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### THE ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER AND ITS RELEVANCE TO NATIONAL SECURITY

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#### ABSTRACT

*National security is of paramount interests to small states. Security cannot be solely dependent on military might alone. It requires the actions at various fronts including diplomatic, intelligence and economic, and delivered in a concerted effort by a whole-of government and whole-of nation approach. Malaysia is well blessed by the basic instruments of power i.e. diplomacy, informational, military and economic elements (DIME). However, for efficient employment of all these instruments of power, a coherent set of National Security Policy documents must be formulated and implemented with strong leadership at all levels to achieve an effective outcome for National Security. This paper endeavours to investigate how small nations can use their instruments of national power to support their national security objectives. The Malaysian context is used as an example to validate the employment of the various elements of national power to protect and secure the nation whilst confronting the various non-traditional security threats.*

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### 1.0 Introduction

The study of national power has long been associated with how a nation state uses the various attributes it possesses to influence other nations and non-state actors at the international stage with the expressed intention of pursuing national objectives (Spanier & Wendzel, 1996). National power is also seen as the ability of a state to defend, protect and secure its national borders and sovereignty. Historically, national power has been affiliated to military capability and fighting of wars since “war in the international arena is the ultima ratio of power” (Jablonsky, 2010). Such has been the case for millennia.

The world however, is in a different era today. Even though rivalry between great and emerging powers seems to be growing, general wars are largely seen as occurrences which are less likely even though the consequences thereof may be great. This is due to the fact that sovereignty and territorial integrity of smaller nations are increasingly protected by international norms and laws. Hence, smaller nations are more inclined to be concerned with national security rather than projecting national power (Long, 2017). This paper endeavours to investigate how small nations can use their instruments of national power to support their national security objectives. The Malaysian context will be used as an example to validate the

employment of the various elements of national power to protect and secure the nation whilst confronting the various non-traditional security threats. The findings of this paper has implications on how the resources available to a state can be better utilised in pursuit of national security.

National security refers to a situation where a country is free from threats to its core values, whether these threats emanate from within or outside the country. It also connotes “the continued ability of a country to pursue its internal life without serious interference” (Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia, 2019). Given the wide range of contemporary threats, the security of a nation state has several dimensions which among others include economic security, energy security, physical security, environmental security, food security, border security, and cyber security. These dimensions correlate closely with elements of national power. Measures to safeguard national security starts with good policies and governance of national resources to ensure the nation remains productive and there is economic growth. Economic strength can then be used to enhance physical, social, food, energy, environmental and other dimensions of security.

## 2.0 National Security Policy

A National Security Policy (NSP) provides a framework for a country to address the security needs of the people and the state. The policy incorporates the views of the government and other institutions, as well as the needs and perceptions of the people, hence taking the form of an integrated document (DCAF, 2005). The Geneva Centre for the Security Sector Governance (2019) suggests that a NSP provides a national understanding of the likely threats and risks given the security environment. It also clarifies the national vision, values and principles that steers the state’s action in providing the desired level of security. Fundamentally, the NSP provides a unifying umbrella for a nation’s foreign, economic, defence and all domestic policies to operate within the same framework.

Among the stated reasons why states need to have a NSP is to garner support from all sectors of society and to optimise the coordinated utilisation of resources (DCAF, 2005). This in a way suggests that national security should be addressed through a Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Society approach (MINDEF, 2020). It is of paramount importance to have one agency that is dedicated to look into the implementation of the NSP. In the case of Malaysia, this responsibility is vested in the National Security Council (Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia, 2019).

### *National power*

National power can be defined as ‘the sum of all resources available to a nation in the pursuit of national objectives’, through the use of force or coercion (US DoD, 2018). However, summing up all resources and instruments available to a nation is insufficient. Power also depends on the capacity to integrate all these individual parts with a clear strategy (Frewen, 2018). While power can be dependent on existing resources, other avenues of developing power are also available. Long (2017) suggests that small states tend to derive national power through at least two means; 1) forging relationships with great powers (derivative power), and 2) through collective membership of regional organisations such as ASEAN, FPDA, and EU, NATO, etc.

Debates on national power also tend to focus on its nature and measurement i.e. how to measure national power? In terms of its nature, national power can be contextual. It depends on the level of resources and capacity to use force in comparison to the opposing rival. If the other party has greater depth and more capable of using all its instruments, than the existing national power may amount to nothing (Jablonsky, 2010). Hence, measure of national power can be relative. Besides this, resources can also be in the tangible and intangible form. Quantifying these forms of resources and also knowing which resource is available and usable at any point of time can be problematic (Tellis et al., 2000).

### *Elements of national power*

Morgenthau, first alluded to the concept of instrument of national power in his book *Powers of Nations* (1978). He described these instruments as elements and in the lexicon used frequently today, both these terms are interchangeable. According to Morgenthau, there are seven essential instruments of national power sub-divided into permanent elements (geography and natural resources) and non-permanent elements (industrial capacity, military preparedness, population, national character, national morale, quality of diplomacy and government). Numerous other scholars have also proposed similar elements, only

to categorise them as either tangible or intangible elements. This in itself suggests that in deciding which elements constitute national power, one can adopt an eclectic approach.

On the contrary, the United States military has espoused a much more varied view of the instruments of national power. These includes the four elements of diplomacy, informational, military and economic elements, which are frequently referred to using the acronym DIME (United States DoD, 2018). For the purpose of the study, these four elements are adopted and they are elaborated as follows:

i. Diplomacy

Diplomacy as a vital instrument of national power aids in gaining support and the exerting influence. It is defined as the way states persuade others to do what they want for their national interest. Diplomacy is often the unseen hand during a crisis. As an example, when Malaysian and Indonesian Naval patrol vessels almost clashed with each other during the Ambalat block dispute in 2009, the crisis was solved through frantic diplomatic effort (Druce & Baikoeni, 2016). In the absence or a lack of military might, diplomacy becomes a significantly important instrument of power particularly for nation states that are small. Diplomacy is the principal instrument for engaging with other states and foreign groups to advance values, interests, and objectives, and to solicit foreign support for military operations. Diplomacy is a principal means of organising coalitions and alliances, which may include states and non-state entities, as partners, allies, surrogates or proxies. In the case of United States, the Department of State is the Government's lead agency for foreign affairs. The credible threat of force reinforces, and in some cases, enables the diplomatic process. Geographic Combatant Commanders are responsible for aligning military activities with diplomatic activities in their assigned areas of responsibility.

ii. Informational

Information is defined as the way states use information, often associated with intelligence, shaping the environment to their national interest. Information is a raw commodity in the production of strategic assessment. Information is power and can be a double edge sword as well if the nation state fails to manage and control it effectively. Disseminating timely and accurate information are also part of the importance of this element of national power. Some entities regularly manipulate information to obtain an unfair advantage.

iii. Military

Military is defined as the states' military strength or might. The military is usually used as a last resort after states fail to settle issues with other states through diplomacy. Military power can also be used to protect national interests, act as an insurance and achieve the end-state for nation in the eventuality of war. It is a fact that a strong military is important in deciding the outcome of a war and this have been a testimony ever since the beginning of history.

iv. Economy

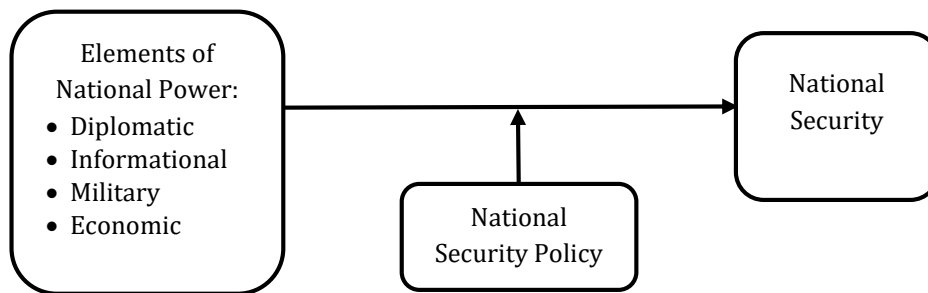
Economy is defined as the states' resilience and how states used it economic might through sanctions to influence and coerce other states to do what they want to meet their national interests' objectives. A state with a strong economy can further enhance all the other three DIME instruments. The Economic element of DIME is a key factor in ensuring the security, stability and prosperity of a nation state. Money can aid the diplomatic effort and coerce other states to do one's bidding. Information wise, money can build infrastructures and intelligence networks required to protect and improve a states' cyber security. Economic strength can build a strong military power. It can also help to expedite the state's modernisation and development.

### 3.0 Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework as shown in Fig.1 has be drawn to amplify the relationships of the factors that has been identified in the preceding paragraphs. To describe the phenomena in question, this study adopts the international relations theory of realism as the underlying theory to support the proposed relationships. Goodin (2010), suggests that realism essentially deals with the pursuit, possession, and application of

power. Similarly, while nations states are in constant pursuit of greater national security, they inevitably embrace realism in their application of instruments of power. On the other hand, several propositions on realism as advanced by Donnelly (2008) are relevant to this model. Firstly, the proposition that the 'international system is anarchic' explains the anarchical nature of threats to national security, particularly the non-traditional threats. Secondly, states are inclined to follow self-interest since their primary concern is survival. Similarly, states tend to pursue national security objectives as this is the very essence of public and political interest.

The conceptual model shown in Fig.1 illustrates the relationship between the variables of concern. National Security is dependent on the capacity of the government and state actors to harness and employ the various Elements of National Power (DIME). However, this relationship is moderated by a comprehensive NSP and its effective implementation. This is to suggest that the application of the instrument of national power to ensure national security is dependent on the availability of a sound NSP.



**Fig. 1: The conceptual framework of the study.**

#### *Malaysia's National Security Policy*

Malaysia' NSP was first produced as a public document in 2017. The new government that came into power in 2018 updated the first version and published it in 2019 (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2019). This 12-page document outlines the current security environment and threats facing the nation. It also outlines the nine core values and 20 strategies. However, it stops short of delineating the implementation process as suggested by the DCAF (2005). According to DCAF, implementation and the various roles of different actors should be clearly outlined to provide guidance for whole-of-government and whole-of society effort.

A cursory analysis of the three existing policy documents for Malaysia's national security (National Security Policy, 2019; National Security and Public Order, 2019; and Defence White Paper, 2020) suggest that there are many differences in the core values and strategies, hence not reflecting a coherent set of policy documents. It should be noted that national power can only be enhanced through a comprehensive whole-of-government effort. However, this approach cannot be successful if various agencies come together with separate plans and strategies. Such plans should be collectively organised from the very beginning with all agencies understanding the grand strategy and establishing cooperation in a seamless manner (US DoD, 2018). In comparison, Australia's National Security Strategy provides more detailed information. Instead of outlining core values and generic strategy statements, Australia's policy document covers quite comprehensively the likely threats and key approaches to tackle each problem, including priority areas in the near future and budgetary allocations. Whole-of-government approaches to tackle specifics issues are also outlined (Australian Government, 2013). Such a detailed policy document has the potential to provide clearer guidance for all security agencies in planning their capabilities and putting up a united front.

#### *Utilisation of instruments of national power for national security*

To determine the applicability of DIME in national security issues, it is necessary to relate it to a current situation. Malaysia's land border with Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia is about 3,147 km long while the coastline is approximately 4,800 km. Confronting and controlling border security issues at both our land borders and coastline has always been problematic. For example, the problems at the land border and adjacent territory between Malaysia and Thailand in the state of Kelantan. The numerous illegal crossing points, dual citizenship and close family ties of people living either side of the border has created a fertile

ground for illegal trade and other illegal activities to flourish. It has also given rise to transmission of unchecked human trafficking and animal carried diseases (Asia Sentinel, 2019).

To investigate the relevance of DIME to tackle these issues, a brief SWOT analysis has been undertaken. This is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** SWOT Analysis for Relevance of DIME in Border Security Issues

| Ser | Element of National Power | Strengths and Opportunities  | Weaknesses and Threats   |
|-----|---------------------------|--|--|
| 1   | Diplomatic                | a. Close diplomatic relations with Thailand.<br>b. Issues can be raised at a bilateral level and through the ASEAN framework.  | a. Historical issues and enmities.<br>b. Legal issues.   |
| 2   | Informational             | a. Various agencies already assigned to collect and process intelligence.<br>b. Creating a unified intelligence gathering and sharing system.<br>c. Timely distribution of intelligence.   | a. Weak intelligence gathering mechanisms.<br>b. Poor collaboration.<br>c. Information sharing issues.<br>d. Information leakages. |
| 3   | Military                  | a. Historical and institutional experience in the operational area.<br>b. Capacity to undertake tasks in the most difficult of environments<br>c. Adaptability<br>d. Capitalise on defence diplomacy.<br>e. Issues can be handled at General Border Committee meetings | a. Lack of legal authority.<br>b. Limited time to train and prepare for primary roles.   |
| 4   | Economic                  | a. Opportunity to develop border areas and elevate economic status of local populace.<br>b. Increased border control can improve taxation.   | a. Lack of sustained economic development programmes.  |

The above analysis indicates that there are numerous strengths and in particular opportunities in utilising DIME to improve national security along our borders. Admittedly, some of the existing weakness and potential threats facing this endeavour must also be given due attention.

#### *Whole-of-government effort*

Risks to national security ranges from a vast spectrum of issues and threats. This requires a vast array of measures involving government agencies and civil society from across the board. This approach, often referred to as a whole-of-government or whole-of-society (whole-of-nation or comprehensive) approach involves military and civilians and across boundaries to effect an integrated government response (Doyle, 2019). Back in the days of counter-insurgency operations against communist terrorist, this measures were widely known as civil-military actions under the KESBAN (Security and Development) concept (Ahmad, Zamri & Juraimy, 2014). In the present context, security operations along the land and maritime borders, presumably undertaken through such an approach, still has plenty of room for greater collaboration and cooperation between government agencies and segments of civil society.

## 4.0 Conclusion

National security is of paramount interests to small states. As alluded by Brook and Candreva (2009), security cannot be solely dependent on military might alone. It requires the actions at various fronts including diplomatic, intelligence and economic, and delivered in a concerted effort by a whole-of government and whole-of nation approach. Malaysia is well blessed by the basic instruments of power (DIME). However, for efficient employment of all these instruments of power, a coherent set of National

Security Policy documents must be formulated and implemented with strong leadership at all levels to achieve an effective outcome for National Security.

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