National Security Concept of Malaysian Citizens in the New Century – Based on "Questionnaire Survey"*

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Abstract

National security concept of Malaysian citizens is a direct reflection of the reality of Malaysian national security. Questionnaire survey is employed to reveal and analyze national security concept of Malaysian citizens. Entering the new century, Malaysia has three important national identities: a multi-ethnic country of "constructing united nationalism", a religious country of "slowly Islamizing", and a parliamentary country of "asymmetric two-coalition system". The three identities construct three main aspects of Malaysian national security interests: the contradiction of ethnic-groups, religious contradiction, and political risks caused by the two-coalition system. The three security interests have significantly influenced Malaysian national policies.

Keywords: National Security Concept, Security Identity, Two-Coalition System, Islamization, Ethnic-Groups Politics, Malaysian Security, Malaysian Party Politics

1. Introduction

Ideas structure constructs national identity and national security interests, and agents of state make national policy by means of their cognition over national identity and interests. (Wendt, 1999) In domestic structure, citizens are one of the most important agents. To some extents, cognition of citizens on national security can objectively reflect some significant contents of national security. Questionnaire analysis is a kind of useful and effective method to explore citizens' cognition over national security. In 2013, this research project conducted "questionnaire survey" on "national security concept of Malaysian citizens". The questionnaire survey was conducted in eight typical cities of Malaysia (North: Alor Star, Kota Bharu, Penang; Middle: Kuala Lumpur, Kuantan; South: Johor Bahru; East Malaysia: Kuching, Kota Kinabalu). There were 300 questionnaires for every city. For every city, 300 questionnaires were divided into three groups (for Malay and other aborigines, Chinese, and Indian). Finally, 2,400 effective questionnaires (1,200 for every group) were collected. By analyzing the questionnaires, it found the following significant points of Malaysian citizens' national security concept in the new century.

2. Malaysian National Identity Reflected from Questionnaire Survey

Entering the new century, Malaysia has undergone some significant changes in Malaysian national identities. The questionnaire survey revealed Malaysian citizens' recognition over Malaysian national identities. It discuss in the following three aspects.

2.1 Malaysia Is A Multi-ethnic Country of "Constructing United Nationalism"

For historical reasons, Malaysia has three major ethnic-groups: Malay and other aborigines, Chinese and Indian. When the nation began, Chinese and Indian had often been questioned their loyalty to Malaysia. In reply to the question of "Do you identify your identity as a Malaysian citizen?", 99.6 per cent of those responders answered "Yes". It shows that all ethnic-groups have already had strong sense of national identity after more than half century since the independence of this country. But it does not mean that united nationalism already deeply roots in Malaysia. Malaysian government has always tried to form some kind of strong and united nationalism for the long-term stability of Malaysia. In 2010, the Najib administration put forward the programme of "Satu Malaysia" (One Malaysia).

In the questionnaire, 80.0 per cent of the responders agreed "the Satu Malaysia programme is helpful to construct united nationalism for Malaysia". But when further facing the question of "Do you support to construct the Malaysian nation made of all ethnic-groups?", 80.0 per cent of the responders expressed "do not support". The three reasons with biggest responses are: worry about be assimilated (40.5%), religious factor (38.5%), and worry to hurt own existing benefits and welfare (15.7%). It directly shows it is still far from forming widely-accepted "united nationalism" for national cohesion. Malaysian people are more hopeful of united nationalism in economy than in politics. As Othman, Puthucheary & Kessler (2008) considered that Malaysia in "pluralistic society" has still not make coherence based on mutual recognition for establishing a harmonious society or a united nation. The questionnaire shows Malaysian ethnic-groups have expected to construct united nationalism in the new century, but it is still unknown that how to construct united nationalism in politics.

2.2 Malaysia Is A Religious Country of "Slowly Islamizing"

In Malaysia, Malay believes in Islam, non-Malay ethnic-groups mainly believe in Buddhism, Hinduism, Chartism, etc. In the questionnaire, all Malay responders are Muslim. For non-Malay responders, 40.8 per cent are Buddhist, 29.7 per cent are Christian, 20.5 per cent are Hindu, 8.5 per cent believe in other religions and 1.5 per cent are irreligious. When asked "Do you agree that Islam is in a dominating position in both politics and religion in Malaysia?", 62.9 per cent of Malay responders agreed and 83.8 per cent of non-Malay responders agreed. But as answering "Do you agree that Malaysia is a Muslim country?", only 60.8 per cent of Malay responders disagreed and 87.5 per cent of non-Malay responders disagreed. To compare the two sets of data, a seemingly contradictory phenomenon was found for both Malay and non-Malay – the majorities of them do not deny but reject to accept the fact of "Malaysia as a Muslim country". Actually these responders had different reasons though they disagreed in a same thing. The reasons of the Malay responders focused on religious factor (such as Malaysia does not meet the requirements of "Muslim country"), but the reasons of the non-Malay responders focused on "more than 40 per cent of Malaysia citizens are not Muslim".

This kind of differences based on ethnic-groups just reflects that the Malay ethnic-group and the non-Malay ethnic-groups had opposite cognition on "Malaysia Islamization". The mainstream view of the Malay ethnic-group is that Malaysia should become an Islamic country. The mainstream view of the non-Malay ethnic-groups is that Malaysia should become a secular country. When asked "Do you support Malaysia as a Islamic country?", 100 per cent of Malay responders answered Yes and only 3.1 per cent of non-Malay responders answered Yes. When further asked "Which kind of Islamic country do you support?", 67.5 per cent of the Malay responders chose "a secular Islamic country (like Turkey)" and 26.5 per cent of them chose "an Islamic theocracy (like Iran)". It shows the majority of the Malay responders hoped to establish a warm Islamic country in Malaysia. Actually, the Malay ethnic-group has dominated national political and social development since the birth of this country. Entering the new century, the Malaysia government dominated by the Malay ethnic-group has always slowly put forward national Islamization. In the questionnaire survey, 85.7 per cent of the responders considered that "Malaysia is undergoing a process of Islamization". According to the questionnaire survey, the majority of Malaysian citizens cognized Malaysia identity as a slowly Islamizing religious country.

2.3 Malaysia Is a Parliamentary Country of "Asymmetric Two-Coalition System"

As a British ex-colony, Malaysia inherited the British parliamentary system. But unlike many British ex-colonies (such as New Zealand, Australia, etc.), Malaysia had never formed a real and mature two-party system over the half century since its independence from the United Kingdom. (Soong, 2008; Ye, 2013) This political phenomenon was caused by many factors. In the questionnaire, 50.3 per cent of the responders considered that it owes to the long-term and stable governance of the Barisan Nasional (the National Front) by the UMNO. It cannot be denied that the National Front has indeed successfully led Malaysia to reach the level of medium developed country in the past half century. It made the majority of Malaysian people lost passion to support a powerful counterpart as an opposite political force. Meanwhile, 30.8 per cent of the responders considered a consequence of Malaysian party politics based on ethnic-groups. It is also a truth in Malaysian politics. Historically, to most extents, the independence of Malaysia is the consequence of compromise of three major ethnic-groups of Malaysia. In Malaysia, political party becomes a deputy of single ethnic-group's benefits. The struggle for ethnic-group's benefits has been the central task of Malaysian parties representing each ethnic-group. In the past decades, Malaysian ethnic-groups have basically depended on those corresponding member parties of the National Front for balancing respective ethnic-group's benefits.

Thus, most Malaysian citizens have been lack of demand in constructing an alternative political platform for balancing respective ethnic-groups' benefits. Though being lack of mature two-coalition system in Malaysia, it does not mean the developmental stagnation of Malaysian two-coalition system. Entering the new century, the two-coalition system in Malaysia has made significant development under the comprehensive function of the increasing unsatisfactory with governmental corruption, insecurity of national economy, the enhancement of civil consciousness and so on. Particularly, the establishment of the Pakatan Rakyat (the People's Alliance) in 2008 became a symbolic event of the initial formation of the two-coalition system in Malaysia. This also fits with the result of the questionnaire survey. When asked "Can you accept if the Pakatan Rakyat governs the central government?", 60.1 per cent of the responders and as high as 70.7 per cent of non-Malay responders expressed "can accept". But as further asked "Do you think whether the Pakatan Rakyat can govern the central government within the next decade?", only 30.9 per cent of the responders and 40.3 per cent of non-Malay responders felt positive about this question. It reflected Malaysian citizens' cognition over the situation of the two-coalition system in Malaysia – the opposite parties are growing stronger but still not enough powerful. In other word, Malaysia has an asymmetric two-coalition system.

3. Malaysian Security Interests and national Policies Reflected from Questionnaire Survey

National identity constructs the contents of national security interests. (Wendt, 1999) National security interests can guide the right direction of national policies. In other word, national security interests define the scope of national policies, especially national security policies. The questionnaire reflected three main national identities of Malaysia in the new century. The three identities construct three main aspects of Malaysian national security interests: the contradiction of ethnic-groups, religious contradiction, and political risks caused by the two-coalition system. The questionnaire survey exactly confirmed this viewpoint. As the responders were asked to choose three biggest threats against Malaysia, the top four items were, in order, the contradiction of ethnic-groups, religious contradiction, corruption, and political risks caused by the two-coalition system. The three aspects of Malaysian security interests have significantly influenced national policies of Malaysia in the following three aspects in the new century.

3.1 Moderation

The national security interests made moderation as the cornerstone of Malaysian national policies (especially security policies). Entering the new century, Malaysia has experienced various ordeals by racist forces, extremist religious forces, financial crisis, the sharp rising of the opposite parties, etc. For national stability and social harmony, the Malaysian government has always adhered to moderate policies in national development and social stability. Malaysian Premier Najib Razak significantly pointed out, "The government was committed to moderation and my priority was to ensure peace and harmony in this country." (Harun, 2013 November 3). The moderation policy fits national interests of Malaysia, thus it gained recognition of the majority of Malaysia citizens. This was proved in the questionnaire survey (see Table 1). In the four major aspects, over half of the responders recognized the Malaysian government in moderation policies. For the comparison between Malaysia and its neighbor countries, as high as over 80 per cent responders expressed their recognition over the governmental moderation policies. In addition, a significant phenomenon on *Table 1* is worthy of note – all percentages of Malay responders are significantly higher than that of non-Malay responders. It shows that national moderating policies were more attracting Malay citizens. It also indirectly reflected Malay citizens may gained more ethnic-group interests through national policies of moderation.

Table 1. Malaysian citizens' recognition on Malaysian governmental moderation policies

	Agree with "The Malaysian government's policy in ( ) is worthy of being called moderation policy."			
	Politics	Economy	Religion	Education
Malay responders	67.5%	69.3%	72.8%	75.9%
Non-Malay responders	51.2%	51.9%	60.6%	52.4%
All responders	56.6%	57.7%	64.7%	60.2%
	Agree with "Compared with ASEAN countries, the Malaysian government's policy in ( ) is more worthy of being called moderation policy."			
	Politics	Economy	Religion	Education
Malay responders	85.9%	88.1%	91.2%	90.5%
Non-Malay responders	80.6%	75.9%	85.4%	80.6%
All responders	82.4%	80.0%	87.3%	83.9%

3.2 Balance between Interests of Ethnic-Groups and Religious

In view of national identities as a multi-ethnic and Muslim country, the Malaysian government dominated by Malay who believes Islam has very carefully undergone moderate policies on ethnic groups and religion for national security interests. In the questionnaire survey, the responders were asked to describe the governmental policies on ethnic groups and religion. It had two sets of data based on ethnic-groups. For the first set of data, 71.5 per cent of the Malay responders and 25.7 per cent of the non-Malay responders chose "national Islamization based of ethnic harmony". It reflects that most Malay citizens considered the government sacrificed the interests of Muslim for the interests of other ethnic-groups. Those responders gave some representative cases, such as the government does not prohibit drinking and non-Halal food in all public places, does not close those amusement places where not follow the Islamic doctrine, does not push enforcement of the Hudud law, and so on. For the second set of data, 25.3 per cent of the Malay responders and 70.7 per cent of the non-Malay responders chose "ethnic harmony based of national Islamization".

It reflects most non-Malay citizens considered the government sacrificed the interests of other ethnic-groups for the interests of Muslim. Those responders also gave some representative cases, such as the government has continued enhancing the status of Islam as national region in Malaysia, carried out new economic policies that were heavily biased towards the interest of the Malay ethnic-group, and so on. The above two sets of data just reflects moderation of Malaysian national policies on the ethnic groups and religion. On the one hand, the Malaysian government must push national Islamization because it is natural demand of Muslim who is the majority of national population. Thus, the Malaysian government must show its firm and uncompromising face to Muslim citizens when it pushed nation Islamization for gaining the political support of the majority of national citizens. On the other hand, the Malaysian government also must avoid any radical way to push national Islamization because non-Muslin still is amounting to more than 40% of national population. Thus, the Malaysian government also must show its thoughtful and responsible face to non-Muslim citizens as it rejected any attempt to accelerate national Islamization for avoiding to arouse deadly contradictory conflict in ethnic-groups. Overall, the Malaysian government has always tried to seek to a delicate balance between the interests of ethnic-groups and religious.

3.3 To Deal with the Influence of Two-Coalition System

The forming two-coalition system has significantly been influencing Malaysian national policies in the new century. Since the 12th General Election in 2008, the fast-growing People's Alliance has significantly changed Malaysian political map at both central and local levels. It is a landmark event for Malaysian two-coalition system. For its positive influence to the governmental policies, 90.3 per cent of the responders believed that it makes great advantage to supervise the government, fight corruption and raise national competitiveness. And 66.4 per cent of the non-Malay responders believed that it is helpful for non-Malay ethnic-group to gain more ethnic-groups' interests. Actually, the Malaysian government has indeed been adjusting its policies for higher recognition by the people, such as the Satu Malaysia programme, to increase governmental funding for non-Malay ethnic-groups' schools, and so on.

As to its negative influence to the governmental policies, 80.2 per cent of the responders considered that it may cause the governmental speculation for vote, the abuse of governmental resources for zero-sum political struggle with the opposite parties, and reducing investments or aids by the central government to the states of the opposite parties. And 73.9 per cent of the non-Malay responders considered racist contradiction by fierce political struggle. Actually every now and then, racist remarks were spoken out from the governmental senior officials in recent years. For example, after the elections, Mahathir bin Mohamad (former Prime Minister), Muhyiddin bin Yassin (Deputy Prime Minister), Adnan bin Yaakob (Menteri Besar of Pahang) (etc.) publicly made racist remark, "the Chinese ethnic-group are ungrateful", "the Chinese ethnic-group are unpatriotic", "the Chinese ethnic-group are selfish and acquisitive". (Zeng, 2013 November 12; *China Press*, 2013 May 6) Overall, it is still unknown of what Malaysia two-coalition system will bring Malaysian national security.

4. Conclusion

Entering the new century, both international and national structures have undergone a series of significant transformation. Malaysia has faced various challenges to national security. Malaysian citizens have their recognition over Malaysian national security. According to analysis on "questionnaire survey", it had revealed some significant contents of national security concept of Malaysian citizens. Malaysian citizens recognized three important national identities: a multi-ethnic country of "constructing united nationalism", a religious country of "slowly Islamizing", and a parliamentary country of "asymmetric two-coalition system". Malaysian citizens identified three major threats against Malaysian national security interests: the contradiction of ethnic-groups, religious contradiction, and political risks caused by the two-coalition system. For national interests, Malaysian citizens felt three significant characters of national policies of the Malaysian government: moderation, balance between interests of ethnic-groups and religious, and to deal with the influence of two-coalition system. In general, Malaysian national security in the eyes of Malaysian citizens is full of various challenges in the new century.

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