the tariff war he initiated in 2018.

The U.S. tariff of 21% in 2018 was largely applied to approximately \$300 billion worth of imports from China. Different sections of the U.S. Trade Act were utilised as the legal foundation for the tariff imposition, especially Section 301 that empowers the U.S. Trade Representative to investigate and retaliate against foreign trade practices deemed discriminatory.

A targeted subject, limited in scope, and restrained in tactics. It resembles what Herbert Hoover, then U.S. President, wrote in April 1929 in responding to the drafted revision of a tariff act sponsored by Willis Hawley – of the infamous Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 – the then Republican House Representative:

“...the test of necessity for [tariff] revision is... whether there has been a substantial slackening of activity in the industry during the past few years, and a consequent decrease of employment... In determining changes in our tariff we must not fail to take into account the broad interests of the country as a whole, and such interests include our trade relations with other countries. It is obviously unwise protection which sacrifices a greater amount of employment in exports to gain a less amount of employment from imports.”

In fact, the first tariff war didn't hurt the overall U.S. economy. It was actually a bipartisan consensus to address the local economic damage attributed to what MIT economist David Autor first called “China Shock”, and to counter the rise of China as a hegemonic authoritarian power viewed as a threat to the stability of the liberal democratic world order. As the first tariff war was straightforward, it was synonymous with the U.S.-China trade war, prompting a rethinking amongst advanced democratic economies about trade over-dependence on China. From offshoring during the heyday of hyper-globalisation to nearshoring, friendshoring, and reshoring after 2018, the first tariff war marked disruptive, but not disastrous, changes to the global trade landscape.

For developing countries, the first tariff war and the ensuing Biden tech war against China fractured the once closely bonded U.S.-China relationship famously dubbed as “Chimerica” by Harvard historian Niall Ferguson, becoming an unexpected catalyst for reindustrialisation through the resulting fissures.

That's why many still try to understand Trump's reciprocal tariff via the original lens of the tariff war. They argue that Trump is playing 5D chess to reunite the world against China, i.e. 145% tariff against China whilst pausing the rest for 90 days. Many would urge the affected countries to negotiate with President Trump. After all, Trump has a motto of things being “just business, nothing personal.”

This time however, things are different.

With non-friendly fire being continuously shot at Canada and the European Union, in which they basically maintained a nearly tariff-free cross-border trade with America, it signifies that Trump's tariff is no longer about the old battle between conservative values that emphasise free market and liberal visions of trade that care about progressivism.

When the U.S. most important alliances that have worked closely in the past to contain the advancement of China's dual-use technological capability, and to secure the availability of advanced raw materials for America are slapped with equally, if not more ridiculous reciprocal tariff, they will only be pushed closer to China while finding America untrustworthy. Rationalising Trump's tariff as a national and global security strategy looks more and more like wishful thinking.

The high tariff of 145% against Chinese imports as of date is more of a consequence of a tit-for-tat escalation in the trade war, rather than a well-thought-out and thoroughly planned strategy. Although China remains the country being hit the hardest, the tariff war this round goes beyond China. It is better understood as an end, not the end, to achieve something else: neither economic efficiency nor national security, but American domestic politics. Bluntly put, the global tariff war is a foreign projection of Trump's MAGA movement to purge the “wokeness” value.

If what the Trump administration has been doing to their federal agencies and universities are to purge the “leftist liberal value” for the MAGA value upon excuses of reducing budget deficit and restoring government efficiency, then trade, which has the “liberal bias”, would be what the ultra-nationalist MAGA movement aims for externally with trade deficit as a smokescreen.

The SOP even looks alike: move fast, break things, no follow-up plan.

A domestically politically driven reciprocal tariff won't be put on for negotiation with foreigners, as there won't be any explicit trade-related target for negotiation. The EU's trade chief, Maros Sefcovic, left the negotiation meeting in Washington on April 14th with a struggle to grasp what America wanted. That is not surprising after all. When asked how he would decide on trade exemptions, Trump said, “Instinctively, more than anything else,” an instinct rooted in his reading on the MAGA reactions.

90 days are too short for serious trade negotiations for the 90 countries on the list. Ask Canada and Mexico which were granted a 30-day pause. There is no need to dash for a practically non-negotiable deal. Slashing further tariffs for other imports to help cut costs for the affected, while buckling up with fiscal assistance to embrace the impact, is more worthy of the time spent.

The endgame of the global tariff war lies only in a recession that shakes MAGA support for Trump's instinct.

dash not for a trade deal

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U.S. hegemony in retreat

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The Paradox of Hegemony

At the heart of this crisis is a paradox embedded in the hegemonic stability theory. The hegemon creates the system but may resent the cost of maintaining it over time. As rivals rise and domestic pressures mount, the hegemon might no longer see value in paying for public goods that increasingly benefit others.

We are approaching U.S. President Donald Trump's 100th day in office, and Washington has already been a hive of activity. From sweeping executive orders to belligerent rhetoric on trade, many analysts conclude that Trump is abandoning the very international system the United States built after the Second World War. The erosion of American commitment to global leadership is more than a matter of diplomatic style. It marks a strategic shift with far-reaching implications.

For the U.S., the post-2008 global financial crisis (GFC) has sharpened this perception. The GFC damaged its reputation as a responsible steward of international finance. China's ascent accelerated in parallel. At home, large swathes of the American electorate grew sceptical of globalisation and free trade, blaming foreign competition for domestic job losses and wage stagnation.

It reminded me of a theory I studied while doing my postgraduate degree at arguably the world's best university, the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE): hegemonic stability theory (HST). I never expected this IR concept to feel so relevant years later. While this is not an academic piece, I find HST useful in understanding the unfolding between the U.S. and China. As Washington pulls away from the post-war system it once championed, the question arises: **what happens to global stability when the hegemon starts behaving like a revisionist power?**

Enter Trump the demagogue: the first American president in living memory to openly campaign against the liberal international order. He treated alliances as transactional arrangements, threatened tariffs on allies, and framed global institutions as conspiracies against American prosperity. It was not just the trade war with China that marked this shift. It was the larger decision to forgo responsibility for the order America had built.

America the Reluctant Hegemon

China: Challenger or Beneficiary?

Hegemonic stability theory, as advanced by scholars such as Charles Kindleberger (1973), Robert Giplin (1981), and later Robert Keohane (1984), argues that the international system is most stable when a single dominant state creates and maintains the rules of the game. The hegemon provides public goods: open markets, reserve currency stability, maritime security, and a predictable framework for cooperation. Other countries, even those that do not necessarily like the hegemon's dominance, often benefit from and depend on this system.

While Washington retreats, Beijing is playing a long game. China has benefited immensely from the post-war order, particularly regarding its economic dimensions. Its accession to the WTO in 2001 catalysed decades of double-digit growth, export surpluses, and the integration of Chinese firms into global supply chains.

Beginning in 1945, the U.S. took on this role with conviction. Through the Bretton Woods institutions, NATO, and the liberal trade order centred on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (and later the World Trade Organization), Washington underwrote a set of rules and norms that promoted relative stability and economic integration. Its dominance was not just military or economic. It was systemic.

Critics argue that China's state capitalism, intellectual property practices, and political repression contradict liberal norms. But under HST, this matters less than the structural dynamic: the hegemon's declining commitment and the following vacuum.

But Trump's return signals a stark departure. Rather than upholding the system, his administration is opting out. The repeated refusal to engage multilaterally, threats to withdraw from NATO, the rejection of climate agreements, and the open disdain for trade deals like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) all suggest a hegemon tired of its own architecture.

China has seized this moment. Its Belt and Road Initiative, new multilateral banks such as the AIIB, and growing presence in international forums show a state ready to shape the system or at least insulate itself from the one America no longer wants to uphold. Yet, China is not trying to dismantle the order wholesale. It acts as a selective reformer, coexisting with the system while incrementally shifting its centre of gravity.

The Erosion of Systemic Trust

International systems rely not just on hard power but on expectations. States and markets act based on assumptions that the hegemon will provide continuity. HST teaches us that when those expectations collapse, so too does the incentive to play by the rules.

Trump's policy doctrine is grounded in strategic ambivalence. Allies no longer know if the U.S. will come to their defence. Trade partners are unsure if past agreements will hold. Investors and diplomats read every social media post for signs of an unpredictable pivot.

This is more than disruption. It is a degradation of trust in the system's core. While HST accounts for hegemonic decline as a material process, Trumpism adds a new layer: intentional abdication. The hegemon is no longer being displaced. It is walking off the field.

Public Goods and Power Vacuums

Hegemons provide order not just through enforcement, but through presence. U.S. naval patrols ensured freedom of navigation, its financial institutions absorbed global liquidity shocks, and alliances restrained regional arms races. In stepping back, Washington creates gaps that no state is ready or willing to fill.

This is evident in global trade. With the TPP abandoned, the vacuum was filled by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a deal conceived by ASEAN but largely shaped by Beijing. As U.S. rhetoric leans protectionist, others are reshuffling supply chains, forging new trade corridors, and recalibrating expectations around global leadership.

But the consequences go beyond economics. When the hegemon refuses to bear the burden of stewardship, the system starts to fragment. Competing spheres of influence, regulatory divergence, and bilateral bargains begin to replace the universal rules once taken for granted.

What Comes After Hegemony?

Hegemonic stability theory does not predict that a new hegemon will automatically emerge. It warns of the chaos when leadership fades and no alternative steps up. The current transition is not from unipolarity to bipolarity or multipolarity. It is from order to uncertainty.

The real tragedy lies not in America's decline but its deliberate retreat. Washington still commands the resources, alliances, and institutional architecture to maintain global leadership. But it lacks the political will. This makes the world more unstable, not just because China is rising, but because the system's architect no longer wants the blueprint.

A Word of Caution for ASEAN

For ASEAN, this shift carries consequences. Our economies are deeply linked to global trade flows, supply chains, and the rules-based system. We rely on certainty, not brinkmanship. As a region historically caught in the currents of great power rivalry, we are interested in preserving a stable order regardless of who leads it.

This is where the logic of HST matters most. It reminds us that the system is not self-sustaining. Without a committed hegemon, even the most carefully constructed order will unravel. The trade wars are not the cause. They are a symptom of something more profound: the hegemon's disinterest in the very stability it once guaranteed.

The Price of Abandonment

China is not overtaking the United States because of its relative decline. It is being overtaken by choice. By abandoning the architecture it once defended, it risks losing influence and the moral authority underpinning its primacy.

Hegemonic stability theory offers a sobering lens through which to view this shift. It reminds us that power alone is not enough. Leadership is about responsibility. And when the hegemon shirks that duty, the international system begins to fray not at its edges, but at its centre.

The cost of the American retreat will not be paid in trade deficits or diplomatic spats. It will be paid in instability, fragmentation, and the loss of the system that enabled decades of prosperity for the U.S. and the world it once led.

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U.S. hegemony in retreat

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care is capital: leveraging childhood investment to sustain an aging nation

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Despite its significant contribution to economic and social development, the care economy in Malaysia has been undervalued and underinvested. Care for the young and for elderly are pivotal to the well-being of individuals and the functioning of societies, without which, the economy will be at a standstill.

With the demographic shift and rising total dependency ratio caused by the declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy, both elderly people and children are at a greater risk and likely to bear the brunt of care burden the most. With this demographic change and polycrisis such as the long lasting impact of COVID-19, increased poverty and inequalities, and climate change, children today are facing more risk than before. Public spending is expected to double between 2015 and 2050, due to the growing demand for services from the aging population. Moreover, the efforts to professionalise the sector which has long been supported informally, raises discussion of whether it will make care support less accessible. With this heightened concern, there is a critical need to examine the optimal way of providing financial support to the care sector. Within the care economy's life cycles, there is a plethora of research evidencing the importance of investing in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) such as quality education, breastfeeding, and parental time investment that can be traced as far back to the Perry Preschool Project in the 1960s. Studies illustrated early childhood interventions having a large social return for human capital development. For example, a study by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank demonstrated early intervention investment having an annual rate of return of 18%, higher than the then country's stock market (5.8%), with 16% coming from the public return. The study is further strengthened with the neurodevelopmental studies showing ECCE being a critical fundamental years and certain skills that are missed during this period could be non-reversible. Simultaneously, recent research developments have also discovered how the overall care economy can contribute to the Gross National Income (GNI) through increased household income as more women participate in the labour workforce, and an estimation of RM379 billion to Malaysia's GDP should unpaid care work be valued at.

In 2012, Malaysia's total spending on ECCE was equivalent to approximately only 0.2% of GDP. It was an increase from the previous years, but still lower from the average public spending on ECCE in the OECD countries which is just over 0.8% of GDP.

Taking a few benchmarks of spending percentage of GDP from countries that scored higher in the Starting Well Index such as Singapore (0.5%), South Korea (0.9%) and Finland (1.1%), Malaysia should be planning an increase of spending in this part of investment to the human capital development of the country. Due to the importance of intervention during early childhood, the salaries for ECCE educators should be compared and made equivalent to primary and secondary schools. Despite the existing policies aimed at ensuring quality ECCE centres, the salaries of ECCE educators remain low, disincentivising top talent in the education field from specialising in ECCE or staying committed in the long run.

While the economic explanation for ECCE is centred on it being a valuable public investment, critics argue that it may not necessarily be the same for the elderly, though they are still necessary. In an aging society, the economic value comes from the high demand of its care service that would create many economic opportunities which could be catered by the private market. Public spending could play a factor in GDP contribution, but since government spending is a limited resource, strategic decisions and allocation would realistically be made. The concern of a non-intervention approach is also centred on it being inequitable and inaccessible for all, aside from it being a social contract and a form of redistributive justice. Additionally, spending on the elderly can produce several positive externalities such as eliminating the barriers for working individuals, especially women, to participate in the labour market. Based on these differences, it is pertinent to look into the most optimal and sustainable financing model for the elderly. There's an urgent need to rebalance care-related spending, especially given ECCE's long-term returns compared to the often reactive approach to elder care.

Though the underlying justifications for financing childhood and elder care may differ, it remains essential to view investments in the care economy through a life-cycle approach. This is because the sector interacts with each other and should not be limited to the provisioning of care centres, but encompasses from the moment when a child is conceived to the elderly years, along with the societal preferences of care that would influence the success of a policy. This includes the labour market policies, provisioning of care centers, government incentives and collaboration with the private market, and social protection. In Sweden, whilst acknowledging the socio-political-economic differences, steps have been taken to allow for a certain amount of transfer of parental leave to other family members who are taking care of the children such as grandparents; an informal care provision that has long been practised in our country that enables the formal labour supply, yet its contributions being invisible and unvalued.

Equally, policymakers must be urged to use the life-cycle approach when examining policy designs that are socially and economically viable. For instance, a connection and closeness between elderly care centres and childcare or orphanage institutions might be a well-planned design especially as both segments require a deep social connection and physical interactions. Statistics show that elderly people experienced loneliness and social isolation, while children require love and care for a healthy development.. Hence, having institutional design where the two generations could interact would benefit both of them. Policymakers should also seek to advocate for family-sensitive labour policies such as breastfeeding-friendly policies and integrate these efforts into a cohesive strategy for human capital development. This can then support the aspiration of Negara Madani in ensuring that no one is left behind as we move up the economic ladder.

This article calls for two critical aspects when designing the financial ecosystem in the care economy in Malaysia; the clear need for increased investment in early childhood care and education (ECCE) due to its well-documented long-term benefits and return of investment in human capital development, and to explore the pathways to a sustainable care model, - especially the untapped economic opportunities within the elder care industry.

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care is capital: leveraging childhood investment to sustain an aging nation

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reviving the case study approach to research & policy making in Malaysia

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A book titled *Social Science and Malaysian National Development*, edited by Abdul Rahman Embong, was published by the Malaysian Social Science Association (or PSSM) in 2007. The book sought to emphasize the research and policy nexus, and the centrality of 'evidence-based policy making.' Citing Genevieve Domenach-Chich, the editor highlighted 'the importance of fully employing social science for policy formulation, especially to manage social transformation.' (see **note 1**)

After 18 years, how far have we progressed in this issue? Have we been able to 'conduct research that would contribute meaningfully to development and social transformation'? How has policy making in this country contributed to the growth of the nation's development?

The status or nature of research work that has shaped the national development agenda is ambiguous. How research, and social science research in particular, has benefited the approach to the policy formulation and implementation is similarly uncertain. The recent report by the Malaysia auditor general on the status and monitoring of research projects in selected universities in Malaysia, however, is not reassuring.

The report highlighted that for the year 2023, 1000 research projects were identified as unsatisfactory, which amounted to RM 148.04 million. Further, of the amount of 2077 projects that received grants, only 236 projects were categorized as showing 'good progress' while another 571 had 'satisfactory status.' Five universities were involved in the receiving of government research grants, consisting of Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). (see **note 2**)

These findings are not a promising indicator of the status and condition of the research field in Malaysia. It illustrates gaps in the approach and purposes of research work. Such gaps would in turn affect the nature of policy making, and the impacts of policy implementation in government programs that would affect Malaysian society.

In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s- even the 1990s- research works that involved anthropological, sociological and ethnographic approaches were prominent. These studies contributed to the knowledge corpus, and discussions on the national development agenda and policy making process.

Amongst these works include James Puthucheary's *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy* (1960), Syed Hussein Alatas's *The Second Malaysian Plan, 1971-1975: A Critique* (1972), Shamsul Amri Baharuddin's *Rancangan Malaysia Kedua, Tujuan dan Pelaksanaannya: Suatu Penilaian Teoritis* (1979) and *From British to Bumiputera Rule: Local Politics and Rural Development in Peninsular Malaysia* (1986), Diana Wong's *Peasant's in the Making: Malaysia's Green Revolution* (1987), Ishak Shaari's *Keadaan Ekonomi dan Struktur Masyarakat Melayu Kelantan pada abad ke-19* (1991), and Abdul Rahman Embong's *State-led Modernization and the Malay Middle Class in Malaysia* (1999). This also extends to works in the field of politics and culture, and political science and history. Consider, for instance, James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) and *Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976), and Anthony Milner's *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (1982).

These works, although academic in nature and originating from the field of social research and the social sciences, both guided development planning in Malaysia and the review of existing and new State policies. The framework and political-economic basis of the New Economic Policy (NEP), established in 1970 and which constitutes a major social transformation program in the history of development of Malaysia, was shaped by perspectives of social justice by key intellectuals, activists, and political leaders of that era. Abdul Rahman Embong, writing in 2007, observed that the social sciences in Malaysia 'has an institutional history of about five decades' and that the development of the field 'has been most dramatic since the 1970s.' (see **note 3**)

Today, works such as those of Diana Wong and those that are locality specific, qualitative and longitudinal, no longer attain a prominent position in national development conversations and policy making discussions. Instead, the trend and focus has been on the accumulation of data that is quantitative in nature, and extensive in form with area-wide data sampling. The importance is therefore on statistical findings. The latter is subsequently utilized to inform policy thinking and formulation, and further to that, in the assessing of deliverables and outputs whether economic, social, environmental or political.

Several consequences arise out of these trends. Firstly, is the implication that while we may possess the information regarding a particular issue, for instance in the measuring of the rate of unemployment in Malaysia in percentage form, we lack in-depth knowledge of the nature and characteristics of the social condition of unemployment. Similarly, we may be informed of the rate of poverty, but we lack insights and knowledge in the conditions and dimensions of poverty; poverty becoming faceless.

Secondly, we are unable to provide in-depth explanations of phenomena that occur in a particular and distinct locality, which is time-bound and context-bound. Additionally, without focus and in-depth analysis, we also lack the capacity to track changes and transformations in the social conditions of communities in that locality over long and expansive periods of time. Third and lastly, by relying on quantitative and statistical approaches, we lack the capacity to explain the causes and ramifications of a particular, or constellation, of phenomena.

Overall, the formation of agendas, the formulation of policies and programs, and their implementation become impaired. Policy makers and political leaders are not provided with sufficient critical and comprehensive empirical data, which is locality-focused and bottom-up, that can guide sound policy formulation and decision making.

Moving forward, there is a need to revive and renew the case study approach to understanding social issues and social phenomena. Using the knowledge resulting from this approach to guide the formulation, planning, and implementation of national, state and local development. The case study approach encompasses anthropological, sociological and ethnographic methods, being locality-defined, community-based and devoutly partisan to those who are on the margins, qualitative in substance, and longitudinal in scope. Such corpus of knowledge, with its framing and analysis of problems, will assist public officials at all levels of government to deliberate solutions and aid in the efficient and effective execution of those solutions. In this way, the government and society can together affect social transformation that is positive, progressive, inclusive, and above all, humane, so that no one will be left behind.

notes

- (note 1) Abdul Rahman Embong (ed.), *Social Science & Malaysian National Development* (2007), p. 30–31
 (note 2) Over 1,000 research projects costing RM148m by Malaysia's top universities found 'unsatisfactory', *The Edge Malaysia*, 24 February 2025, at <https://theedgemaalaysia.com/node/745614>
 (note 3) Abdul Rahman Embong, *Social Science & Malaysian National Development*, p. 64

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sustainability adoption among SMEs

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In recent years, both government and financial institutions in Malaysia introduced numerous initiatives for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to kickstart their sustainability journey - from organising ESG awareness talks and training to offering financing for SMEs. Yet, many SMEs either do not intend to begin or remain clueless about the different sustainability jargon and standards. During the past few months of engaging more than 50 SMEs across various sectors, some are aware of ESG but do not see the importance of implementing it. This article will explore the main challenges and underlying barriers to implementing sustainability while suggesting several policy recommendations to influence more SMEs to begin taking action in sustainability.

Core challenges faced by SMEs

Many SMEs fear the high start-up cost of transitioning into renewable energy sources. The e-invoicing requirement may discourage more SMEs from introducing more sustainability initiatives. Malaysian SMEs with annual sales between RM150,000 and RM500,000 are required to comply with e-invoicing from 2026. SMEs with limited cash flow do not have a choice but to spend on e-invoicing software first and provide training for some staff to familiarise themselves with the software.

In addition, most SMEs do not have a proper data collection mechanism to measure sustainability indicators such as energy and water consumption. They do not compile all the electricity and water bills into one folder and eventually, face trouble searching for relevant data. As a result, the data indicated in the sustainability reports may not reflect the complete picture of how the companies operate. If the company could not find actual data to report, they only could report estimated data -with assumptions made- or forecasted data by describing plans to reduce energy or water consumption in the sustainability report.

Although many SME owners are starting to be aware of sustainability, they still do not see the value of sustainability. They always feel that sustainability will add more cost to their business and cannot relate how sustainability and profitability are linked. It is a good sign that some middle managers foresee that sustainability would add value to their company. Nonetheless, they are not the business decision makers who could convince top management to initiate the sustainability journey.

Generally, SME business owners would ask their staff to participate in ESG training. They do not want to spend half a day understanding the importance of ESGs and sustainability in their business operations. At last, they may face issues in retaining their staff who have already experienced ESG training as they cannot relate to the importance of incorporating sustainability in their business operations.

With more than 20 companies applying for the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA)'s Domestic Investment Accelerator Fund (DIAF) – ESG Adoption grant (see **note 1**), several calls needed to be set up for companies to understand the application procedures, taking an average of one to two months to complete their applications.

There are over 200 questions for the SMEs to assess their sustainability adoption level under the B impact assessment (see **note 2**). The companies are required to prepare and upload more than 10 documents to complete the grant application. The whole grant application process could take at least half a year due to the two months spent by the companies to apply, two months for MIDA to approve the application, and two months in the post-grant approval procedures. Furthermore, the bank application procedures could be stricter and less friendlier for SMEs. According to the Joint Committee on Climate Change (JC3), there are five criteria to fulfill before banks allow the companies to lend money for sustainability initiative implementation. First is *character*, which is the borrower's history and background. The second requirement is *conditions*, which could relate to the market, economic situation, industry and other factors. Third is *capital*, which is about the owner's investment into the business or the company's net worth. Fourth is *capacity*, which is the ability to repay the loan. Fifth is *collateral*, which is available assets to back the loan.

Underlying barriers

If the company has 5-10 employees, it would be difficult for the employees to take several days of work leave to attend ESG training. This coincides with the findings from NTUC Learning Hub's Sustainability for Business Resilience Report, with employees being too busy with work. When the employees are away for training, the work will be dragged further as they cannot find other colleagues to cover the work.

Many Malaysian SMEs face challenges in implementing digital solutions due to limited digital literacy and resistance to change. Although the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) introduced numerous initiatives to help SMEs including SME Business Digitalisation Grant, 100 Go Digital and SMART Automation Grant, many SMEs remain unaware of these opportunities or do not realise how these grants enhance their overall business performance.

Hence, they would find it challenging to use carbon accounting or sustainability reporting software due to limited digital and sustainability knowledge.

As smaller enterprises are not required to comply with the sustainability requirements set by the Malaysian government, they are yet to feel the pressure. Although other external stakeholders including consumers and suppliers may demand green and sustainable products, smaller companies will prioritise profitability and survival over being sustainable.

Although many financial institutions in Malaysia like Bank Negara Malaysia and commercial banks, provide loans with lower interest rates such as the Low Carbon Transition Facility, which is capped at 5% p.a. for SMEs to implement sustainability initiatives, SMEs may still face trouble in paying back due to broader cost pressures as well as Malaysia's mandatory e-invoicing policy. Relying on external trade proves difficult when recent examples with the U.S. imposing a 24% reciprocal tariff on Malaysian exports, making smaller Malaysian companies more vulnerable.

Survey Benchmark

This section benchmarks with several ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand to assess the level of sustainability adoption among SMEs in respective countries.

Malaysia

The Alliance Bank's ESG 2.0 study (2025) gathered 382 online survey responses, with 40% of respondents from the service industry, 35% from manufacturing, 16% from construction, 6% from agriculture and 2% from mining and quarrying. The survey shows that ESG awareness among Malaysian SMEs surged from 14% in 2023 to 80% in 2025. Over the same period, the ESG adoption rates rose more than double - from 28% to 60%. The main drivers for ESG adoption include cost savings, market demand and innovation.

The UOB Business Outlook Study (2024) collected 525 online survey responses from SMEs and large enterprises in Malaysia, with revenue of less than RM 900 million. Compared to Alliance Bank's findings, UOB's results were less optimistic, with only 39% of the respondents implementing sustainability initiatives. The sectors with the lowest adoption rates were consumer goods and tech, media and telecommunications. An increase in the cost of products or services to end customers, insufficient knowledge to identify and execute the right initiatives for the company and lack of proper infrastructure for renewable energy are the key barriers to sustainability.

Singapore

NTUC LearningHub and GRI conducted an online survey during Q4 2024 with 200 SME business leaders, accompanied by a focus group discussion involving 38 participants, including regulators, financial institutions, government bodies, large companies, SMEs and trainers. While 40% of survey respondents expressed awareness towards some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) (see **note 3**), they are uncertain about how these goals are related to their businesses. Less than one-third of SME leaders recognised the importance of sustainability to their businesses. Only 43% engaged in sustainability practices, with 16% involved for less than three years.

In early 2024, UOB assessed the sustainability adoption level with 800 Singapore-based SMEs and large enterprises with revenue of below SGD 300 million. Similar to the findings from the NTUC LearningHub, only 38% of the respondents took action on sustainability. Construction and infrastructure, as well as real estate and hospitality, were among the least active sectors in adopting sustainability. Unlike in Malaysia, the key additional barrier cited by Singaporean companies was the shortage of workers or resources.

Indonesia

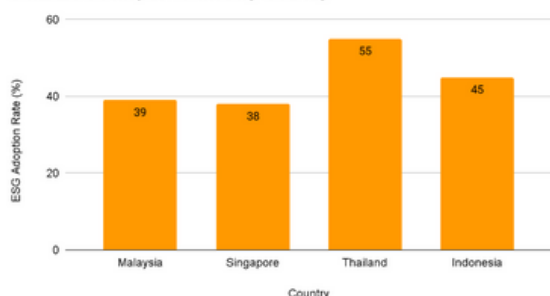
The UOB Study (2024) received 525 responses from SMEs and large enterprises in Indonesia, with revenue ranging from IDR 6 billion to IDR 3 trillion. Almost half of the respondents implemented sustainability. Construction and infrastructure, as well as wholesale trade sectors, are among the least adopted sectors. Concerns about negative impact on profits, increase in the cost of products or services to end customers and inadequate financial support from government or banks are the primary challenges to sustainability.

Thailand

According to the UOB Study (2024), 525 responses were collected from SMEs and large enterprises in Thailand, with revenue between THB 30 million to less than THB 7.5 billion. This survey shows that more than half of the companies in Thailand are more committed to implementing sustainability, which is more promising than Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

Still, wholesale trade, community and personal sectors recorded the lowest sustainability adoption rates. The main barriers were similar to the benchmarked countries, including the high cost of products or services to end customers, possible impacts on short-term revenues and concerns about negative impacts on profits.

SME ESG Adoption Rates by Country



Note: The bar chart is derived from the UOB Business Outlook Study 2024 (SMEs & Large Enterprises), which surveyed over 2,000 businesses across Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

The focus group discussions in the Singapore study offer a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the challenges SMEs face. This mixed-methods approach provides broader insights than the research methodologies used in other benchmark countries, which relied mainly on online surveys.

Policy Recommendations

To encourage more SMEs to take part in the sustainability journey, there are several policies for governments to consider:

- **Promote stronger public-private-academia-community collaboration.**

This collaboration approach requires a top-down and bottom-up approach, whereby not only government and big companies influence SMEs to kickstart sustainability. Academia could provide necessary research findings on why SMEs are crucial players in this sustainability journey. Associations such as SAMENTA, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) and ESG Association of Malaysia (ESGAM) could gather the voice of SMEs and amplify the impact of sustainability initiatives.

- **Offer step-by-step strategy on ESG adoption.**

Many SMEs run away from ESG as they feel that there are too many frameworks and standards to follow. Although the governments have organised many roadshows and free workshops for SMEs, it is crucial to consolidate all information into several pages of simple infographics. The trainers need to be capable of turning technical knowledge into simplified concepts by relating to the personal and professional lives of SME owners and employees. Hence, SMEs will be able to follow the thought process and gradually start taking action on sustainability.

- **Identify SMEs that show potential for sustainability.**

Although some SMEs already implemented sustainability initiatives, they do not realise or do not know how to promote on their website or sustainability report format.

The government could take the lead in identifying 1-2 SMEs in each sector, provide them with necessary guidance, share best practices and lead them to disclose sustainability initiatives.

As SMEs constitute approximately 97% to 99.9% of all registered businesses in ASEAN member states, the government ideally should not be the only player in achieving the sustainability agenda. Multinational and listed companies could share the sustainability implementation costs with the SMEs in their supply chain. SMEs could also plan some corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives like recycling waste and volunteering in orphanage homes once or twice a year and provide incentives for those employees participating. This would boost their employee morale and help companies to achieve sustainability goals.

With the right mindset, knowledge and resources from all stakeholders, more SMEs will be motivated to begin their sustainability journey not purely from the regulatory lens but their commitment to making society a better place.

notes

(note 1) Malaysian Investment Development Authority. (n.d.). Grants. MIDA. Retrieved April 6, 2025, from <https://www.mida.gov.my/forms-and-guidelines/grants/>

(note 2) The B Impact Assessment is a free, confidential online tool developed by B Lab to help businesses measure, manage, and improve their impact on key stakeholders, including workers, communities, customers, and the environment. It evaluates a company's practices across five areas: governance, workers, community, environment, and customers. Achieving a minimum verified score of 80 out of 200 points on the assessment is the first step toward B Corp Certification. For more information or to begin the assessment, visit bcorporation.net/programs-and-tools/b-impact-assessment.

(note 3) The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected objectives established in 2015 to address global challenges and promote prosperity while protecting the planet. These goals aim to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth—all while tackling climate change and preserving oceans and forests.

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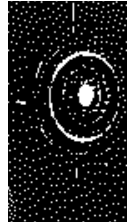
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Malaysian Foreign Policy: Pragmatic & Principled

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The foreign ministry of Malaysia lists pragmatism and taking a principled stance as the core tenets of its foreign policy. This raises the question of why it maintains this and whether these policies are sustainable long term. Malaysian Foreign policy is characterized by its embrace of non-alignment and emphasis on strong ASEAN relations, and while it can be suggested that it has been warming to China since Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, it can still be seen maintaining its policy of balancing the two superpowers. Several factors motivate Malaysia's foreign policy, being a member of the global south is key to this. In addition, the government's need to secure its economic and security interests as well as its need to maintain public legitimacy leads to this pragmatic and principled approach. While these policies have served Malaysia so far, it remains debatable whether these policies can be maintained long term, increasing great power competition with increasingly obvious spheres of influence mean Malaysia may soon have to abandon non-alignment. In addition, the government may be forced to embrace a more principled foreign policy as citizens become increasingly aware of global injustices and demand action.

Current Foreign Policy

Malaysia emphasizes a pragmatic and principled approach to foreign policy (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, n.d.*), this manifests itself with their policy of non-alignment, carefully navigating the relationship between the US and China (*Tan, 2023*) but ensuring it does not fully commit to one Global Power. This leads to Malaysia having comprehensive agreements with both countries, examples such as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement with the United States, that facilitates logistical support and exercises between the two militaries.

Despite the close security cooperation with its geopolitical rival, Malaysia also has close economic ties with China. With several economic agreements, participation in the Belt and Road and most recently membership in BRICS, Malaysia sees significant cooperation with China. This balancing act has historically been Malaysia's policy and despite a recent shift towards closer relations with China under Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia still very much aims to continue this non-alignment for the foreseeable future, as it is able to benefit from relations from both powers.

In addition, its pragmatic and principled foreign policy has also led to a firm commitment to ASEAN. As a key member of ASEAN, Malaysia sees it as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, seeing further cooperation as key for its future. One way it has done this is through closer economic cooperation with an end goal with the creation of a single market (*Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Malaysia, n.d.*), there is no doubt that Malaysia will continue to pursue closer cooperation in the long term.

Causes

The Creation of Malaysian foreign policy rests on its need to balance its security and economic needs with its need for public legitimacy. While cooperation with the great powers is a tremendous source of security and economic growth, Malaysia often must avoid committing fully to a major power due to concerns surrounding domestic legitimacy. We see that the US is a vital source of investment with 21 billion dollars in Malaysia, and while they might benefit and even rely on these initiatives it must avoid forming a close bond. With 84% of Malaysians disapproving of the US handling of Gaza (*Yang, 2024*) and the general dislike for newly elected President Donald Trump, the government is precariously placed to make sure they do not want to lose popular support from the electorate.

Malaysia's embrace of non-alignment similarly stems from its historical context; gaining independence during the Cold War and in the wake of the Malayan emergency, they were unwilling to become involved in the conflicts between the two global powers of the time. Being a member of the global south and a newly independent country, it did not believe it needed to be involved in the ideological battles and instead chose to foster relationships and focus on its own development. This continues to this day as it continues to identify with the global south and aligns with ASEAN and BRICS which stress non-intervention and national sovereignty.

Challenges to Current Malaysian Foreign Policy

Finally, it needs to be investigated if Malaysia will be able to maintain this foreign policy long term, with the increasing embrace of a realist foreign policy from global powers Malaysia may be forced to commit to a global power. Realist Theory suggests global powers aim to create spheres of influence in order to secure their own power, something that realist scholar Graham Allison (*Allison, 2020*) notes is increasingly occurring in the 2020s, these powers will aim to punish states that have extensive cooperation with rivals in an attempt to build a sphere of influence. This has already begun happening, under Duterte the Philippines saw a pivot towards China, despite still strong relations with the United States, the US saw a potential China partner and responded harshly with sanction threats and lessened military cooperation.

In the near future either great power may feel threatened by Malaysia's cooperation with the other and impose harsh measures in an attempt to bring it into their sphere. Therefore, with the global pivot to realism Malaysia's ability to remain unaligned is likely untenable.

Changing domestic views mean Malaysia may face difficulties balancing a pragmatic and principled foreign policy long term. At its current state, Malaysia often speaks out against human rights injustices globally but stops short of direct and excessive. Malaysians may increasingly demand government action towards human rights violations abroad, especially as information becomes increasingly accessible. The Rohingya genocide in 2016, had Malaysians take to the streets protesting the government of Myanmar's treatment of Muslims suggesting that there is an awareness of injustices abroad and a desire to assist in ending human rights violations. However, it needs to be noted that with a large muslim population, many citizens are motivated by Ummah consciousness, this leads to an increased concern for the rights of Muslims abroad rather than a general concern for all groups. This would explain the more muted response to crises like the Ukraine war compared to that of the war in Gaza. Therefore, in the short and medium term the Malaysian government will see more demand to react to issues regarding muslims abroad. In the long term, however, broader expectations for Malaysia to respond to all human rights abuses will still likely emerge. In addition, it needs to be acknowledged that Malaysia's actual ability to respond is limited due to the ASEAN Way, which stresses non-intervention in domestic affairs of other nations, especially that of member states. This will likely lead to firmer action from the government in future actions such as more formal sanctions due to public pressure. In the long term the Malaysian government may have to shift away from its pragmatic non-intervention in the face of domestic pressure and increasingly act out of principle and defend human rights abroad, representing a dramatic shift in Malaysian foreign policy.

Through the core tenets of pragmatism and principle, Malaysian foreign policy is characterized by non-alignment where it balances the cooperation between the two major powers, benefiting significantly. Similarly, this policy has also led to Malaysia cooperating regionally through organizations like ASEAN and will continue to pursue closer relations in the future. These policies were born out of a need to balance its practical economic and security needs but are constrained in part by domestic public legitimacy as there is little desire from the public to see total alignment with any major power. In addition, historical context has motivated much of Malaysia's foreign policy largely focussing on its own development rather than the ideological battles between major powers, a policy it continues to maintain.

Ultimately it's unlikely this policy is sustainably long term, as increasing geopolitical tensions and changing strategies mean Malaysia may be forced to commit to a great power, a significant shift in its policy. Additionally, it may similarly abandon a pragmatic approach for one built on principle as domestic pressure increasingly desires a government that acts to protect human rights abroad. Despite this, by adopting the following policy recommendations, through ASEAN it remains possible for Malaysia to maintain its non-alignment as well as embrace the shift to a more proactive foreign policy demanded by the public.

Policy Recommendations

- Malaysia must push for the creation of a deputy chair position within ASEAN.
- Malaysia must fundamentally challenge the core principles of ASEAN.
- Malaysia must push for reform within ASEAN for an independent executive arm.

For Malaysia and ASEAN to effectively maintain political autonomy in an increasingly adversarial geopolitical environment, ASEAN unity and policy effectiveness must be strengthened through greater agenda continuity; this can be done if Malaysia pushes for the creation of a deputy chair position within ASEAN, subordinate to that of the chair. The current system operates with a chair appointed on a rotating basis with member states becoming chair for a year and setting the agenda. A reformed system will continue to have a chair held by a member state with the next year's member state holding the deputy chair position, while cooperation with incoming chairs likely currently exists, the creation of a deputy chairmanship will effectively boost cooperation and assist in agenda continuation. The creation of a formal deputy chair position effectively streamlines cooperation between the incumbent and incoming chairs, this allows future agendas to be better coordinated between member states ensuring a smoother transition between chairmanships and building a more consistent agenda. Agenda consistency strengthens ASEAN unity and ensures policy effectiveness by providing a more stable political environment for member states, allowing deeper cooperation on a long term basis. Furthermore, the group will be better able to plan long-term, by effectively eliminating policy gaps between chairs during transitions. With this ASEAN can strengthen its political autonomy, a more unified organization with strengthened long term planning allows ASEAN to better interact with superpowers through stronger collective bargaining.

This is a highly feasible reform for Malaysia to propose as many member states within ASEAN are eager to deepen ASEAN cooperation, unity and effectiveness, and will likely be receptive to this recommendation. While doubt over the member state's actual willingness to form a closer union is a valid criticism, efforts by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as chairman to reform the position beyond that of its current role suggest there are a significant number of policy makers within ASEAN willing to reform ASEAN, greatly increasing the feasibility of the policy proposals. As chairman Malaysia should begin dialogue over the creation of the new role before proposing its creation in ASEAN summits, as a moderate reform that still largely maintains ASEAN's existing structure and the member states relative openness to such a position means this position could be created within 3 or 4 years.

To embrace the shift in its foreign policy from pragmatism to principle brought about by domestic sentiment, Malaysia must challenge many of the core principles of ASEAN, and how they conduct diplomacy under the framework of the ASEAN Way. At the present moment Malaysia's ability to respond to human rights violations abroad is limited by the principles outlined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and its adherence to national sovereignty and non-interference. Malaysia must push for ASEAN to accept a more interventionist principle under the framework of Responsibility to Protect, a policy already endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2005, allowing more direct action non-military responses through sanctions and trade restrictions. By doing this Malaysia can better embrace domestic demands for direct action whilst still operating within the ASEAN framework for external diplomacy. Whether this is feasible for Malaysia to achieve is up for debate.

They will need to work with ASEAN members who are open to interventionism such as Indonesia and Singapore, who have increasingly demonstrated a willingness to take action against foreign states who have violated human rights, with issues like the Myanmar coup and the Ukraine war respectively. Critics will point that the current desire for a change in principle is low both within the governments and amongst the public, but with shifting values in the long term the governments of ASEAN will likely be forced to consider such a change. In the future Malaysia should begin exchanges with the public and think tanks both within itself and other member states to better gauge public support for such a shift and the merits of doing so. Despite this, many other members of ASEAN are still firmly committed to non-intervention and for the foreseeable future it is unlikely such a significant change to the ASEAN charter will be made, especially if such a change requires unanimity.

It remains possible for Malaysia to maintain the non-alignment that it has benefited from so far, however it will need to strengthen its bargaining power which will allow it to better avoid great power pressure. This should be done by ASEAN's reformation into a closer political bloc rather than a strictly economic bloc, it has done this to a minor extent so far with increased security cooperation but so far it is not enough to deter great power action. One key way Malaysia can strengthen ASEAN into a politically closer and more cohesive bloc is by pushing for and creating an independent executive arm able to implement region wide policy and conduct diplomatic negotiations. At its current state the secretariat does not possess any meaningful decision-making ability and instead facilitates the discussion between states. A reformed secretariat's most similar equivalent position will be that of a CEO with greater negotiating and policy creating powers, with member states acting in roles similar to that of the board of directors and chairman, setting agenda.

This new executive arm will be composed of representatives of member states with a leader chosen from among the group, this ensures that while certain duties typically reserved for the state are sacrificed, the executive arm is still guided by a general consensus from amongst SE Asian nations. In order to be effective this new executive arm will require significant power, this includes the ability to conduct diplomacy on the behalf of member states as well as the ability to form and implement policies for member states. The practical ability will also be required to enforce policies it forms, this comes in the form of punitive action. If an executive arm of ASEAN has the ability to withhold funding from funds like the ASEAN development fund and the sectoral fund it will enhance its ability to ensure policies and consensus formed will be followed by all states in ASEAN. With an executive arm backed by the collective strength of the member states and the ability to negotiate on their behalf, it will be in a far stronger position to challenge great power pressure in the future, strengthening its ability to remain non-aligned. This however will be a significant challenge for Malaysia as it fundamentally challenges ASEAN's principle of unanimity and sovereignty as it requires ceding certain powers towards a supranational body.

Critics will argue that because of differing geopolitical interests from member states the creation of a decision making body will be impossible, however, an increasingly tense geopolitical landscape has led to an aligning of many of these geopolitical interests. Furthermore, as can be seen with the ASEAN response to President Trump's most recent tariffs, a more unified organization with stronger bargaining power offers both Malaysia and ASEAN greater maneuverability when dealing with political challenges moving ahead. While reforming the position itself can be done relatively quickly taking only a few years, the main challenge rests on convincing member states to back policy unanimously.

Malaysia should utilize its position as chair to begin a dialogue around the policy, however the rotating nature of the chairmanship limits dialogue to once every 10 years, similar to Malaysia's attempts to create a unified time zone it will likely be delayed. While member states sympathetic to the policy can assist by fostering dialogue themselves, rotating chairs and the significant size of the reform mean actual implementation could take well over 20 years.

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