

**RUHANIE Ahmad**

Former Member of Parliament  
Parliament of Malaysia

## **THE US NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR MARITIME SECURITY 2005 AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS ON MALAYSIA**

*This article is written on the assumption that Malaysia---a major littoral state to the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea---may experience a delicate diplomatic situation resulting from the preemptive character of the US National Strategy for Maritime Security 2005---NSMS 2005---which could motivate rivalry, provoke conflict, and induce war in Southeast Asia. The assumption is such because the US is now perceived to be using NSMS 2005 as its latest geopolitical tool to contain China, to safeguard its energy security geopolitics, and in anticipation of maritime-based resource war in the region. The crux of this article, therefore, is based on the question how will Malaysia maintain its balanced relations toward the US and China in the context of this geopolitical framework. As such, this article attempts to analyze the preemptive character of NSMS 2005, to ascertain the China Factor contained in it, and to examine the impacts and implications of this maritime strategy on Malaysia's future relations with the US and China. This analysis hopes to enlighten the Malaysian government on the geopolitical consequences of NSMS 2005 and to facilitate the Malaysian government with the appropriate insights on how to mitigate these consequences through foreign policy initiatives at the national, bilateral, and multilateral levels.*

**Keywords:** Energy Security, Geopolitics, Maritime Conflict, US Hegemony Security

### **Introduction**

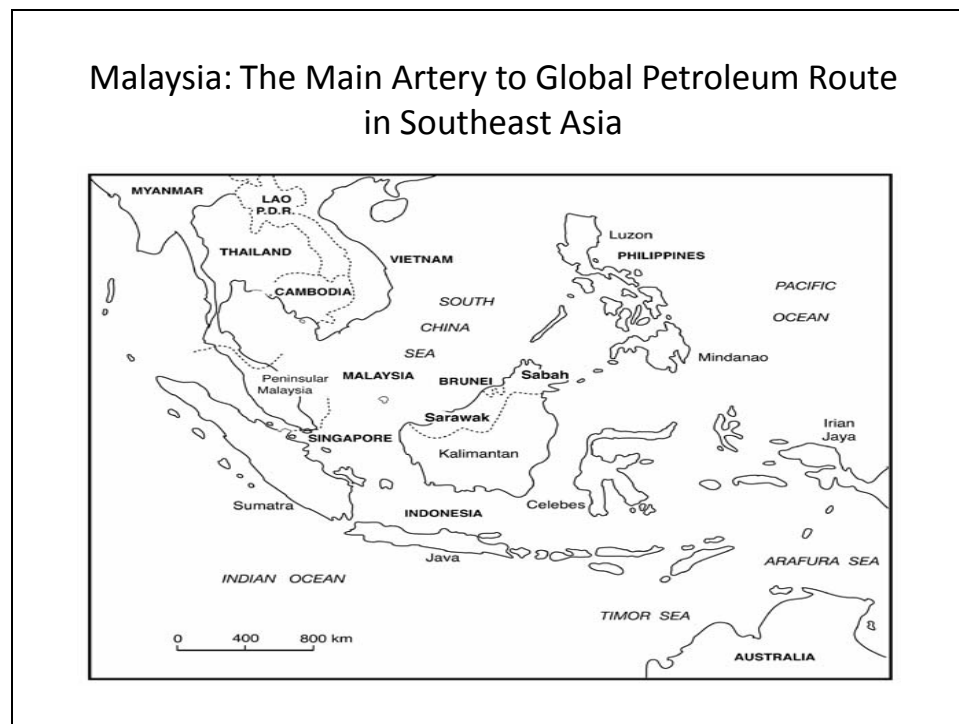
Malaysia is a small nation with geostrategic strength derived from its status as one of the states which control the Straits of Malacca the world's most vital waterways for global energy trade and big powers' naval fleet mobility in the maritime region of Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Malaysia is the co-beneficiary to the vast amount of petroleum reserves<sup>2</sup> in the South China Sea---also a critical sea-lane for energy

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<sup>1</sup> The strategic importance of the Straits of Malacca derives from a combination of geopolitical, economic, and military factors (Kovacs 2005:x).

<sup>2</sup> Malaysia's oil reserves are the third highest in the Asia-Pacific region. Malaysia holds proven oil reserves of 4 billion barrels as of January 2009. Nearly all of Malaysia's oil comes from offshore fields. The continental shelf is divided into 3 producing basins: the Malay basin in the west and the Sarawak and Sabah basins in the east. Most of the country's oil reserves are located in the Malay basin and tend to be of high quality. At the same time, Malaysia is the world's eighth largest holder of natural gas reserves and was the second largest exporter of liquefied natural gas after Qatar in 2007. Malaysia holds 83 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of proven natural gas reserves as of January 2009. While much of the country's oil reserves are found off Peninsular Malaysia, much of the country's natural gas production comes from Eastern Malaysia, offshore Sarawak and Sabah (The U.S. Energy Information Administration Report, September 2009).

transportation from West Asia to East Asia, namely Japan, South Korea and Taiwan as allies of the United States (US), as well as China as the US major adversary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> As such, the Straits of Malacca is the Southeast Asian focal entry point to the energy supply route from West Asia, while the South China Sea is the Southeast Asian strategic exit point to the energy supply destination in East Asia.<sup>4</sup> Both waterways---in the east and west coast of Peninsular Malaysia---are also important to the mobilization of naval powers, especially by the US, in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>5</sup>



**Map 1: Malaysia as the main artery to global petroleum route in Southeast Asia**

Thus, Malaysia is the main artery to the West Asia-East Asia energy supply and big powers' naval mobility. However, since the vast majority of the world's energy trade

<sup>3</sup> If controlling the seas is a direct reflection of the leverage and hierarchy of a country in the international community, then the South China Sea is the epicenter of an emerging maritime regime. Here, nation-states (regional and extra-regional), non-state actors and international governmental organizations attempt to determine the rules of maritime trade (Kang 2009:1).

<sup>4</sup> Southeast Asia is home to important sea-lanes and straits, including the Malacca Straits, one of the busiest waterways in the world. More than 50,000 vessels on international routes transit the Malacca Straits each year, which connects the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea. Tankers carrying oil from the Middle East to countries such as China and Japan, which rely on imported oil, are just some of the vessels passing through the straits each day (Liss 2007:1).

<sup>5</sup> Southeast Asia lies at the foot of China's most strategically important region. It envelops China's border from the most economically successful eastern coastal areas, to its poorer and vulnerable southwestern provinces. The region holds all the vital and viable passageways of energy transport to China from the Middle East, Africa and around the world, making it both a region of great significance for China's security and a source of vulnerability (Zhang 2007:18).

is sea borne (Wesley 2007:5); as US control over energy supply routes will curtail the possibility of the rise of a strategic competitor (ibid:6); and China is the world's single biggest consumer of imported petroleum since July 2010 (msnbc.msn.com. 20 July 2010)<sup>6</sup>; Malaysia, therefore, is inevitably crucial and strategic to both the US and also China in the context of their 21<sup>st</sup> century's geopolitics.<sup>7</sup>

As such, all the above are causing Malaysia to be susceptible to the impact of the US National Strategy for Maritime Security (NSMS) being implemented since 2005 because among its objectives are to deter "disruption to marine transportation and commerce systems",<sup>8</sup> and to avoid attacks "on critical maritime infrastructure and key assets" all over the world, if those disruptions and attacks affect American citizens, assets and interests, or affect the citizens, assets and interests of the US allies. This susceptibility becomes more serious because NSMS 2005 also provides preemptive functions to the US maritime forces to deter such disruptions or avoid such attacks, irrespective of whether these actions jeopardize the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of other countries, particularly maritime nations like Malaysia.

## Objectives

This article, therefore, is of the sole objective of seeking to examine the implications of NSMS 2005 on Malaysia through analyses on the salient features and roles of NSMS 2005; the energy security geopolitics in NSMS 2005; the China Factor in NSMS 2005; and the major implications of these factors on Malaysia. These analyses are important because NSMS 2005---perceived as a major instrument to the US grand strategy<sup>9</sup> of containing China from Southeast Asia---could jeopardize Malaysia's relations with the US and also China, since both nations are Malaysia's major trading partners.

This objective is explored based on the question of how will Malaysia balance its relations with the US and China in the event of a probable future US-China conflict resulting from implementation of NSMS 2005 in the Southeast Asian and East Asian regions. It is also being pursued on the assumption that Malaysia, as littoral state to the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea, may experience a delicate diplomatic situation resulting from consequences of the geopolitical impacts of NSMS 2005.

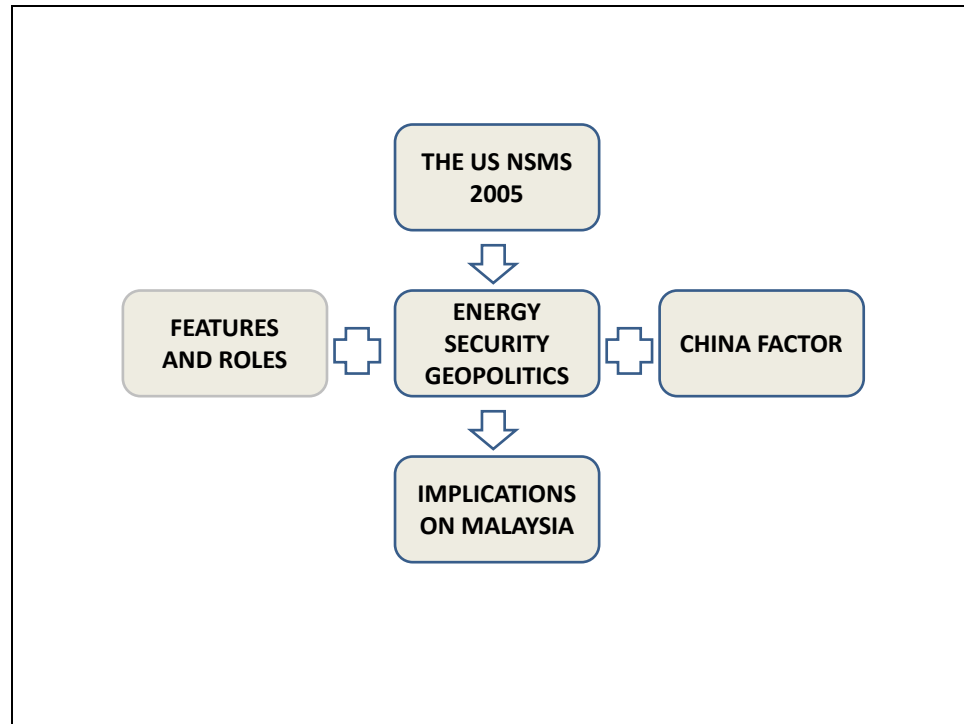
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<sup>6</sup> China has overtaken the United States as the world's largest consumer of energy, according to data from Paris-based International Energy Agency. News reports citing data from the IEA said China consumed the equivalent of 2.25 billion tons of oil last year, slightly above U.S. consumption of 2.17 billion tons. The measure includes all types of energy: oil, nuclear energy, coal, natural gas and renewable energy sources. But, China's government rejected the IEA's statistics (msnbc.msn.com. 20 July 2010).

<sup>7</sup> One of the most important national security challenges facing the United States in the early 21st century is hedging against the rise of a hostile, more openly confrontational, or expansionist People's Republic of China (PRC) (Krepinevich et. al. 208: 25).

<sup>8</sup> Disruptions in global oil and gas flows would have a major repercussion on the world's economy (Kovacs 2005:viii).

<sup>9</sup> Grand strategy integrates military, political, and economic means to pursue states' ultimate objectives in the international system (Biddle 2005:1).



**Graphic 1: NSMS 2005 and its implications on Malaysia**

Accordingly, this article is divided into five sub-topics. First, it attempts to define the concept of maritime security in the context of NSMS 2005 and examines the salient features and roles of the strategy. Second, it undertakes to analyze the NSMS 2005 in the context of the US energy security geopolitics towards China. Third, it seeks to deliberate on the China Factor in the NSMS 2005. Fourth, it will study the implications of all these factors on Malaysia. Lastly, it summarizes its findings in the context of Malaysia's national interests and national security.

### **The US NSMS 2005**

The formulation and implementation of NSMS 2005 reflects the seriousness of the US to securing the global commons and maritime domains<sup>10</sup> through the concept of maritime security. But, the US left this concept ambiguously defined. Banloi (2004) and Bateman (2007), however, described the basic features and scope of maritime security concept as follows:

Maritime security is a broad concept that includes a panoply of notions such as maritime safety, port security, freedom of navigation, SLOC security, security from piracy attacks and armed robbery (Banloi 2004).

<sup>10</sup> The maritime domain is defined as all areas and things of, on, under, relating to, adjacent to, or bordering on a sea, ocean, or other navigable waterway, including all maritime-related activities, infrastructure, people, cargo, and vessels and other conveyances (NSMS 2005:1). Maritime domain encompasses trade routes, communication links, and natural resources vital to the global economy and the well-being of people in the United States and around the world (The US International Outreach and Coordination Strategy for The National Strategy for Maritime Security 2005:1).

The concept of maritime security has a traditional meaning for navies and defense forces with their role of protecting the nation and its national interests against threats primarily of a military nature. However, the concept of maritime security has expanded following 9/11. It is still about protecting national security but instead of overt threats from military forces, there is a new emphasis on asymmetric threats, including both maritime terrorism and piracy (Bateman 2007:80).

As such, this article constructed a working definition of maritime security concept based on the features and roles of NSMS 2005 as follows:

Maritime security is an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive administrative, legal, political, economic, commercial, military and defense initiatives aimed at achieving the following objectives---to preserve freedom of the seas; to facilitate freedom of navigation and commerce; to safeguard the maritime domain, including all maritime-related activities, infrastructure, people, cargo, and vessels and other conveyances, and trade routes, communication links, and natural resources vital to the global economy and the well-being of people around the world; to address all maritime-related threats of sabotage, terrorism, piracy, as well as hostile, criminal, and dangerous acts; and to protect the resources of the ocean.

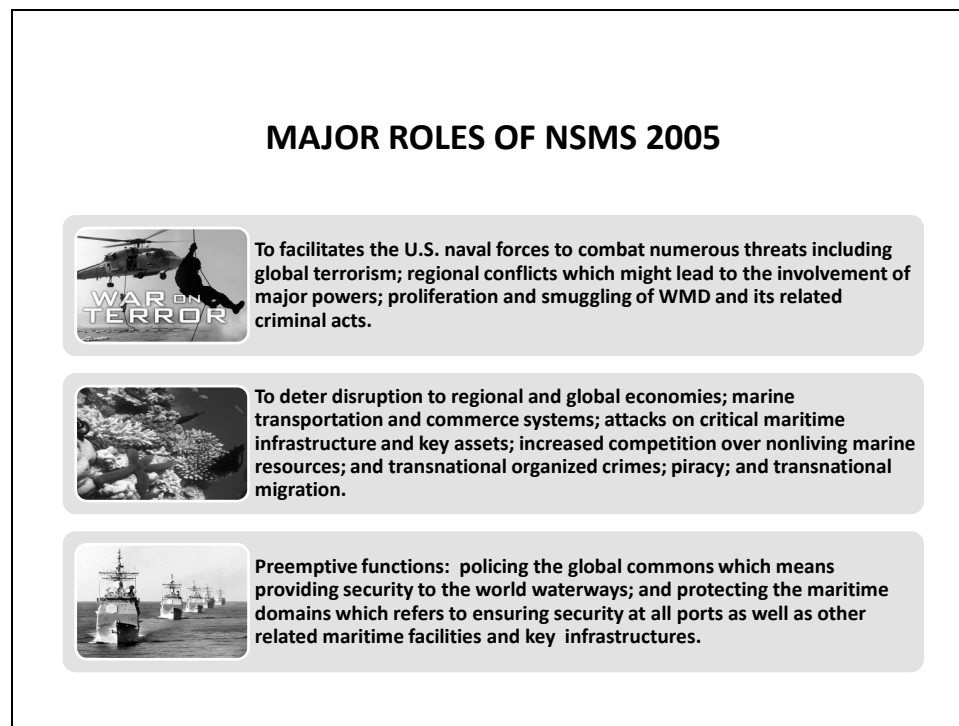
This definition shows that maritime security of the 21st century, as being stipulated in the US NSMS 2005, is a broad security concept. Additionally, this concept, although national in its nature, is also international in its objectives. It is such because “the safety and economic security of the United States depend in substantial part upon the secure use of the world’s oceans” (NSMS 2005:1). Hence, the US NSMS 2005 is a strategic instrument which facilitates the US naval forces to combat traditional and unconventional threats---perceived and real---to the maritime domains and global commons, including global terrorism; regional conflicts which might lead to the involvement of major powers; proliferation and smuggling of WMD and its related criminal acts; disruption to regional and global economies; and disruption to marine transportation and commerce systems (NSMS 2005).

NSMS 2005 also has two specific preemptive functions. Firstly, police the global commons by providing security to the world’s waterways. Secondly, to protect the maritime domains by ensuring security at all ports as well as other related maritime facilities and key infrastructures. These functions are to be executed in the context of providing security to American citizens, assets, and interests---nationally and internationally---when they are under threats in any global commons or maritime domains. These functions also cover the security of citizens, interests and assets of US allies<sup>11</sup> all over the world. These trans-border and preemptive functions of NSMS 2005 are almost similar to the objectives of the US war on terror launch since late 2001, to combat terrorists, terrorist organizations, and modern terrorism, with the sole purpose of protecting American citizens, assets, and interests, nationally and internationally. As such, NSMS 2005 is a preemptive strategy which can be applied to any maritime domains or global commons, irrespective of whether it could jeopardize the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of other nations. Thus, putting its explicit functions

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<sup>11</sup> The United States and its allies – including France – are especially vulnerable to maritime terrorist attacks because of their worldwide overseas presence (Sinai 2004:49).

aside, NSMS 2005 is actually a strategy that legitimizes the presence of the US maritime forces anywhere in the world.<sup>12</sup>



**Graphic 2: Major roles of the NSMS 2005**

### **Energy Security Geopolitics**

NSMS 2005 is also linked to the energy security geopolitics of the US. Ruhanie (2011:93) conceptualized energy security geopolitics as follows:

Energy security geopolitics concerns the action of a state to control a particular region as a strategy to deter the possibility of an energy-based conflict which can affect the state's access to energy resources; to avoid the state's competitors from resorting to energy as a weapon to threaten its economic, political and national security; to ensure the safety to energy infrastructures and transportation routes; and to ensure that the global energy market is not disrupted.

Ruhanie (ibid) also conceptualized energy security geopolitics of the US in Southeast Asia as follows:

Energy security geopolitics of the US in Southeast Asia, therefore, is aimed at enabling the US to protect the security of petroleum transportation from West Asia---through the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea---to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan; to deter possibility of an energy conflict in the South China Sea; and to use the supply of petroleum

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<sup>12</sup> Since 2003, the United States government has been very active in developing maritime policy and assigning organizational responsibilities to provide maritime security (Egli and Renuart 2003:1).

from West Asia as a possible weapon against its adversaries, particularly China, if and when necessary.

The US is very particular about this aspect of geopolitics because it has been a net importer of energy since the 1950s; its dependence on imports has grown sharply since 1985; oil accounts for 89 percent of net US energy imports; and the US energy consumption is projected to increase by about 32 percent by 2020 (The US National Energy Policy 2001). At the same time, the US is also very focused on protecting its energy security geopolitics towards China since China's net oil imports are expected to rise from approximately one million barrels of oil per day at present to possibly 5 to 8 million barrels of oil per day by 2020, with a predominant (over 70 percent) dependence on Middle East imports (ibid).<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the US energy security geopolitics is also linked to its national security. Among the rationales are as follows:

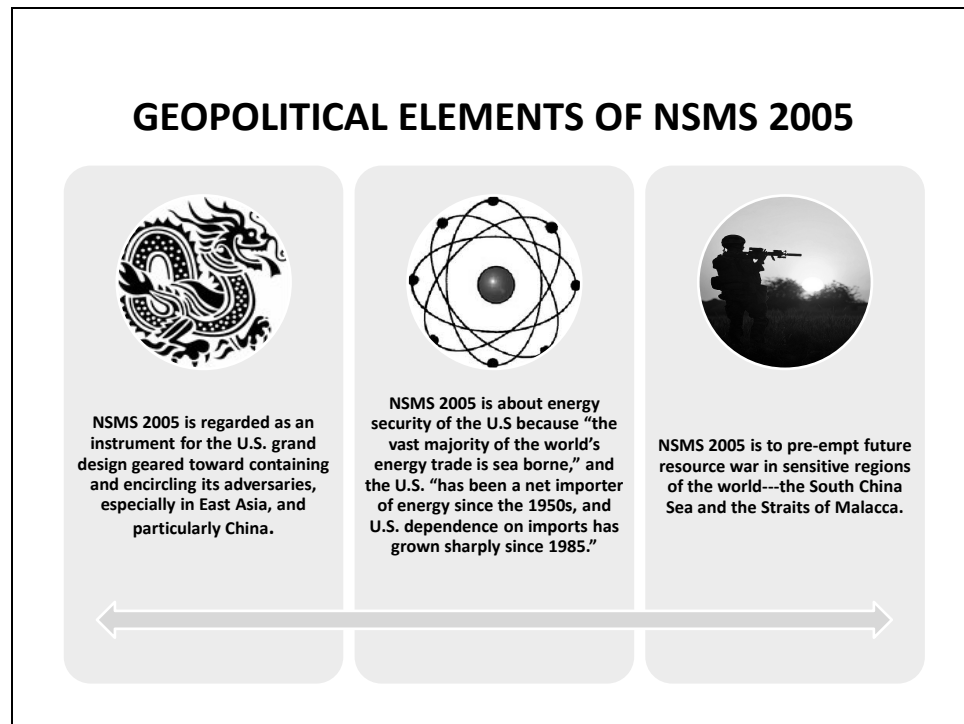
The possibility that access to energy resources may become an object of large-scale armed struggle is one of the most alarming prospects facing the current world system (Russell 21 May 2008).

Energy security is now deemed so central to national security that threats to the former are liable to be reflexively interpreted as threats to the latter (ibid: 13 July 2008).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of energy security came to refer to the quest of Western powers to secure the uninterrupted flow of oil from foreign suppliers, and the attempt to rationalize its use and diversify energy resources... At later stage, the concept of energy security was expanded into four directions, (i) to comprise all sources of energy, including oil, coal, nuclear, solar, and hydro energy so as to establish the 'optimum' mix of energy sources which best suits a nation's needs, and most importantly the continuous access to that mix; (ii) to refer to the threats to national security resulting from energy including shortages; (iii) to deal with the strategies needed to establish an energy regime which does not pose a threat to the quality of the environment, and reduces the negative environmental consequences of energy production and consumption; and (iv) to assess the impact of the quest for secure sources of energy on the flare-up of conflicts, and the impact of conflict on securing sources of energy (Mohammad and Abdullah 2009:27).

<sup>14</sup> Energy security is the availability of sufficient supplies at affordable prices (Yergin 2006); and the provision of affordable, reliable, diverse and ample supplies of oil and gas and their future equivalents and adequate infrastructure to deliver these supplies to market (Kalicki and Goldwin (2005) in Fattouh 2007:5).

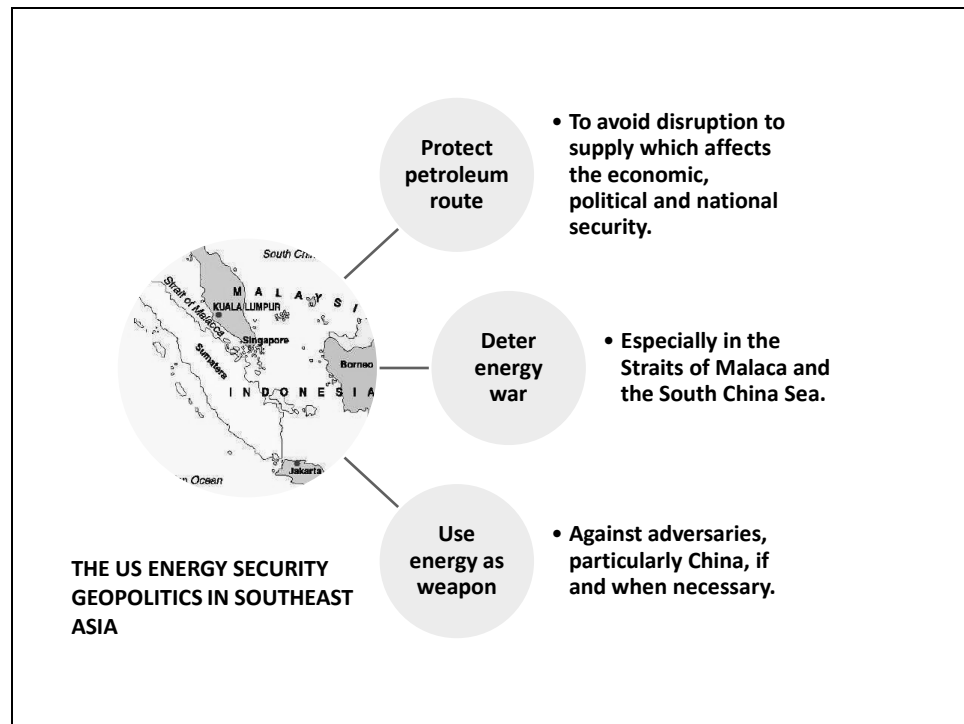


**Graphic 3: Elements of geopolitics in NSMS 2005**

In summary, the US emphasizes on its energy security geopolitics<sup>15</sup> because it is expected to experience a severe socio-economic crisis if it fails to secure adequate amount of imported oil and gas to meet its national consumption in the year 2020. This is why the US has to choose the most appropriate and effective strategy to resolve its oil security dilemma in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The most effective strategy in this context has to be in the form of a comprehensive and coordinated maritime security strategy coupled with a strong and reliable naval defense mechanism in order to protect the world's sea lanes which are vital to the transportation of oil and gas from the producing countries---mostly in West Asia---to the American western shores and also to the US allies in East Asia. In this case, NSMS 2005 is obviously the best strategy. It enables the integrated US sea power to police the world's waterways and its maritime domains.

<sup>15</sup> The geopolitics of energy arise out of the fact that most of the world's principal energy producers are not its principal consumers. For the energy producing countries, energy is not only a source of enormous power and wealth; it also constitutes leverage, since energy is a strategic resource whose denial to any rival or enemy increases the latter's vulnerability. Energy can thus be used as a very effective weapon of war. Russia, for example, is successfully using energy as a very important geopolitical tool in its relations with the countries of its 'near abroad' as well as Europe (Sikri 2008:5).





**Graphic 4: The US energy security geopolitics in Southeast Asia**

Therefore, taking the above into consideration, it is appropriate to believe that another function of NSMS 2005 is to pre-empt a future resource war in sensitive regions of the world, especially in Southeast Asia, because the South China Sea is rich in natural resources such as oil and natural gas, but ownership of the resources is in dispute (US Energy Information Administration 2008:3). There are numerous factors supporting this belief. The most apparent is the current US military presence in Southeast Asia---in Basilan Island, Southern Philippines---through its counterterrorism initiative since January 2002. Officially, it was unilaterally declared that the US had mobilized its military forces to Basilan Island to combat the Abu Sayyaf Group—a terrorist organization allegedly being the al-Qaeda’s proxy in Southeast Asia. Implicitly, however, the presence of the US security forces in Southern Philippines is actually being perceived as a strategy to enhance the US sea power in Southeast Asia in order to strengthen the capability of its existing naval group already stationed in East Asia, in anticipation of a probable future resource war in the South China Sea.<sup>16</sup> The US Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower 2007 indicted this probability by stating

<sup>16</sup> The US’ strategy to preserve its permanent global superiority by preventing the rise of rivals drives US military objectives in the Philippines. The self-avowed aim of the US is to perpetuate its position of being the world’s sole superpower in order to re-order the world. Its strategy to perpetuate its status is to prevent the rise of any rivals. To do this, it is seeking the capacity to deter and defeat potential enemies or rivals anywhere in the world by retaining and realigning its ‘global posture’ or its ability to operate across the globe through its worldwide network of forward-deployed troops, bases, and access agreements (Focus on the Philippines, November 2007).

that major power war, regional conflict, terrorism, lawlessness and natural disasters—all have the potential to threaten US national security and world prosperity.

In the context of Southeast Asian security environment, a regional conflict might erupt in the South China Sea if its littoral states, including China, fail to resolve their overlapping claims over this energy-rich region through effective conflict resolution mechanisms, peaceful negotiation, or diplomatic frameworks. When such a conflict takes place, the possibility of a major power war in South China Sea is unavoidable. And, the most possible non-Asian major power to be drawn into this regionalized conflict is none other but the US.

Klare (2002) summed up the reason to a possible oil-conflict in the South China Sea, as follows:

The growing demand for energy in Asia will affect the South China Sea in two significant ways. First, the states that border on the area will undoubtedly seek to maximize their access to its undersea resources in order to diminish their reliance on imports. Second, several other East Asian countries, including Japan and South Korea, are vitally dependent on energy supplies located elsewhere, almost all of which must travel by ship through the South China Sea. Those states will naturally seek to prevent any threat to the continued flow of resources. Together, these factors have made the South China Sea the fulcrum of energy competition in Asia Pacific region. So far, energy competition in the region has provoked only minor outbreaks of violence, in most cases involving clashes between the naval forces of neighboring states...The dispute over the South China Sea, however, is likely to grow more intense as the regional competition over vital energy supplies increases (Klare 2002:111-113).

The motive of the US in stationing its military personnel in Basilan Island is also reflected in an assessment of the US Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower 2007 by Work and Jan van Tol (2008) as follows:

Although the concept (the strategy) argues that maritime security is central to the success of globalization, it fails to acknowledge that the threats to the maritime commons are now likely as low as or lower than at any time in the last century. Trade flows freely and unobstructed over the oceans. Piracy remains a problem, but mainly to local shipping, fishermen, and coastal communities; it poses little threat to international trade and shipping. Terrorism at sea is also a relatively minor threat. The lack of any general threat to maritime security is reflected in relatively low maritime insurance rates, except in a few localized areas. The concept offers no evidence that this circumstance is likely to change in the future. This omission might lead some to conclude that the concept purposely hypes potential future threats to maritime security in a transparent attempt to justify a great increase in the size of maritime forces.... Given that a fierce competition for resources is looming, this argument is not likely to be persuasive unless backed up by evidence that threats to maritime security are on the rise (Work and Jan van Tol 2008:19-20).<sup>17</sup>

The above observation is further clarified by Murphy (2007) as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> By the end of third quarter 2008, the Southeast Asian region has recorded a total of 53 cases of piracy and armed robbery incidences for the year, one of the lowest recorded during the same period over the last five years. A total of 18 actual attacks were reported during the third quarter of 2008 (Southeast Asia Maritime Security Review 2008:1).

The number of terrorist attacks at sea has been minuscule as a proportion of terrorist attacks overall. According to the RAND Corporation's Terrorism Chronology Database and the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Incident Database, incidents of maritime terrorism account for only 2 per cent of all the terrorism incidents recorded over the past 30 years. This is because the conditions necessary for a successful terrorist attack can be fulfilled on water only with difficulty. Terrorists have not operated at sea to any great extent so far because they can operate more easily and effectively on land. For the majority of terrorist groups operating today, maritime activity is unnecessary; there are only a few groups for whom operations are driven by strategic or operational imperative (Murphy 2007:45).

As such, it is evident that NSMS 2005 is being designed to enhance the US geopolitics---particularly toward China---through mobilization of its integrated sea power, mostly to the Asia Pacific region to contain China, to enhance its energy security geopolitics, and to anticipate a resource war in the South China Sea.

Despite of all the above, however, China is still unprovoked. On the contrary, China is actively managing these security threats through its soft balancing mechanism. In addition, China introduces its new security concept in 2002 which reflected its aim to counterbalance the US. According to Davison (2004:64) its emphasis are as follows:

That the Asia-Pacific region and the world are moving inexorably towards multipolarity and that regional dialogue and cooperation are the best way to ensure peace and security.  
Smoothing relations with its immediate neighbors through border agreements and related confidence-building measures.  
Collaborating with Russia to counterbalance US international security postures related to arm control and peace enforcement.  
Implementing a regional diplomacy of 'anti-hegemony' designed to shape a regional security environment where US alliance system will no longer be relevant or necessary.

The above security concept proves that China is against the hegemonic nature of the US foreign policy like the one being translated into the formulation of NSMS 2005. However, Erickson (2007) elaborated on the Chinese response to NSMS 2005 as follows:

The key for the United States will be to attempt to convince China that the goals and intentions of the new strategy are real and not, as many in China fear, merely "window-dressing" or a disguise for a "containment" of China (Erikson 2007:42).

The observation by Erikson (2007) is reflective of China's new security concept. It also proves that China as a major power which has amicable relations with most Southeast Asian nations is still not convinced about the true agenda of NSMS 2005. Until China is fully satisfied with the implicit and explicit objectives of NSMS 2005, it is safe to deduce that this new maritime strategy of the US is not the true and correct solution to the security uncertainties facing the US in the Post-911 era.

### **The China Factor**

The hidden China Factor in the NSMS 2005, therefore, means that this maritime strategy is aimed at nothing else but geopolitics---the struggle between rival powers for control over territory, natural resources, vital geographic features (harbors, rivers, oases) and other sources of economic and military advantage (Klare 2004:147). This is because the US---a lonely superpower in the Post-Cold War era; now trapped in a web of unipolarity

dilemmas, suffering from paradox of unchallenged supremacy, and predicted to face acute energy constraints by the year 2020---is construed to be using the NSMS 2005 as a strategic instrument to maintain its global supremacy and hegemony against rising China, as well as to strengthen its quasi-monopoly on the international energy trade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> This is the reality because maritime power is not based on navies alone, but also, as Alfred Thayer Mahan recognized, on economic strength, and the leading sea power is usually the leading economic power in the global system (Levy and Thompson 2010:7).

This is why NSMS 2005 is viewed with cynicism by some quarters in China, particularly the media, through remarks such as “had Washington not revised its maritime strategy to emphasize fighting nontraditional security challenges such as terrorism in keeping with world events, “the mighty US fleet [would] be like a giant that [had] lost its way, a colossus without any merit” (Erikson 2007:46).

This remark might had not been made if the major agenda of NSMS 2005 is not perceived to be in line with offensive realism theory, i.e. to enable the US gain power over its rivals with hegemony as its final goal (Mearshiemer 2001:29); or being construed as in congruence with the objective of Project for the New American Century (PNAC) to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire (PNAC Statement of Principles 3:6:1997). In other words, NSMS 2005 might had not be viewed negatively if it is not regarded by some quarters as an instrument for the US grand design geared toward containing and encircling its adversaries, especially in East Asia, and particularly China. There are numerous factors to support this perception. Among them are as follows:

First, since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were consistent efforts to make the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the American century, especially in Asia. This, for example, was clearly manifested in several reports and monographs prepared by PNAC and RAND Corporation. Among other proposals, for example, the PNAC Report 2000 recommended to the US government for the establishment of four core missions for the US military forces, including fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars; perform the constabulary duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions; and transform US forces to exploit the revolution in military affairs (PNAC Report 2000:iv). Additionally, among the pre-requisites to the four missions include the repositioning of the US forces to respond to 21<sup>st</sup> century strategic realities by shifting permanently-based forces to Southeast Europe and Southeast Asia; and by changing naval deployment patterns to reflect growing US strategic concerns in East Asia (Ibid).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> There is now only one superpower. But this does not mean that the world is unipolar. A unipolar system would have one superpower, no significant major powers, and many minor powers...A bipolar system like the Cold War has two superpowers, and the relations between them are central to international politics...A multipolar system has several major powers of comparable strength that cooperate and compete with each other in shifting patterns...Contemporary international politics does not fit any of these three models (Huntington 1999: 35-36). The term unipolarity dilemmas is introduced by Ikenberry (2005), while the term unchallenged primacy is introduced by Joeff (2002:596).

<sup>19</sup> Washington has reconfigured its permanent troop deployments in Japan and South Korea, tightened its alliance with Australia, declared Thailand and the Philippines to be major non-NATO allies, and signed a wide-ranging strategic cooperation agreement with Singapore. Meanwhile, the Pentagon has deployed

These recommendations reflected elements of China containment strategy especially when it suggested the repositioning of the US permanently-based forces to Southeast Asia. Therefore, it is not a sheer coincidence that the US implemented NSMS 2005 in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although it is being considered by some American think-tanks as a principal protective element of the United States' war on terrorism (Parfomak and Frittelli 2007:1). It is because the PNAC Report which ultimately formed a major bulk of the US National Security Strategy 2002---hence the formulation of NSMS 2005---had already recommended the strategy of shifting permanently-based forces to Southeast Europe and Southeast Asia; and the changing of naval deployment patterns to reflect growing US strategic concerns in East Asia. In this context, obviously no changing of naval deployment patterns could be carried out by the US without a comprehensive instrument of strategy to facilitate its implementation. NSMS 2005, therefore, is the most appropriate instrument for the execution of the strategy suggested by PNAC.

Second, deliberation about China Factor is also found in several official documents of the US which were formulated during the Bush Administration. These documents could be considered as the originating sources for the formulation of NSMS 2005. In most of these documents, it is stated that the US is at war against the terrorists and potential adversaries that might jeopardize the US survival. Within this context, China is one of the countries being singled out. For example, President George W. Bush stated in the US National Security Strategy 2002, as follows:

America will encourage the advancement of democracy and economic openness in both nations (China and Russia) because these are the best foundations for domestic stability and international order. We will strongly resist aggression from other great powers---even as we welcome their peaceful pursuit of prosperity, trade, and cultural advancement.

Additionally, the US National Defense Strategy 2008 had singled out China as follows:

China is one ascendant state with the potential for competing with the United States. For the foreseeable future, we will need to hedge against China's growing military modernization and the impact of its strategic choices upon international security. It is likely that China will continue to expand its conventional military capabilities, emphasizing anti-access and area denial assets including developing a full range of long-range strike, space, and information warfare capabilities. Our interaction with China will be long-term and multi-dimensional and will involve peacetime engagement between defense establishments as much as fielded combat capabilities. The objective of this effort is to mitigate near term challenges while preserving and enhancing US national advantages over time (The US National Defense Strategy 2008:3).

All the above manifested that China Factor does prevail in NSMS 2005. Again, this proves that NSMS 2005 is a geopolitical instrument of the US which is being repackaged and repositioned through the label of global counterterrorism, particularly in 21<sup>st</sup> century Southeast Asia.

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significant new power-projection capabilities to the region, including attack submarines, cruise-missile destroyers, long-range bombers, and fighter aircraft stationed in Guam (Twining 2007:79).

## **Implications on Malaysia**

Therefore, if China is still not convinced that NSMS 2005 is a maritime security strategy being formulated for the sake of global peace, it is indicative that the geopolitical implications of NSMS 2005 might one day lead to US-China maritime-based armed conflicts in Southeast Asia. This is due to the preemptive nature of NSMS 2005 which threatens the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of other nations and consequently motivates rivalry, provokes retaliations, and induces war. In other words, NSMS 2005 is not a conflict avoidance strategy, but a strategy that could induce rivalry, conflict, and war.

As such, if a conflict flares up in Southeast Asian region resulting from the preemptive nature of NSMS 2005, the impacts of such conflict on Malaysia and other Southeast Asian nations would undoubtedly be divisive---socially, politically, militarily, and economically---to the extent they might paralyzed the Southeast Asia nations and jeopardized the principles of peace, freedom, and neutrality which they advocated through ASEAN since in the early 1970s.

As such, no matter how subtly the current rivalry is being manifested, uncertainties and anxieties are already in the air. But, whether this rivalry would induce future armed conflicts, it is up to the Southeast Asian regional powers to collectively act and decide on how to mitigate the current security development in order to abort possible future war. Southeast Asian nations, therefore, have to seriously view NSMS 2005 in the context of probable conflict and war in the region with outmost concern and preparedness. It is such because US-China armed conflicts could erupt in Southeast Asia based on two scenarios. But, in whichever scenario, the battle arena is still within Malaysian waters---the South China Sea in the east, and the Straits of Malacca in the west. Although these waters are jointly owned by other littoral states, Malaysia could be the prime victim because of its close proximity to both waterways. At the same time, it is because major maritime domains of Malaysia are situated along the Straits of Malacca, while Malaysia's oil and gas fields are all in the South China Sea.

The probable future war scenarios involving the US and China in Southeast Asia resulting from the preemptive nature of NSMS 2005 are as follows:

1. A US-China armed conflict could erupt due to intensified rivalries among several Southeast nations over the control of energy-rich region of the South China Sea. This conflict would ultimately force the US and China to take side with the opposing nations and being drawn into a much bigger war. Alternatively, this conflict could take place resulting from the unilateral action of the US to defend the interests of its East Asian allies in the event Chinese forces unilaterally and physically block vessels carrying oil and gas to South Korea, Taiwan and Japan from sailing through the South China Sea.
2. A US-China maritime conflict could take place in the Straits of Malacca if the US naval forces unilaterally and physically control the Straits of Malacca and consequently prohibits all vessels carrying energy to China from passing through the straits. Irrespective of the motives and implications, China would definitely construe such a blockade as a move by the US to disrupt China's economy. In such a situation, China would inevitably retaliate through an armed aggression toward the US. This scenario is possible because imported

energy is the lifeline of China's economic growth. Alternatively, this scenario could also happen in the Straits of Malacca if China, on the other hand, unilaterally takes physical control of the straits to block the passage of energy-laden tankers sailing to South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, or the western shores of the US.<sup>20</sup>

The above scenarios are indications that the geopolitical element and the preemptive nature of NSMS 2005 undoubtedly have its impacts and implications on Malaysia and other nations of Southeast Asia. The most directly affected countries are Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore as the major littoral states to the Straits of Malacca and the Singapore Straits; as well as Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam as the littoral states to the South China Sea.<sup>21</sup> Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, Kampuchea, Laos, and Myanmar are indirectly affected due to the fact that they also have maritime domains as being defined in NSMS 2005.

In this context, the major impacts of NSMS 2005 are related to the issues of ASEAN solidarity; the foreign policy configuration of Southeast Asian nations; their territorial integrity and national sovereignty; as well as their collective ability to formulate collective multilateral strategies toward the US and China. All these issues are interrelated. But, the most critical of all are about the ASEAN solidarity and the foreign policy configuration of Southeast Asian nations toward the US and China. These issues are the keys to resolving the other two. They are delicate and divisive due to the following reasons.

1. If an inter-conflict among the Southeast Asian nations takes place in the South China Sea, ASEAN solidarity will definitely vanish into the thin air. In such a situation, the foreign policy configuration of each individual Southeast Asian nation would be in disarray.<sup>22</sup> Some nations would be fighting together with the US, some others would be fighting with China, and a few of them might choose to remain neutral but being caught in the middle of an inter-ASEAN war involving two world great powers. In such a scenario, balancing, bandwagoning or even hedging the security threats would be of no benefit to the ASEAN solidarity.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A high dependence on the Malacca Straits leaves China vulnerable not only to threats of piracy and terrorism, but also to other powerful competitor nations, including the United States, Japan and India, who seek control of these sea lines and who are taking action accordingly (Zhang 2007:19).

<sup>21</sup> Concern about shipping lanes in Southeast Asia is greatly exacerbated in the South China Sea by an additional factor---the reserves of oil close to the Spratly Island, which are thought to provide a serious risk of armed conflict (Dosch 2004:131).

<sup>22</sup> For Southeast Asia, there is a consensus among analysts that the subregion has adopted a twin strategy of deep engagement with China on the one hand and, on the other, "soft balancing" against potential Chinese aggression or disruption of the status quo. The latter strategy includes not only military acquisitions and modernization but also attempts to keep the United States involved in the region as a counterweight to Chinese power (Goh 2005:vii).

<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding the intention to redeploy forces from Asia, the United States has been upgrading its defense relations with key partners in the region. In Southeast Asia, apart from U.S. treaty allies Thailand and the Philippines, U.S. security relations have strengthened with Singapore and, more recently, Indonesia. Since September 11, quiet cooperation with Malaysia has improved, and normalization with Vietnam has enabled Washington and Hanoi to establish cautious and incremental military-to-military ties. Two conditions probably account for this adjustment. First, the war against terrorism has made it imperative for the United States to forge closer ties with the Muslim-majority countries in Southeast Asia. Second, this broadening of security relations creates structural constraints to discourage Beijing from

2. In the event of US-China armed conflict in defense of the US allies in East Asia, or in defense of the US and China individual interests either in the Straits of Malacca or the South China Sea, the same divisive scenario would again become inevitable. This is because Southeast Asian nations have varied foreign policy perspective toward the US and China. Thailand and the Philippines are the treaty allies of the US. Singapore has special defense agreements with the US. Indonesia has a unique military and defense arrangement with the US. Malaysia as the Southeast Asian pioneer in establishing diplomatic relations with China in the Cold War Era, also has the US as its biggest trading partner. Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea are advocates of socialism. Brunei is a monarchy. Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste are young nations with lesser diplomatic clout. Myanmar is ruled by a military regime unfriendly with the US.
3. Third, the foreign policy configuration of Southeast Asian nations also varies due to the US war on terror in which Muslim terrorist organizations, including those allegedly operating in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand, are supposedly to be the principal enemy. This factor becomes one of the divisive elements in the foreign policy configuration of countries like Indonesia and Malaysia if maritime-based conflicts between the US and China occur in Southeast Asia. This, however, is not due to the fact that the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia are in favor of terrorism. Conversely, this is due to the fact that majority of Muslims in these countries might pressure their respective government to be against the US just as an expression of their hatred toward the US for waging the terror war which is being perceived as an unjust and unnecessary war.

The diverse foreign policy configuration of the Southeast Asian nations, therefore, is the major obstacle for them to maintain the ASEAN solidarity and hence to have a standard and unified stand toward the US and China in the event of maritime-based regional conflicts involving the two great powers due to their intensified geopolitical rivalry. As such, if all Southeast nations fail to overcome this obstacle, Southeast Asia will definitely be divided in the event that NSMS 2005 causes the US-China conflicts in the future. Some nations---without hesitation---will sail along with the U.S; some others---also without hesitation---will align fully with China; while a minority few will be caught in a dilemma, whether to become a last-minute ally, to bandwagon, or just do hedging with either the US or China. This failure will also hinder the Southeast Asia nations from taking a collective stand on how to defend their territorial integrity and national sovereignty if the rivalries between the US and China erupt into a war.

It is now clear that NSMS 2005 does have its impacts and implications on Malaysia and other Southeast Asian nations if US-China conflicts take place in the region in the coming decades. Based on the two scenarios discussed earlier, the biggest impact

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abusing its growing regional power. In recent years there has been a gradual and quiet multilateralization of security cooperation in the region. Once bilateral exercises between the United States and Thailand, the annual Cobra Gold maneuvers have been enlarged to include Singapore and Japan as formal partners, and several other nations as observers (The Stanley Foundation 2006:6).



of NSMS 2005 on Malaysia is on the question of how Malaysia will act in solitary to decide on its fate and survival in the context of its relations with the US and China. This challenge is the most difficult and the most crucial at the bilateral and multilateral levels. The only option left is for Malaysia to act preemptively through its own national initiative. More specifically, Malaysia has to embark on this preemptive initiative right from now to mitigate the possibility of such conflicts.

This article has the following insights for the Malaysian government to consider. They are as follows:

1. The first area to be reviewed by the Malaysia government is about the status of its overlapping claims in the South China Sea since this is one of the flash points where a conflict could take place. In this context, thorough studies on all possible triggering factors need to be carried out. This should be followed by exploring all possible conflict avoidance strategies in order to mitigate the conflict through diplomacy, legal measures, or horse trading based on a win-win principle.<sup>24</sup>
2. The second area of focus is Malaysia's maritime strategy and policy as well as its defense capability, especially in the naval and air defense sectors. At the same time, Malaysia has to review its national security strategy, its national defense policy, as well as its national security and national defense apparatuses. This is vital due to the fact that the anticipated US-China conflicts are maritime-based conflicts either in the South China Sea and/or in the Straits of Malacca.
3. The third area of focus will be on Malaysia's maritime domains and Malaysia key maritime infrastructures based on their definitions in NSMS 2005. This will enable Malaysia to ascertain the adequacy of its security measures concerning maritime domains and maritime key infrastructures, as well to enhance these measures in order to avoid any preemptive move by the US naval power should the US finds that Malaysia's maritime domains and key maritime infrastructures are detrimental to the US vital interests and the American citizens or that of its allies.
4. The fourth focus should be on Malaysia's multilateral cooperation in providing security and safety in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea, including the current ASEAN version of Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) with several Southeast Asian nations and Japan. In this context, Malaysia has to initiate on the possibility of persuading the ASEAN RMSI partners to include China into this framework. Malaysia also has to review international observations and opinions regarding China's participation in RMSI. One example of these observations is by Sato (2004) as follows:

Since its foundation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has emphasized regional solidarity and the exclusion of outside influences from the region. While this was not practical at the time of the Cold War and hot wars in Vietnam and Cambodia, when the socialist/communist states of

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<sup>24</sup> The Spratlys disputes are Malaysia's most complex territorial disputes in the South China Sea... Specifically, China, Vietnam and Taiwan claim the whole of the Spratly Islands while Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei claim only parts thereof. A good example is Amboyna Cay. It is simultaneously claimed by China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam (Asri et. al 2009:111).

Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar joined ASEAN in the late 1990s the organization had an opportunity to revisit these objectives. On maritime-security issues, the desire to exclude outside influences is most closely shared by Malaysia and Indonesia, the two countries that view actions in the Straits as a sovereign issue. Singapore's increasing cooperation with the United States, such as preparation for port calls by US aircraft carriers, is a divergence from the policies of the other two countries. This stems from Singapore's greater emphasis on Straits security as a national strategic interest; the other two countries have broader sets of security priorities. Fear of its bigger Muslim neighbors, Indonesia and Malaysia, is often cited as a reason for Singapore's flirtations with outside powers. Though this may be true, Singapore also argues that Indonesian and Malaysian maritime-security shortcomings are the real concern and that the call for US and Japanese help is intended to be a wake-up call. Southeast Asian countries also view China's rising naval power with caution. For this reason, their attitude toward the US presence in the region is ambiguous. Despite vocal opposition to permanent basing by the US fleet, a less visible presence, such as bilateral assistance from and joint training with US forces that upgrade local military capabilities, is welcomed by both Malaysia and Indonesia. Malaysia has participated in joint naval exercises with the United States. And Indonesia's lack of participation is not the result of its reluctance, but of US sanctions imposed after human-rights violations were committed by the Indonesian military in East Timor....Nevertheless, the three ASEAN countries are not interested in antagonizing China over enhanced cooperation with the US and Japan. China is recognized as an important mediator that can be engaged and used to deter other superpowers. China has been invited to major regional anti-terrorism meetings along with the US and Japan (Sato July 14, 2004).

The most pertinent point raised by Sato (2004) is regarding Malaysia's stand on the sovereignty of the Straits of Malacca. As such, Malaysia has to evaluate this question in the context of the bigger picture i.e. mitigating the possible US-China conflicts. And, the most crucial consideration to this issue is whether the inclusion of China into the Southeast Asian RMSI will jeopardize Malaysia's sovereignty and territorial integrity over the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. Such evaluation will enable Malaysia to envisage the appropriate multilateral ASEAN strategy regarding RMSI within the framework of NSMS 2005 and to mitigate the possible future conflicts involving the US and China in Southeast Asian waters.

5. Consequently, therefore, the fifth area of focus is about reviewing and analyzing the maritime strategies and policies of the US and China and ascertaining the maritime capabilities of both countries to enable Malaysia envision the most appropriate contingency strategy should these two great powers collide in the Straits of Malacca or the South China Sea to safeguard their geostrategic interests in these waterways.

All these mitigating strategies are essential in order to enable Malaysia has balanced relations with the US and China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to enable Malaysia formulates its national contingency strategies, and to facilitate Malaysia's role in ASEAN

and other regional organizations in the context of mitigating the probable US-China conflicts in future.

However, despite of all the above, Ruhanie (2011:91) has quoted Malaysia's Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak, as stating that Malaysia preferred multilateral approach to overcome any possible US-China conflicts in the Straits of Malacca or the South China Sea. Ruhanie (ibid) quoted Dato' Sri Najib as follows:

The formation of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM) in 2010, involving 10 members of ASEAN and their dialogue partners---the US, Australia, China, Japan, India, South Korea, New Zealand and Russia---is aimed at ensuring that ASEAN remains free from major powers' influences and able to become the central player in determining its actions, whether politically, economically or socially.

Regarding the US energy security geopolitics in Southeast Asia, Dato' Sri Najib was quoted by Ruhanie (2011:97) as follows:

The responsibility to protect the maritime security and the safety of passage in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea lies with the littoral states. This is because they are related to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the littoral states. On the part of Malaysia, it has implemented a comprehensive maritime security policy to ensure the safety and security in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea.

It is clear therefore, while Malaysia is not unaware of the US grand strategy on China and the US energy security geopolitics involving the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea, Malaysia still prefers to approach both of these issues through diplomacy and multilateralism, especially through ASEAN. By taking this approaches, however, Malaysia definitely and indirectly hopes that all major powers, especially the US and China, also have to share their responsibilities in maintaining a positive and conducive security environment in Southeast Asia.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article discovers that maritime security concept has never been clearly defined. But its scope has been widened by the various US security authorities in the aftermath of 9/11 tragedy through the formulation of NSMS 2005 which is meant to provide security to the global commons, maritime domains and key maritime infrastructures. However, the US NSMS 2005 has two preemptive functions i.e. policing the global commons and maritime domains in the context of providing security to American citizens, vital interests and key assets in the event they are facing maritime security threats. These functions are detrimental to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other nations. This is why NSMS 2005, irrespective of its explicit objective, is still being construed by certain quarters in China, especially the media, as an instrument of the US foreign policy with imperialistic motives.

This article also has ascertained that NSMS 2005 bears several elements of geopolitics, specifically pertaining to the containment of China, concerning the enhancement of the US energy security geopolitics, and the US naval power's preparations for possible maritime conflicts in the energy-rich regions of Southeast Asia, particularly in the South China Sea, and in the critical waterway of the Straits of Malacca which is vital to the transportation of energy to China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and

even the west coast of the US. In connection to these geopolitical elements of NSMS 2005, this article analyses two hypothetical war scenarios in the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca and their impacts on Southeast Asian nations, particularly Malaysia. Realizing the divisive impacts of such conflicts, this analysis provides several insights to the Malaysian government on how to mitigate the probable conflicts right from now in order to abort the possible conflicts from becoming realities in the future decades. These suggestions are to enable Malaysia reconfigures its relations with the US and China through bilateral and multilateral initiatives in order to have balanced relations with the two major powers, as well as to enable Malaysia plays key roles in mitigating the probable conflicts through the ASEAN framework and other multilateral organizations--regionally and internationally.

Lastly, although this article acknowledges the noble intention of the US in formulating and implementing NSMS 2005, it has, however, its strong reservation on the preemptive functions of NSMS 2005 which are perceived to be detrimental to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other nations because these functions could motivate rivalry, provoke retaliations, and induce war, especially in Southeast Asia where the principles of peace, freedom, and neutrality are the beacon of world peace being advocated since early 1970s.

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