

## **BRIDGING BORDERS: THE ROLE OF SHARED SECURITY IN MALAYSIA-CHINA RELATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The bilateral relations between Malaysia and China have experienced both tensions and opportunities in recent years, particularly shaped by disputes in the South China Sea (SCS). Despite these challenges, this study highlights a renewed phase of collaboration centred on the framework of shared security. Shared security is an emerging paradigm in international relations, emphasising cooperation on nontraditional security (NTS) issues that transcend traditional geopolitical rivalries. This framework offers a novel lens for analysing how states with conflicting interests can foster diplomatic understanding through common security objectives. This article examines three critical NTS issues that bind Malaysia and China:*

*counterterrorism, environmental protection, and maritime piracy. By analysing these areas through the principles of shared interests and shared power, the study demonstrates how shared security can pave the way for constructive engagement and mutual trust. The findings argue that this approach not only transforms traditional notions of bilateral relations but also establishes a robust foundation for sustainable peace and regional stability. The case study of Malaysia-China relations provides empirical evidence supporting the theoretical innovation of shared security, illustrating its potential as a pragmatic tool for reconciling conflicts and advancing global security discourse.*

**Keywords:** Shared security, nontraditional security, diplomacy, Malaysia, China

## INTRODUCTION

The bilateral relations between Malaysia and China have been shaped by both cooperation and conflict, with the South China Sea (SCS) dispute being a persistent point of contention. This dispute canters on overlapping territorial claims, with China asserting sovereignty over vast areas through its controversial “nine-dash line” and Malaysia contesting these claims over regions like the Luconia Shoals, which fall within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Chinese incursions, including fishing and energy exploration activities in Malaysian-claimed waters, have further complicated relations. However, despite these challenges, Malaysia has adopted a measured response, favouring diplomacy and maintaining a tacit mutual understanding to prevent the escalation of hostilities. Against this backdrop of strained yet restrained relations, this study investigates the potential for Malaysia and China to transcend traditional security rivalries through the framework of shared security. Shared security refers to collaborative efforts by states to address nontraditional security (NTS) challenges, which are transnational, multidimensional, and beyond the capacity of any single nation to resolve independently. These challenges include terrorism, environmental degradation, and maritime piracy—threats that have increasingly dominated the security landscape and necessitated innovative cooperative approaches.

This article contributes to the emerging discourse on shared security by proposing it as a practical and innovative approach to managing NTS challenges and fostering stable bilateral relations. By focusing on shared vulnerabilities and mutual benefits, shared security has the potential to bridge historical divides and offer a sustainable model for Malaysia-China relations in an era of complex global threats. This article further argues that shared security provides a novel paradigm for improving Malaysia-China relations,

emphasising principles of shared interests and shared power to tackle common threats. This approach not only offers a pathway to manage NTS issues but also redefines bilateral engagement in a way that reduces dependence on traditional security mechanisms, which often exacerbate tensions. By focusing on mutual vulnerabilities rather than unilateral advantages, shared security offers a more inclusive and pragmatic tool for fostering diplomatic understanding between traditional rival states.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate how shared security can enhance bilateral cooperation between Malaysia and China. While historical and traditional conflicts have constrained their relations, the growing significance of NTS threats provides an opportunity to reshape their engagement. This study moreover highlights three key areas of NTS cooperation—counterterrorism, environmental protection, and maritime piracy—as critical examples where shared security can serve as a unifying framework. To address the primary objective, this article is structured into two parts. The first part explores the theoretical underpinnings of shared security, situating it within the broader transformation of international security paradigms. This includes a critique of traditional security approaches that prioritise national sovereignty at the expense of transnational collaboration. The second part provides empirical evidence of Malaysia and China’s engagement in NTS cooperation, demonstrating how shared security has already begun to influence their bilateral relations positively.

## **THEORIES REVISITED: INTRODUCING SHARED SECURITY**

National and international security have become an amalgamation of diverse theories and concepts, sometimes widely discussed as realism and neoliberalism theories, i.e., traditional security. The ideas of constructivists and human security also strengthen NTS. Each of these concepts has its own specific areas and understandings, each characterised by unique characteristics, classifications, identities, and models. However, the debate between these theories is only encircled by the concern of security at any level (Haftendorn 1991; Krause and Williams 1996; Baldwin 1997). Interestingly, all these—realism, neoliberalism, constructivists and human security—understandings are part of international security and international relations.

Realism understands that security mainly emphasises national interests and the nation-state. Furthermore, it believes that the state’s survival is centred on defence, military, and security policies (Morgenthau and Thompson 1985). Waltz (1979) tried to build defensive realism, while Mearsheimer

(1990) presented offensive realism with the maximum power thrust of the state. Indeed, military power and capabilities have remained the main focus of both scholars. Similarly, Walt (1985) coined neorealism and recognised the position of power in international politics. The notion of security, surrounded by military power and power politics, remained a prime approach for scholars until the 1980s.

The theories of neoliberalism within the framework of international politics concede a more comprehensive understanding of security. Neoliberals challenged realists' ideas of national security and power politics with the concept of complex interdependence, which emerged with the growing significance and interconnectivity of the economy (Keohane and Nye 1973). Particularly, neoliberals emphasise that security depends on international institutions and cooperation (Krasner 1982). They believe that smooth and cooperative relations between states are more critical than gloomy and distrustful realist interpretations, despite sharing similar basic notions of self-help and anarchy and witnessing states as logical, profitable maximisers.

The constructivist theory assumes that security is a socially established phenomenon with threats, interests, and capabilities (Wendt 1995). It suggests that security observations differ between actors, time, and space. Furthermore, it shares information about a social structure; for example, the security of the state or community results from socialisation and, accordingly, is part of the shared learning practice (Levy 1994).

After reviewing these foundational security paradigms—realism, neoliberalism, and constructivism—Haftendorn (1991) clarified and distinguished three interrelated concepts: national security, international security, and global security, each addressing different levels of security concerns. All three notions of security are constructed around identifying essential changes in the international system. Haftendorn (1991) tried to link national security to Thomas Hobbes's emphasis on the sovereign state as the primary guarantor of security, international security to Hugo Grotius's advocacy for rule-based cooperation among states, and global security to Immanuel Kant's vision of perpetual peace through universal principles. Although these philosophers were from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their ideas remain foundational and influential in contemporary security theories.

At first glance, the notion of national security finds its roots in the principles of political realism propagated by Hobbes. On the contrary, the idea of global security embraces the Kantian tradition, envisioning a global community where enlightened individuals oversee political processes.

Meanwhile, the paradigm of international security gains meaning through the formation of security regimes and the construction of international institutions, as Grotius advocates. These perspectives on security illustrate the diverse approaches and philosophies that shape the understanding and implementation of security measures at different levels—national, global, and international (Haftendorn 1991). Haftendorn’s perspective on national, international, and global security primarily focusses on whether the state is responsible for its security or depends on good relations with other states. However, the transformation of security has even broadened the scholarship of security, and NTS has become one of the emerging fields of study.

As Ullman (1983) argues, security threats should not be viewed solely as external, militaristic, or related to tactical retreats. Misunderstanding this broader perspective can cause states to overlook internal or shared security challenges, leaving them vulnerable and unable to effectively address these issues. Parker (2014) believes that NTS issues present formidable obstacles to the well-being and endurance of individuals and nations alike. These challenges originate predominantly from non-military sources, including climate change, scarcity of resources, pandemic diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and transnational crime. The complex nature of these threats extends beyond national borders, rendering unilateral remedies inadequate and underscoring the need for comprehensive approaches that encompass political, economic, and social dimensions. In navigating the realm of NTS, embracing diversity, adaptability, and interdisciplinary strategies becomes imperative for safeguarding collective security and well-being (Parker 2014).

### **Expansion of the Concept of Security**

Apart from the three concepts mentioned above, we propose that there are other concepts like postcolonialist security, human security, critical security, poststructuralist security, Copenhagen School, and globalisation, which are also relevant. Some scholars like Buzan and Hansen (2009) believe that these concepts are the outcome of the post-Cold War era and go beyond the rigid notion of realism. Consequently, these concepts refer to a new level of analysis or extend to new security dimensions, such as human security.

Human security represents the most relevant model of new security threats, broadly protecting human beings. The origin of human security can be traced back to the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) document (UNDP 1994). The key seven elements of this concept

are: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, political security, personal security, and community security (Paris 2001). It seems that the elements of human security are fully concerned with human life, but with standard guidelines, have continued to advance and adapt to new challenges and perspectives. Moreover, the concept of human security is the opposite of realist security concepts because, in human security, the human/individual is the main object of analysis. In this regard, Biscop (2005) explains that the concept of human security reorients attention from the state towards the individual and their community, recognising and tackling a diverse array of threats that jeopardise their welfare, encompassing both military and non-military dimensions. Instead of regarding the security of the state as the ultimate objective, human security is regarded as a necessary foundation and a means to guarantee the well-being of the people. This paradigm shift emphasises the intrinsic value of individuals and their communities in promoting a comprehensive and inclusive approach to security.

Some scholars believe that NTS results from human security and its key elements (Caballero-Anthony 2016). NTS seeks to contain the proportion of human security as a part of the national security concept. In this context, NTS differs from the concepts mentioned above and includes areas of military and non-military issues. The proponents of this understanding often insist that political, environmental, and economic interaction should be primarily crucial for NTS security (Hauge and Ellingsen 1998). NTS issues like environmental degradation, economic crises, and terrorism can pose a direct security threat to national security. Moreover, the concepts of international relations and security mentioned above have distinct identities and classifications, but they often reveal significant gaps when applied to states with differing political systems, such as Malaysia and China. Malaysia, as a democratic country, tends to interpret these concepts through Western frameworks, while China, as a socialist state, approaches them from a distinct ideological perspective. Addressing this gap, this study has developed a new analytical framework of shared security to counter NTS challenges by focussing on three common issues between Malaysia and China, namely terrorism, environmental degradation, and maritime piracy.

Before moving on to develop the principles of shared security, one can ask why shared security is relevant after having discussed the many security theories and concepts above. This study argues that shared security is based on three dimensions. The first dimension raises a question about guaranteeing security. In other words, who else will benefit from security besides the state(s)? Is it only a state, or are individuals and groups included?

On this question, Haftendorn (1991) asserts that, in the realm of security, it is imperative to embrace a multifaceted approach beyond narrow confines and which extends to various areas of concern. Security should not be limited to a singular issue or constrained by a specific level of analysis. Instead, it should encompass a broad spectrum of considerations, recognising the interconnected nature of threats and the need for comprehensive responses. By adopting a holistic perspective, we can better address the complexities and intricacies of security challenges in a dynamic and ever-evolving world.

The second dimension examines the sources of security threats. Except for direct military threats, which sources must be involved in security? As Baldwin (1997) observes, security should be analysed on different levels, like “individuals, families, societies, states, the international system, or humanity as a whole” (6). Krause and Williams (1996) moreover claim that there is a need for a broad and shared approach to security that incorporates a broader spectrum of possible threats, spanning environmental and economic concerns as well as migration and human rights. Likewise, Adler (1992) has explored many different NTS issues, which are mainly focused on individuals, societies, and states. The third and final dimension leads to different options that could be used to avoid such security threats. Thus, a deeper and broader understanding of shared security would include all collective/bilateral efforts to handle NTS issues. In this context, Baldwin (1997) emphasises that the pursuit of security, much like the pursuit of wealth, can be achieved through multiple approaches. This perspective underscores the flexibility and adaptability of shared security, allowing states to collaboratively address diverse challenges through tailored strategies.

### **Shared Security**

The origin of shared security can be traced back to ancient Chinese philosophy. In *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, Jung et al. (2011) discuss theories of coexistence and harmony, emphasising their relevance for maintaining societal balance. These principles provide valuable insights into achieving security objectives and offer a universal framework for addressing common challenges. In contemporary Chinese political philosophy, this idea has evolved into the concept of “a community with a shared future for mankind” (Xi 2017), which has been prominently advocated by Chinese leaders in recent years. This modern interpretation emphasises global cooperation, mutual respect, and collective efforts to address common challenges, aligning closely with the principles of shared security.

According to Tang (1998), a universal response to common issues generates the scholarship of shared security along the path of security implementation. This study conceptualises shared security as a notion concerning security threats in a general manner, which is more extensive than the traditional concepts—as mentioned earlier. In other words, security is no longer perceived as the subject of rigid, traditional, military, and state-centric notions, but has transformed. Shared security offers policymakers and academics a new, deeper, and broader understanding (Krause and Williams 1996). Shared security argues that the state is not a single security entity because new entities, like non-governmental organisations, non-state actors, individuals, and communities, have emerged with new variations of security (NTS) challenges.

The shared security concept transcends the traditional understanding of security, intensifying beyond state-centric perspectives. It proposes a comprehensive perception of contemporary security threats, recognising the connection of various entities such as non-state actors, non-governmental organisations, individuals, and communities. Shared security endorses a shared approach to security, where the safety and well-being of all entities are prioritised. At its core, shared security is led by the principles of shared interest and shared power, compressing the notion that peace, security, and human development are mutually interconnected and beneficial for all. This model underlines the belief that “my security is your security” by emphasising the significance of cooperation in addressing NTS issues to promote peace and prosperity. This shared security approach would work with several actors (state and non-state) that are involved in strengthening healthy bilateral relations, as it emphasises shared interest and power instead of traditional security or national interest orientation. It assumes nations should collaborate to prioritise NTS issues where they can cooperate easily (Kennedy and Hallowell 2021). It also discards such policies based on military and fear narratives.

This model also requires changes in policymaking because it would enhance peaceful collaboration between the two states. Both nations face multiple challenges posed by NTS issues, some of which have escalated into national security threats. States also need to ensure that those NTS issues, which are affecting them at the same level and possibly creating direct conflict among them, need to be dealt with mutually or collectively. The constant work on such issues creates trust and a common understanding that benefits shared security. In short, shared interest and shared power are extremely constructive principles of shared security that provide shared efforts to deal with NTS issues beyond the traditional security issues.



Shared interest and shared power provide the additional base for the commitment required for NTS threats. Shared interest is an ethical form of shared policy based on priorities and common goals for common issues, i.e., NTS issues. The control of terrorism, environmental pollution, and maritime piracy in any one country will benefit others since “my security is your security” and “my interest is your interest”. This all happens when shared interest increases for the following reasons. First, the leading role of shared interest is to indicate shared problems and interests with the other state(s). When one state obtains concrete information about any NTS issue(s) and shares it with the other, that act increases interest and cooperation between two conflicting states. Second, information on shared problem(s) redirects the attention of conflicting state(s) from traditional security to NTS issues that unite their interests, i.e., shared interests. This ethical principle provides many reasons for communicating and cooperating, which reduces tension and opens new options for normalising relations, thereby facilitating the process of shared security.

Shared power has been used at different levels of national and international politics to manage particular situations (Crosby 2010). Shared power is a part of dealing with expanded NTS issues with shared authority across national, regional, and international barriers. The transnational NTS issues are complicated to deal with single-handedly by any state, but a shared power would work. The power-sharing method would be an excellent option for states to develop a shared understanding of NTS issues and pursue solutions—with “my power is your power”.

Shared security also leads to collective planning, which hints at the proposal of a shared power process, where states negotiate and ensure that all stakeholders have authority and a voice. It is an idea that tries to create new policy implementations with valuable impact. Shared power is a complex tool because power has always been considered a part of the realism school of thought. In shared security, power-sharing is a new tool that enables states to formulate alternate strategies for managing complex security issues. For example, when addressing maritime piracy, either Malaysia or China may seek the authority to operate beyond its own territorial waters. However, without collaborative efforts and agreements, neither state can effectively tackle this issue single-handedly. If it works with other states that share specific powers, the problem can be managed.

Shared power insists on resolving or managing NTS issues with specific changes in security policies that would help states develop and improve mutual or collective working together. It outlines and endorses a

shared mission and agrees on shared power action steps. In other words, NTS challenges are at the forefront now, and the impact and importance of shared power engagements are more evident than ever. It would build trust and a shared vision for shared security.

In summary, shared security offers a new theoretical foundation with the help of shared interest and shared power for good bilateral relationships while dealing with NTS issues. When the two countries do not have good relations due to traditional hostility and are worried about correlative security cooperation, shared security would be used as a starting point for bilateral security cooperation on NTS issues. In the case of Malaysia and China, shared security is an independent variable, and NTS issues are a dependent variable for developing correlative security cooperation. Both states have undoubtedly used different channels to resolve NTS issues and have had some success. However, the continuity of this success could be improved due to traditional security matters like territorial, ideological, and resource-sharing disputes, while other NTS and important issues remained low-intensity.

### **Limitations of Shared Security**

Despite its many benefits, shared security nonetheless has certain limits in terms of multilateral or bilateral relations between states. It is essential to recognise that shared security proposes a promising ground for cooperation on NTS issues. However, some elements limit the general effectiveness and applicability of shared security. As mentioned earlier, shared security focusses more on non-military threats. In contrast, traditional security threats, such as armed aggression, territorial disputes, and nuclear proliferation, may not be effectively engaged with shared security.

Sovereignty is one of the essential components of statehood, and any sovereignty concerns may limit the operationalisation of shared security. States have prioritised their national interests and security issues, which may not be compromised over shared interests. Sovereignty also emphasises geopolitical dynamics, as Malaysia is positioning an alliance with Western powers, while China has its own position in international politics. This situation may limit the impact of shared security cooperation between the two countries.

Financial, human, and technological resources may also limit states' ability to be involved in shared security. The states' budget may limit the allocation of these resources, with possible unequal distribution and competing priorities. Historical and territorial disputes also limit the extent of shared security because trust and political will may not always exist among

sharing states, especially in cases like the SCS dispute between Malaysia and China—and their historical enmity—which may hinder cooperation on specific NTS issues.

Despite many inherent limitations, shared security presents a vital opportunity for fostering cooperation among states on common issues, i.e., NTS issues. While the limits mentioned above may challenge the efficacy of shared security, recognising its effects would address these constraints to maximise the prospects of shared security. Malaysia and China should actively dialogue, promote mutual trust, and develop reasonable solutions to cope with NTS challenges, especially in terrorism, environmental degradation, and maritime piracy. Even on the limited issues of NTS, continuous cooperation can strengthen their bilateral relations and benefit regional stability.

## **NTS POLICY OF MALAYSIA**

Since its independence, Malaysia has gone through many defence and security strategies and practices but has never been guided or driven by any rigid plan. The present National Defence Policy is a comprehensive expression of the Malaysian Security Council Act (Laws of Malaysia 2016). Gradually, the focus of Malaysian security has crossed traditional obstacles and gone beyond defending national boundaries and sovereignty. It is a new dimension of irregular security challenges like counterterrorism, environmental protection, and maritime piracy that Malaysia is paying more attention to (Kwek 2021). These challenges possess the capacity to question governmental authority and pose a threat to regional security and stability.

After the end of the Cold War, the unipolar world shifted its focus to human development and globalisation; which changed Malaysia's perception of security and threats. In 1992, then Minister of Defence Malaysia, Najib Tun Razak, stated that security is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions, including military and non-military elements. He emphasised that achieving comprehensive security requires a holistic approach, addressing political stability, economic strength, and societal unity, alongside maintaining sufficient military capability (Teh and Ngu 2016). This perspective reflects the interconnectedness of various security dimensions, highlighting that military strength alone is insufficient without addressing the socio-economic and political foundations of national resilience. Najib Tun Razak again reiterated a similar perspective in September 2000, underscoring the precarious nature of economic prosperity without political stability and the

inherent vulnerability of all facets of society without the means to safeguard the nation's wealth (2001). His statements collectively underscore the need for a multidimensional approach to security, integrating military preparedness with broader socio-political and economic strategies.

In the current situation, many regional hotspots or flashpoints could affect the crisis, such as the Spratly Islands dispute in the SCS, the China-Taiwan conflict, and the border problem of Malaysia with neighbouring states. Moreover, all the regional states, including Malaysia, are expanding their modern military assets (Abdullah 2010). No doubt, traditional security threats are still alive for Malaysian security. However, challenges such as illegal immigrants, extremism and terrorism, cyber security, natural disasters, transnational crime, pandemics, and food and energy security have also gained attention and become part of Malaysia's National Security Policy (NSP) (National Security Council Malaysia 2019).

By associating shared security with NPS, we find that the objectives and priorities are closely aligned. As shared security, NSP also emphasises the significance of addressing NTS security challenges beyond traditional security issues. Shared security is embedded in shared power and interest principles with collective responsibility and cooperation, while NSP offers a framework for collaborative action. Malaysia's NSP reflects the idea of "my security is your security" by recognising that one state's security issues often affect the other. Likewise, the idea of "my power is your power" is acknowledged by the NSP response that compelling security needs shared resources, interest, and expertise. Recognising NTS issues highlights the position of alliances and partnerships within its framework. It allows other nations to cooperate and tackle complex security challenges more efficiently. By reviewing the national and regional dynamics, Malaysia has formulated its NSP, which deals with different security threats. This policy focusses on the national core values of Malaysia, which safeguard it from all forms of threats, both traditional and nontraditional. The NSP document has not used the term "nontraditional security" but is mentioned as non-physical threats (National Security Council Malaysia 2019). All perceived threats are represented as part of the national security environment, which represents the maintenance of national security, sovereignty, and public order.

At present, the national security environment of Malaysia has become more complex, with both state and non-state actors posing security threats. Meanwhile, the NSP has prioritised the issues; on that list, illegal immigrants and refugees are at the top. According to the NSP, NTS negatively impacts economic, social, criminal, and political areas. Extremism and terrorism are

also leading security challenges for Malaysia. There are reports that elements of extremism and terrorism have penetrated the country and can trigger chaos. Likewise, cyber security, natural disasters, transnational crimes, pandemics, food security, and energy security have been discussed in the NSP of Malaysia, which also shows Malaysia's awareness of NTS threats.

In Malaysia's Defence White Paper, published on 2 December 2019, an array of strategic initiatives has been set in motion, encompassing the revised National Military Strategy and the Defence Capacity Plan, both aimed at evaluating defence policies regarding human resources (Ministry of Defence 2020). A comprehensive review of the National Defence Industry Policy is underway, exploring its current landscape and potential enhancements. This multifaceted approach signifies a commitment to thorough assessment and continuous refinement within national defence policy (Kwek 2021). According to the former Minister of Defence Malaysia, despite the non-involvement in armed conflicts with other nations, the nation finds itself grappling with territorial disputes and nontraditional threats that extend across the borders. This complex landscape demands the country adopt a proactive stance, implementing various measures to safeguard its interests and address emerging challenges head-on. With a keen awareness of the dynamic nature of the security environment, Malaysia remains steadfast in the pursuit of effective strategies to ensure stability and to protect the sovereignty.

## **NTS POLICY OF CHINA**

China has become one of the world's emerging powers, consequently enlarging its involvement in NTS. The making of China's NSP has gone through many processes of interpretation, expansion, and reflection. Much has been done to develop a national framework that covers both national and international aspects of NTS. Meanwhile, China's involvement in NTS cooperation has been enhanced by the approaches of shared future and global security initiatives (GSIs)<sup>1</sup> (Xiaochun 2018; Rajagopalan 2022). Apart from NTS, Chinese expansion in the military has also raised concerns among its neighbours and opponents. However, there is no doubt that NTS has opened new diplomatic doors for China since the introduction of its "new security concept" in 1996 (Hongyi 2021: 506).

In 1996, China operationalised a new security concept as a critical element of NTS, which primarily assists its development agendas and national security (Morton 2011). Its main agendas were orientated towards food,

energy, health, and health security, while terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism (the three evil forces) continued to receive special attention. This momentum sparked a debate regarding NTS and its importance for future Chinese ambitions and diplomatic connectivity. After almost two decades, NTS has become a vital tool for its national and foreign policies. In 1998, China published its Defence White Paper, which recommended a “new security concept” (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China 1998: 4). Consequently, the White Paper of 2000 openly stated that a foundation of defence policy should have been built upon the bedrock of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2000a).

By embracing the development of an innovative security concept and forging a fair and balanced new international order, China has laid the groundwork for the profound assurance of global peace and security. This entails a dynamic approach that acknowledges the intricate interplay of diverse factors while fostering collaboration and fairness as cornerstones of China’s collective efforts (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2000b). The new security concept created more room for NTS in Chinese national security and foreign policy. In 2002, Beijing initiated the concept of NTS as a fundamental aspect of its diplomatic agenda. It entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ASEAN to collaborate on NTS efforts.

In 2003, President Hu Jintao gave a new shape to the NSP of China and emphasised “governing for the people” (National Institute for Defense Studies 2004: 95). Later, in 2004, the Defence White Paper was published, which introduced a new notion of “comprehensive national security” (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2008a: 6, 34). As the White Paper states, China is committed to synchronising its development with its security concerns. It diligently strives to augment its national strategic capabilities by utilising diverse security measures to effectively address conventional and NTS challenges. This approach aims to achieve comprehensive national security across the political, economic, military, and social domains (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2000b).

This new motion provided an open platform for the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to develop historic missions of the NSP, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the rules of the Communist Party of China. Following the same trajectory, the Defence White Paper of 2009 prominently incorporated the notion of NTS, introducing a fresh concept known as “military operations

other than war” (Siebens and Lucas 2022: 5). Dai Bingguo (Secretary-General of the Foreign Affairs Leading Group from April 2005 to March 2013) expressed that China intended to leverage its expanding influence to engage actively in cooperative efforts concerning NTS matters. These cooperative endeavours encompassed various issues, ranging from natural disasters and energy security to international peacekeeping, thereby supporting China’s development strategy (Bingguo 2010).

Another perception is that Beijing has ambitious to dominate the SCS with its armed forces but under the umbrella of NTS policy (Ghiselli 2018). In addition to the initiatives for NTS cooperation, the White Paper has also advocated for advancing overseas operational capabilities. These capabilities encompass emergency response and rescue, safeguarding merchant vessels at sea, facilitating the evacuation of Chinese nationals, and furnishing dependable security support to protect China’s interests abroad (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China 2008b). Eventually, after the introduction of new security concept and comprehensive national security, Xi Jinping ascended to power in 2012 as started to give more focus on broadened perspective of the NTS dimensions. In his first tenure, he coined the notion of “holistic national security” and now a “global security initiative” (*Xinhua* 2014). These initiatives highlight China’s evolving NTS policy, positioning it as a global leader in promoting collective security measures while addressing shared threats.

## **NTS COOPERATION BETWEEN MALAYSIA AND CHINA**

It is not easy to evaluate the relationship between Malaysia and China. The formal descriptions from both countries repeatedly emphasise the long history of their cooperation and friendship. While these descriptions are, to some extent, embellished, they are not completely fabricated. The two states have recently developed strong bilateral investment, trade, and people-to-people contacts to maintain friendly bilateral relations (Ngeow 2021). As per their national security policies, both nations are aware of NTS issues and consider them significant security threats. NTS issues have redefined rigid security traditions and opened opportunities to seek global, regional, and bilateral cooperation (Thakur and Newman 2004).

Shared security is a good option for Malaysia and China; both have balanced economies that expand the possibility for shared interests. Apart from the economy, Kuala Lumpur and Beijing have strengthened bilateral

and regional (under the manifestation of ASEAN) schemes to encourage NTS cooperation, especially in terrorism, environmental protection, and maritime piracy. In this context, the analysis of NTS cooperation on a bilateral level is important to understand in further detail.

### **Counter Terrorism Cooperation**

Terrorism is one of the leading and most common security challenges in the world. Terrorist groups and organisations have created havoc for ordinary people. The concept of shared security would establish a strong framework of cooperation and mutual trust in counter-terrorism between Malaysia and China. It offers a comprehensive approach that incorporates both shared interests and shared power. Their bilateral cooperation would promote diplomatic dialogue and invest in joint counter-terrorism operations, strategies, and technologies. It has the potential to increase regional stability, reduce terrorism risks, and promote global efforts to combat terrorism effectively.

In the case of counter-terrorism cooperation between Malaysia and China, shared security encapsulates the principle of shared interest that emphasises that the interests of one nation are intertwined with those of another, demanding collective efforts to cope with common (terrorism) threats. Its idea of “my security is your security” underlines the integration of security dynamics between two states. Malaysia and China are facing similar challenges posed by terrorist activities, such as cross-border terrorism, the proliferation of terrorist networks, and extremist ideologies. The shared nature of terrorist threats recognises the principle of shared interest between both states, which develops accommodating initiatives to enhance their collective security position against terrorism. Moreover, the principle of shared power with the notion of “my power is your power” highlights the significance of leveraging mutual resources and capabilities to counter terrorism effectively. This principle describes power-sharing in terms of sharing intelligence, joint military exercises, coordination of law enforcement efforts, and capacity-building initiatives between Malaysia and China. Shared power can strengthen their ability to prevent, detect, and respond to terrorist threats within their territories.

The terrorist threats to Malaysia and China are not the same; Malaysia is under threat from Islamic extremist groups from two fronts, first domestic Malaysian Mujahideen Movement (*Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia*) and second regional Islamic Congregation (*Jemaah Islamiyah*), Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and Abu Sayyaf Group (The Counter Extremism Project 2021). At the same time, China is only facing domestic terrorism



from (East Turkistan) extremists in the Xinjiang, Uygur autonomous region. According to Chinese authorities, East Turkistan has backing from international terrorist organisations (Guo 2006).

Malaysia is dealing with terrorism with solid policies and legislation like the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015, the Special Measures Against Terrorism in Foreign Countries Act 2015, and the National Security Council Act 2016. Kuala Lumpur has always been interested in working with other countries to prevent terrorist movements. In the same context, Malaysia has adopted a deradicalisation policy with a partnership of different national and international stakeholders. It has also developed a Counter Messaging Centre for monitoring terrorist activities on social media and other sources (Hamidi 2016).

China firmly believes that terrorism is a common enemy of humanity. It has also formulated two principles for responding to terrorism: non-intervention and non-interference. Both principles mainly safeguard China's internal and external stability. There are specific reports against China for human rights violations under counter-terrorism. However, Beijing categorically denies these claims, arguing that they are an internal matter in China (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2022). Due to the SCS conflict, China and Southeast Asian states do not have good security cooperation. Now, things have changed a lot in terms of NTS issues, especially in counter-terrorism cooperation. China is working with Southeast Asian countries on a regional and bilateral level to fight against terrorism.

Malaysia and China have developed bilateral connections to counter terrorism with bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding (*Xinhua* 2010). Both nations had established mechanisms to deal with terrorism. Between 2014 and 2018, the momentum for mutual connectivity peaked as leaders from both countries engaged in reciprocal visits and reached a consensus on counter-terrorism strategy. Both sides were ready to share information on counter-terrorism to strengthen cooperation (*The Star* 2018). Overall, terrorism is a common problem for both states, and again, it can open a new channel for shared security.

### **Cooperation on Environmental Degradation**

The concept of shared security in Malaysia and China's cooperation on environmental degradation contains a comprehensive method incorporating environmental protection with diplomatic connectivity, policy coordination, and public awareness. It offers to establish a shared framework of shared

interest and shared power for environmental protection. It also helps both nations align their environmental protection aims and goals to strengthen mutual understanding and bilateral relations. Shared security thus highlights the integration of environmental challenges between nations through the principle of shared interest, which supports the idea of “my security is your security”. Malaysia and China mutually recognise that environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, and air pollution pose shared or common threats to their ecological systems, public health, and socioeconomic progress. It is also clear that environmental degradation in one country can have significant effects on another country. Therefore, there is a shared interest in protecting and preserving the environment for generations.

The principle of shared power with the idea of “my power is your power” highlights the importance of shared capabilities in coping with environmental challenges effectively. Environmental cooperation between Malaysia and China with this principle encourages sharing scientific research, financial resources, and technological innovations to tackle shared or common environmental threats. Their joint plans, such as ecosystem restoration projects, environmental impact assessments, and renewable energy development, can strengthen their shared power for environmental sustainability.

The environmental problems in China are the outcome of its rapid industrialisation. It poses threats not only to the livelihood and health of its people but also to climate change efforts. In recent years, China has been considered the world’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions (Maizland 2021). It suffers from terrible air pollution. Its extensive carbon-intensive manufacturing has caused further environmental challenges, such as soil contamination and water scarcity. If China continues with this momentum, it will face more severe consequences of climate change in the coming years. Malaysia too is most affected by climate change (Lum 2022). It has been experiencing extreme weather events like increasing temperatures (heat waves), floods, water and air pollution, and rising sea levels recently, with consequences on the health and socioeconomic disparity of the people (Sababathy 2022). It is believed that Malaysia, like other fast-developing nations, is facing climate change driven by industrialisation and urbanisation. Quick deforestation, random mining practices, accelerated expansion, and poor planning impact the country’s resources.

Malaysia and China are cooperating on environmental degradation on regional and bilateral levels. At the regional level, China actively collaborates with ASEAN. In Beijing, on 24 May 2011, ASEAN and China jointly established the China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Centre (CAEC).

The CAEC assumes the vital role of serving as a window, a bridge, and a platform, facilitating environmental cooperation between China and ASEAN. As a member of ASEAN, Malaysia promises to enhance cooperation in alignment with the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework for sustainable development. It has adopted the Framework of the ASEAN-China Environmental Cooperation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2025) (ASEAN 2021). The regional juncture of both states is helping them to strengthen exchanges of best practices and experiences, as well as pragmatic cooperation and dialogue in the field of the environment.

Malaysia and China have signed an MoU on water resources at the bilateral level. The cooperation between the Water Resources Ministry of China and the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry of Malaysia has a long history (*Bernama* 2017). The MoU is about integrated water resources management, protection and conservation of water resources, drought management and flood control, and adaptation to climate change. Moreover, Malaysia and China are trying to develop the best partnership in environmental security and industrial innovations through industrial parks. In this regard, China built the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park (CMQIP) and approved a regulation in 2017 that embraces the core tenets of green development, centering its efforts on forging an industrial ecosystem and spatial layout that prioritises environmental sustainability. With a twofold purpose, the project endeavours to bolster ecological safeguarding infrastructure and proactively introduce initiatives to propel eco-industry growth. This multifaceted undertaking aims to invigorate the environmental industry while unwaveringly safeguarding and preserving the natural environment.

The regional and bilateral cooperation on environmental degradation between Malaysia and China indicates shared security. Both states have a vision to cope with environmental degradation, as Malaysia has the 12th Malaysia Plan, which contains green technology, renewable energy, climate change mitigation, and a people-centric economy. Apart from this, Malaysia's Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 also embraces the ethos of collaborative efforts towards a brighter tomorrow (Chan 2021). On the national level, China has projected four major areas for environmental protection: (1) promoting green development; (2) solving prominent environmental problems; (3) intensifying the protection of ecosystems; and (4) reforming the environmental regulation system (*Xinhua* 2017). On an international level, environmental security comes under the vision of a shared future and a GSI.

Furthermore, the United Nations Basel Convention now covers specific categories of plastic waste, making the export of waste progressively more challenging. Consequently, policymakers, businesses, and other stakeholders are compelled to foster the development of a more resilient and circular economy for plastic within Europe. Following the Chinese ban, mixed, non-recyclable, and contaminated plastics were therefore included in the Basel Convention's control system (yellow list). On 1 January 2021, exporting this plastic waste deemed unsuitable for recycling is no longer permissible for EU countries (Joltreau 2022). China's significant influence and the changing global politics on plastic waste prove the need for closer bilateral and multilateral cooperation within ASEAN and other global actors.

### **Cooperation on Maritime Piracy**

Maritime piracy cooperation between Malaysia and China under the shared security framework involves a multidimensional approach integrating maritime domain awareness, capacity-building, and law enforcement cooperation efforts. By working together on maritime security and strategies, both states can develop their strong maritime resilience, promote regional stability, and protect the freedom of navigation. Shared security endeavours can contribute to the defeat of maritime piracy and keep a prosperous maritime environment for them and all stakeholders. Shared security is guided by the principle of shared interest, which serves the idea of “my security is your security” within the domain of maritime cooperation. It also emphasises mutual acceptance and collective take up on shared or common security challenges because one country's security has become interconnected with another. Both nations know that maritime piracy is a common threat to the safety of their vessels, maritime trade routes, and seafaring populations.

Shared power is another principle that advocates “my power is your power.” It focusses on the collective resources and capabilities to fight against maritime piracy. This power-sharing entails states sharing intelligence, naval assets, and operational expertise to detect, deter, and counter pirate attacks. No doubt, China and Malaysia have some traditional issues with SCS. However, both countries handle maritime security by maintaining bilateral discussions and channels. They face NTS threats in the SCS, the Straits of Malacca, and the Sulu Sea in Eastern Sabah. More bilateral maritime security cooperation between states can overcome the limitations and gaps in managing their waterways.

Malaysia's stance on SCS is firm, but it has carefully engaged China to avoid direct conflict, thereby emphasising that disputes should be peacefully resolved through diplomacy, mutual trust, and amicable negotiations (Tayal 2020). In September 2019, Malaysia, on the proposal of China, decided to start a bilateral consultative mechanism to support negotiation and cooperation concerning SCS issues (Lai and Kuik 2021). Kuala Lumpur has changed its SCS policy over the last few years, and the main reason was an ongoing pandemic and a growing China-US rivalry (Ge 2020). Nevertheless, to maintain its sovereignty, Malaysia has recently increased its criticism of China in the SCS dispute. Previously, Malaysia used traditional methods to maintain a safe and pragmatic stance on the SCS conflict, but it has opened up and showed concerns. However, China held onto its traditional stance on the SCS, with little compromise made. Nevertheless, maritime security cooperation remains steadfast in its readiness to collaborate with other nations to uphold the vision of a shared future. China is insisting that all the conflicting parties in the SCS need to handle maritime conflicts properly through diplomatic means, collectively safeguard maritime security, and respond to maritime challenges (*Xinhua* 2022).

Malaysia and China are cooperating on maritime security on both regional and bilateral levels. At the regional level, China and ASEAN countries expect a code of conduct in the SCS in their collective efforts to stabilise the region. At the bilateral level, China and Malaysia have signed MoUs and agreements and formed many committees, programmes, and exercises. For example, they have a joint committee on maritime science and technology, organised China-Malaysia seminars on maritime sciences, and a programme for Malaysian pilots to learn Chinese ocean forecasting systems. Both states moreover agreed on the joint development of Malaysian naval ships (*CCTV.com* 2016). Malaysia and China also held joint military exercises in the Straits of Malacca and its nearby area under the code-name Peace and Friendship 2015, and later in 2018. It is believed that military exercises have strengthened the strategic partnership between the two countries and helped them jointly safeguard regional maritime security. These short joint exercises are of significant importance as they efficiently solve maritime security challenges.

## CONCLUSION

China, an emerging world power, and Malaysia, a regional key player, are active in different fields and bilaterally cooperating, especially in economics and trade. The two nations are facing various challenges; NTS issues are one

of the critical sections of their common problems. In this regard, this study has proposed shared security as a workable option for both nations to develop a shared interest and shared power.

Since the end of the Cold War, the transformation of security has created an environment for a more comprehensive understanding of security. This environment has taken place in different parts of the world, and although the terms, principles, and characteristics are presented differently, the theme is almost similar. Shared security is also a part of that momentum, representing a new understanding of security between Malaysia and China. The two states are clear in their internal and external policies about new security challenges, i.e., NTS threats, which emphasise cooperating with each other. NTS threats have posed severe consequences, challenging the traditional thinking of security. Shared security proposes multiple areas of cooperation to develop shared interests and shared power against NTS issues.

This study finds that the notion of shared security in bilateral relations between Malaysia and China significantly influences the principles of their traditional security as they have followed rigid and old paths of security proceedings, which provided less space for NTS issues to be dealt with. Nevertheless, their cooperation on environmental degradation, counter-terrorism, and maritime security can be observed as good empirical evidence of shared security. Shared security is also a part of the sequence of security transformations, which has brought new modifications and adjustments. However, both states have a comprehensive understanding of NTS threats, which incorporates the idea of shared security. As Yu (2012) explained, shared security must exceed the prevailing divisions within the international community, extending beyond the confines of conflicting security strategies and contradictory institutional policies. The primary focus should shift towards the safeguarding of human habitats and the effective tackling of global NTS challenges. This attempt necessitates the collaborative endeavours of states to jointly establish and distribute security measures, fostering a harmonious environment conducive to human survival and resilience in the face of multifaceted global threats (Sandano et al. 2019).

Shared security ultimately provides a base to establish a solid ground for durable and reliable security cooperation in traditional and NTS domains. The principle of “my security is your security” possibly helps to avoid direct or indirect confrontation between two conflicting nations. The operationalisation of shared security would resolve the common NTS issues and create new momentum for cooperation with shared interests and shared power to settle all the long-standing traditional issues between Malaysia and China.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The Chinese government has introduced the GSI based on humanity's future and the well-being of humanity. It is essential to mention that the GSI and shared security have different origins and objectives. Chinese interests are the main driving force behind the GSI programme, which is still in its initial stages. On the other hand, shared security is an academic notion meant to foster cooperation even between conflicting states by working on NTS issues. Despite any apparent links, it is essential to identify that the GSI and shared security work on different principles and serve different purposes.

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