

LETTER | M'sia must engineer a more progressive foreign policy

Malaysiakini

23 August 2021

Abdul Razak Ahmad

LETTER | The president of the American Council on Foreign Policy and renowned diplomat Richard Hass in his latest book wrote, “these are no ordinary times. It will not be business as usual in a world of disarray; as a result, it cannot be foreign policy as usual”.

Pandemic, the resurgence of Taliban, tensed America-China relations, climate change, disruption in the business scene and human life due to rapid technological advancement, on-going political and security crisis in the Middle East, and various incidents and phenomena of global magnitude will continue to influence the dynamism of Malaysia’s foreign policy.

Malaysia must realise that in the midst of global pandemonium, we desperately need new leadership, thinking, and effort. Our foreign policy must not remain in the same paradigm without innovation and a shift to more progressive and contemporary thinking.

In recent years, Malaysia's presence on the international stage has gradually faded and vanished. Ostensibly, Wisma Putra is more inclined to prioritise several countries on the basis of personal connection between the chief of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the country's leader, rather than Malaysia's strategic interest.

Our nation might not be big, but it doesn't mean our influence and presence should also be small. Qatar, UAE, Singapore, Norway, and many other small nations have continued to be key actors with huge presence in the international scene. They have become renowned for their foreign policy ideas and intelligence rather than their size and geographic location.

Unfortunately, while Malaysia was once known as the most prominent developing nation, we now suffer a worrying deficit of international presence due to our stagnant foreign policy. It is the most modern democratic Islamic country and has been an exemplary nation to other Islamic countries.

However, in the course of various global crises, especially ones involving Islamic countries, Malaysia has only been vocal in matters involving Palestine. Malaysia has never actively taken interest in issues such as peace efforts in Libya and Afghanistan, refugees' right to protection, tackling Islamophobia, or even leading any efforts in conflict-torn Islamic countries.

At the Asean stage, Malaysia has failed in matters such as Myanmar, peace negotiations in South Thailand and the southern Philippines, as well as navigating the South China Sea conflict between China and several other Asean member states.

Regional and international cooperation on issues such as Covid-19 pandemic containment, climate change, and global warming, human rights, terrorism and islamophobia are not addressed with more advanced policy through various diplomatic instruments. Direct soft power strategy has never been part of Malaysia's foreign policy.

Malaysia must break out from its traditional foreign policy that has been stifling our true potential. Progressive foreign policies, vast experience in development strategy from the perspective of a developing nation as well as recognition from numerous Islamic countries, if used and done strategically, will give new impetus to Malaysia as an important, influential, and prominent nation.

Malaysia must return to being a bold, objective, and impartial voice in various issues of global importance.

The new prime minister of Malaysia, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, must engineer a more progressive foreign policy. In a world that is in disarray, Malaysia can no longer

be “just another observer”. We must provide global leadership and present novel views, perspectives, and efforts that are different from the perspectives of the West and other superpowers.

Alternative perspectives from developing, Islamic, and multicultural Asian countries are necessary, and Malaysia is in the best position to do so.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source: <https://www.malysiakini.com/letters/588275>