

Summary

Malaysia's foreign policy change toward China amid Najib Razak's kleptocracy case raises a broader theoretical question of interest to students of international relations (IR), foreign policy, and public administration: *How is the effect of kleptocracy on foreign policy change mediated by the political-administrative relationship?* In the case of Malaysia's foreign economic policy, it is unfortunate that despite the presence of high-caliber bureaucrats, they were unable to stop the over-inflated loans from being signed, as well as the fire-sale of Malaysia's Edra Energy to China. Najib Razak not only managed to exclude those bureaucrats, he even included his allies to develop and propose those loans from China, which ended up being used to bail out the Najib-led 1MDB debt. This was also the case in making Malaysia's foreign defense policy changes. Despite the Navy's plan to build the Littoral Mission Ships domestically, the kleptocrats purchased them from China instead. In fact, Najib Razak even tasked his 1MDB ally Jho Low to directly negotiate the first-ever Chinese attack submarine port calls in Malaysia, with the Chinese counterparts and excluding the top military bureaucrats altogether. Accordingly, this research provides an insight into the dynamics of foreign policy-making in one of the largest case of kleptocracy that can be reflected on by other smaller power political executives and bureaucrats around the globe, in the face of the US–China rivalry in the 21st century and beyond.