

# PUTRAJAYA FORUM

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## **“BUILDING REGIONAL SECURITY INTEGRATION IN SOUTH EAST ASIA”**

### **Keynote Address by**

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### **SALUTATIONS**

I want to thank the organizers for inviting me to deliver the keynote address for the Putrajaya Forum 2016 **“Building Regional Security Integration in Southeast Asia”**. Now, in its 4th edition, the Putrajaya Forum has emerged as one of the premier conferences on defence and security issues in the region. This year is also special as the Putrajaya Forum is again being held in conjunction with the Defence Services Asia Exhibition and Conference. Hence it is an honour for me to be here and I want to wish a very warm *Selamat Datang* to our foreign guests.

### **Trends and Challenges in Regional Security**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It would be wise for us to begin by first briefly surveying the state of security in Southeast Asia. While it is true that the centre of global economic gravity is shifting to our region, it is also true that a number of developments are threatening the peace and stability of Southeast Asia.

The first is the most obvious, namely, the threat of terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism. The most potent of this is the so-called “DAESH” terror movement. While this gang of thugs has been most prominent in the Middle East, we should not dismiss the possibility that they could someday strike out in our region. As reported earlier, there is evidence of the unification of terrorist battalions in the Southern Philippines with the DAESH under the leadership of Al Baghdadi.

We need to be on our toes in dealing with this threat. The mushrooming of affiliated terrorist organisations in the region, creating “hotspots” and “flashpoints” especially in the Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand, should not be taken lightly.

This news is especially alarming for Malaysia, especially when one considers that our Eastern State of Sabah has come under attack in the past from militant groups in the Southern Philippines. In the quixotic dream of Nur Misuari to form a “caliphate” in the Sulu Sea means that we will not be able to take our eyes off this area any time soon.

One thing I would like to stress though is that we must not lose sight of the fact that terrorism transcends race and religion. Indeed, the majority of DAESH’s victims, of their cruelty and brutality are Muslims themselves. In fact, DAESH’s actions continue to victimize the global Ummah in the sense that their misdeeds have created fear and suspicion amongst the faith communities of the world. This can only be to the detriment of Muslims, especially in countries where they are the minority.

Moreover, what is more disquieting is the fact that its activities seem to have a hypnotic effect on young Muslims. It is insidious because DAESH exploits the fault lines that are created by religion, race, and socio-economic differences. At the same time, like a deadly predator, it preys on the most vulnerable, including the disenfranchised and disaffected. Defeating the IS therefore must involve cutting off the very source of its hold over their imaginations and its funding, that is to say the grievances of the Muslim world today.

Second, relations between the states within and beyond the region remain complex and at times fraught. One of this is the growing great power rivalry that exists in our region. Being at the Axis of world trade and economic passage way, South East Asia is now an important engine of global economic growth, sitting astride key trade and energy routes, we are at the intersection of strategic and economic interests of major global players.

The US and China, being the two biggest economies in the world, both shared a total of almost USD 36 trillion GDP equivalent to 36% of the Gross World Product. This figure alone, together with the population size and market shares clearly signifies the importance of this region to continue working a balance cooperation and strategic smart partnership with these two economic giants. Maintaining peace and stability must be always at the back of our mind to ensure continuous success of the South East Asian region.

Nevertheless, disputes such as the South China Sea controversy as well as on going disagreements over land and maritime borders between several ASEAN member states threatens this very balance. Let me stress here that Malaysia believes that such disputes should be resolved peacefully, through diplomacy especially multi-lateral platforms such as ASEAN and with respect for all parties concerned.

ASEAN centrality should be enshrined in any resolution to the South China Sea issue. We intend to remain the masters of our own region and its affairs. Malaysia also looks forward to working with our neighbours such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Brunei to find ways to forge ahead in this issue. However, the fact that little progress appears to have been made in resolving these disputes—such as the adoption of a binding Code of Conduct for the South China Sea acceptable to all parties—must surely be a cause for concern.

Third, the very complexity of Southeast Asia often militates against closer cooperation. It is true that we are pushing ahead with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), nevertheless security cooperation is an entirely different and more complex matter. At the same time, the countries of Southeast Asia geographically, politically and culturally diverse. Also, the post-colonial status of almost all our countries have given us a very strong tendency towards nationalism. These facts make any form of cooperation difficult, if not impossible.

Finally, we must also acknowledge that not all security threats come in traditional forms such as military conflict. For instance, natural disasters are not uncommon to the South East Asian region. Our geographical location puts us right in the equidistant of volcanic activities, monsoon weather which brings unsuspected heavy rains, heat waves together with possible forest fire and haze as well as earthquakes and tsunami every now and then. These natural disasters have profound impacts on a country's economic development and pose security challenges that transcend national boundaries.

## **Defining Regional Security Integration**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having discussed the challenges we face, it is now incumbent on us to define what "regional security integration" means exactly. It is true that there are a number of definitions and not one is universally accepted still I think that one good definition is how we can promote stability, conflict avoidance and the collective viability of communities. However we want to define it, we cannot run away from the fact the best way to meet threats is through cooperation. As Benjamin Franklin once said, *"we must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately."*

In this sense, ASEAN has made considerable progress through the years. We have embarked further on our combined effort to work together in this region through the ASEAN Community via the Political and Security Community pillar to create a peaceful and stable Southeast Asia. Indeed, we are also blessed to be able to cooperate and seek assistance from our partners from outside the region through mechanism such as the ADMM-Plus.

The available architecture as being discussed at length during the First Session of this forum remain relevant and will continue to be instrumental in responding to Southeast Asia security challenges. ADMM, ADMM Plus and other Track One regional forum possess the strategic and political stature to bring all of us together as a solid security community.

We have embarked on the development of a Regional Standby Arrangement to be ready for deployment and to respond in the case of disasters. We began with the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMEER) as a framework for governmental cooperation at the regional level in 2005. We strengthened cooperation with civil society organisations and other international partners through the

ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) in 2011.

## **Challenges to Regional Security Integration Building**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite all these successes however, it must be conceded that there is still a lot of work to be done towards greater regional security integration. Indeed, a number of challenges and problems have continued to stymie even closer cooperation in this regard.

The chief amongst these, regrettably is often short-sighted over emphasis that many nations give to what they believe to be their national interest. Of course no one is suggesting for one moment that the countries of Southeast Asia should surrender their sovereignty or self-determination. Still, it is very frustrating when rivalries, chauvinism and plain paranoia stand in the way of closer cooperation between our countries. At the end of the day, we have to realize that Southeast Asia has a common destiny and that prosperity as well as peace can only be won if we work together.

Conversely, there is also such a thing as trying too hard or rather trying to do too much. I am not saying that we should have low expectations. Nevertheless, our ultimate goal of greater regional peace and cooperation has also often been side-tracked by our pursuit of over complex or over ambitious plans for regional security architectures. Moreover, the often punishingly complex bureaucracy of security regimes in our countries is enough to scare most people off.

We must also be internally vigilant of that great bugbear, complacency. Southeast Asia as we know has been blessed with decades of peace and prosperity. Since the emergence of ASEAN in 1967 for example, no two countries in the region have fought wars against each other. However, ASEAN could also be said to be a victim of its own success. We have in many ways let our institutions atrophy and are now playing a furious game of catch-up in light of the ASEAN Community. Whether or not we will be able to do enough in time remains to be seen.

## **Pathways towards Regional Security Integration**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These challenges notwithstanding, I still believe that regional integration is still the best way forward for Southeast Asia especially in terms of security. It simply makes sense for us to work together for the greater cause of peace and stability in our own backyard. I would like to propose to you now, a few points on how we might be able to take this discussion forward.

The most immediate item on our agenda should be to continue and ramp up confidence building initiatives between the countries of this region and outside it. I am great believer in the efficacy of military diplomacy as way to wage peace between nations. Joint exercises and exchanges not only forge friendships but also push our militaries to do better.

Another exciting prospect is collaboration in natural disaster and humanitarian relief. We are also cooperating closely with our ADMM PLUS partners to enhance our capabilities. The scope of military contribution to regional integration can be further extended through the ADMM's adoption of the ASEAN Military Ready Group (AMRG) for HADR concept paper on 17 March 2015 in Langkawi. We have endorsed the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Utilisation of Military Assets for HADR under the Framework of AADMER. This SOP will be a contribution to the existing SOP for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations. We are working on the Terms of Reference for the AMRG this time around. We are clear that the military ready group will play a complementary role to the other government civil agencies and the CSOs together with our international partners in addressing humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) issues in the region.

Separately, the risk of over reach in regional integration can be addressed through the adroit use of sub-regional groupings to address security concerns. For instance, great good can be done towards improving the Southern Philippines and Sabah issue through cooperation between Brunei, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.

In fact, earlier this year, I led a delegation of my counterparts from Indonesia and Brunei to Saudi Arabia to discuss greater cooperation in the Muslim world towards issues confronting the Ummah such as terrorism. These sub-regional efforts should not be seen as detracting from the wider goal of greater integration as a whole but rather as building blocks to the ultimate prize of a united Southeast Asia.

Third, this is something that Malaysia has constantly stressed during its recent Chairmanship of ASEAN. The cause of ASEAN integration cannot be solely left to states and members of the elite. Indeed, peace and cooperation is only sustainable and lasting if it involves all members of the various societies. This is something that I hope the participants from DSA might contribute to. Security cooperation will only take root in ASEAN with the participation of civil society and business; of the Tracks 2 and 3.

But when all is said and done, the critical spark that all of these initiatives require is leadership. Nothing can be done if our leaders at the various tracks do not have the foresight and boldness to go against the grain, to take risks and to think outside the box.

Leadership in this sense is putting the good of the future ahead of short term gains. It is about being willing to look at problems from multiple perspectives while never losing sight of the bigger picture. It is also about having strong convictions that what you are doing is right and good for your country as well as the region. It is about keeping a cool head and a clear mind. We have much to lose if we our one and only obsession is with political

expediency or the ancient hatreds of the past. Conversely a Southeast Asia which is led with wisdom and courage will straddle and indeed, shape the world.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, while the challenges towards regional security integration are potent, the opportunities and pathways are just as substantive. Any builder will tell you, that construction is a long and arduous process which requires patience and hard work. This two should be our stance as we seek to forge a more secure and prosperous Southeast Asia. The two are coeval as there can be no economic growth without peace. My life's quest is to ensure that my children and future generations inherit a Southeast Asia that is blessed with both.

Our journey should not stop where it began. We must put greater effort, together, to integrate our capacity and capabilities in paving a stronger working relationship down to the lowest level. We must continue to strive for a safer and more stable region as the only way forward to be the most successful region.

I hope therefore that the participants of the Putrajaya Forum will be able to contribute to how we can take security integration in our region to even greater heights. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and debates on this matter.

Let me end by thanking the organizers again for this great opportunity to speak to you all. I wish you all, a most pleasant and stimulating conference.

Thank you.