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BY THE HONOURABLE DEFENCE MINISTER
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**'EXTREMISM AND MILITANCY: A CHALLENGE TO NATIONAL
SECURITY'**

Introduction and Salutations

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the 3rd conference of the Malaysian Institute of Defence and Security (MiDAS). It is a pleasure to be addressing you all again and I am pleased that the MiDAS Conference series have grown in stature from the first held in 2011. Moving on from the previous theme in 2013 of *'National Resilience towards a Developed Nation'*, we are gathered in this forum again to address a very important issue that currently threatens our national security, and that is the threat from **extremists** and **militants**.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I speak, the National and Malaysia day celebrations remain fresh in our minds as we celebrate 58 years of independence and 52 years of us being a Malaysian Federation this year. I have no doubts that the peace and security in which we have enjoyed all these years is a result of the many security policies and initiatives implemented since our formative years. Nevertheless, no country can guarantee it will enjoy prolonged peace and Malaysia is no exception. As such, it is vital that we constantly identify and address security issues that threaten the stability of this nation. Certainly the threats from religious extremism, radicalisation and militancy are indeed alarming now; more so with the speed and connectivity these perpetrators communicate and sow their misguided beliefs.

You may wish to know that National Security Issues have always been at the forefront in my career. I served as Home Minister for 4 years, before moving to my current portfolio in 2013. I have seen the evolution of security threats - both externally and from within; which threaten to undermine the integrity and position of our nation. I am therefore pleased to address all of you in this conference with the hope that sound suggestions and recommendations can be forwarded to assist us in countering the threats post by extremists and militants.

National Security and the Changing Nature of Threats

Ladies and Gentlemen,

National Security is a vital component to our stability as a nation state which in turn complements the environment for economic growth and prosperity. It is important that our policies implemented over time are able to preserve, maintain and ensure that our nation is ready to address security challenges, be it the traditional or from non-traditional security sources. In hindsight, our national security is inseparable from political stability, economic success and social harmony. Without these elements, our nation would not be able to prevent a potential enemy from intruding and making us vulnerable. I am compelled to echo the sentiment of our prime minister who spoke last month that Malaysia must have a coherent and comprehensive national security strategy in tandem with the present situation and that there is no greater priority than to secure our national security. Nonetheless, it has also been pointed out that national security is often related to regional and international security. With the advancement of technology and social media now, there can be no further truth than this observation.

Meanwhile, threats from conventional forces and nations are almost diminishing and are taking different forms now. The biggest threats to nation states today are not so much from each other but from non-statist· and as is often the case· transnational entities. These come in many forms, from religious extremists to cyber terrorists. At the same time, knowledge, information and news of varying quality and in a multitude of methods have become a very important component in shaping our political, economic, cultural and security concerns. Local and international events are inevitably linked in complex and unpredictable ways.

These new dynamics, especially threats by non-state actors, have posed a serious challenge as to how we integrate our security resources in addressing them. The present scenario requires security agencies and civil authorities to work closely with one another in dealing with issues and challenges. It can no longer operate in silos for the sake of preserving our national security especially when dealing with extremists and militants who take up their cause all in the name of religion. This is appropriate and necessary as the borderless world we are in now has brought about threats which are more universal in nature. To name just one and as I also mentioned earlier, the spread of information communication technology has united the world and reaching out to each other easier than ever before. But it has also provided extremists, terrorists and criminals a new way to communicate, plan attacks and launder money. Worse still, new communication platforms especially through social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and even WhatsApp have allowed extremists and terrorists plenty of avenue to spread their twisted message of hatred. We are, ironically, enjoying the benefits of connectivity but also paying the price for it.

Extremism and Militancy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History will tell us that no one religion (and I stress no one religion), culture or ideology has ever been completely free from the danger of extremism, radicalization and militancy. We have seen with much dismay the threats posed by radical and cult groups all over the world who propagate violence in the name of religion. But this should not detract from the fundamental challenge now that there are still people, and young people at that, willing to engage in acts of violence out of what they think is devoutness or patriotism in the name of religion.

When we mention of extremism and militancy, of a more prominent threat to all of us now are the IS and its followers. Indeed the overall threat of terrorism is greatly amplified by today's hyper-connected and interlinked world, where an incident in one corner of the globe can instantly spark a reaction thousands of miles away. What we have feared all this while has come to reality - the threat of terrorists that is increasingly decentralized, difficult to track and difficult to prevent.

I wish to highlight in February this year, a Research conducted by the Nanyang Technological Institute of Singapore indicated that there are some 300 net sites in the region linked to terror groups. Even more alarming are the widespread visual releases by these groups depicting bombings, mass executions and beheadings in multiple languages. What is shocking is the fact that the reception towards these gruesome acts has been disturbingly encouraging and it was widely reported that supporters of these groups have set a foothold in many countries in the Asia Pacific region including Malaysia.

The fight against terrorism will be a long and arduous one and, defeating it will take a long time, not simply with military might alone. It also demands the multilateral participation of many governments and agencies to eliminate or reduce the possibility of terrorist operations from establishing operating bases across the borders and within our soil.

In Retrospect

Ladies and gentlemen,

If you recall, we have had our fair share in confronting terrorism, extremism and militancy which are somehow intertwined and linked to each other in the present security threat scenario we are facing. The Communist Insurgency during our formative years is a clear example of how we overcame a common foe with several measures involving a whole of government approach such as the *Security and Development (KESBAN)* and the *Hearts and Minds* Project. With the current security threats affecting us now, particularly with the IS and cyber influence, **Winning the Hearts and Minds** could be one of the multi- faceted measures adopted. This strategy should not only be used on IS sympathisers and followers, but in countering the negative perceptions on Islam held by some in the Western world.

After the defeat of the communist insurgents, there had been incidents such as the Memali and later on the Al-Maunah which are distinct incidents where extremism and militancy emerged from a peaceful Malaysian environment due to misguided beliefs and ideologies. Most recently, the IS is actively recruiting men and women from our country to fight in Syria and mind you, some of these men and women are no ordinary people. They come

from all levels of society including professionals and even those from the security forces.

Presently, almost every day we are hounded with news on the atrocities and the growing threats posed by the IS fighters and their supporters worldwide. This movement is not only spreading rapidly but clearly indicates that it is a disciplined force and no ordinary outfit. The threat posed by IS are not only a threat to the present but also the civilizational legacy of the past. As discussion into how long to deal with IS have surmised, defeating it will take a long time, not simply with military might alone, but also a multi-faceted approach that encompasses humanitarian aid, the strengthening of the societies through education and democratic practices within the countries affected.

Addressing Extremism and Militancy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Preventing the escalation of the IS conflict will hence require not only containing and destroying its infrastructure in the Middle East, but also stopping the spread of its ideology and activities in other parts of the world including here in Malaysia. For instance, care must be taken to ensure that the young and vulnerable do not fall prey to their ideologies and distorted beliefs. Winning the hearts and minds of such people requires us not only to address whatever political or socio-economic disparities they may be facing, but also doing something to increase their sense of dignity.

There have also been suggestions that we should bring the Internal Security Act (ISA) back into our legal framework as it was one of the effective means of containing violent extremism and militancy. However, past experiences clearly indicate that even with the ISA in place, there were individuals and group aligned to militancy such as Noordin Mat Top and Mas Selamat Kastari from the Jemaah Islamiyah and Mohd Amin Razali from the Al-Maqunah deviants to name a few. In any case laws alone, irrespective of whether they are focussed on preventive of punitive actions, would not be enough to address the scourge of extremism and militancy. I do wish to highlight though that the **Prevention of Terrorism Act**, **POTA**, which is an anti-terrorism law was passed by the Malaysian government on 7 April 2015.

I am of the opinion that addressing the threats posed by extremism and militants would require multi-faceted and integrated measures which must also include addressing the roots of these evil. There are already measures in place in the *"re-radicalisation"* of extremists and militants undertaken by the police and religious authorities. Although it may be slow and painstaking, we must all put our resources together and defeat this common enemy. Now I don't claim to have the immediate solutions in countering the threats posed by extremists and militants. And I am under no illusion that there is a quick-fix to these but I do believe there are several areas which we can look into;

Firstly, the root of extremism and militancy is ignorance. I believe those who chose this path are often misguided and were looking for a belief and guidance from ideologies. The indoctrination of extremists and militants motivates them towards their goals which to the normal person may sound ridiculous but to them it is their only way of achieving greatness. It is for this fact that we need to educate Malaysians that extremism and militancy is not

the proven path and this is not the work of the government alone, but to all fellow Malaysians which include religious clerics and organisations.

Secondly, universal threats such as extremism and militancy require approaches which are anchored by cooperative, comprehensive and collective measures. The fight against extremism and militancy does not merely entail the neutralisation of threats after they have struck. It also demands a 'whole of government' approach involving not only a multitude of agencies but the multilateral participation of many governments to eliminate or reduce the possibility of terrorist organisations establishing operating bases across borders. Hence, I must re-visit the concept of HANRUH or Total Defence which is about our ability as a nation to garner support from every level of society in addressing a security threat.

Thirdly, it is also interesting to study the concept of *Moderation* which has been consistent in Malaysia's foreign policy orientations and now accepted as an ASEAN way during the 26th ASEAN Summit in April this year. Moderation has its roots through the concept of Islam *Hadhari* and *Wasatiyah* espoused by both our present and former Prime Ministers. Malaysia has stressed that it is possible to achieve *Peace and Security through moderation,* which was our theme in bidding for inclusion in the UN Security Council. As highlighted by PM Najib in his address to the UN in September last year,   the threat to global peace and security is not Islam but the twin forces of violent extremism and religious intolerance. As he said, the moderation agenda is inclusive to everyone and the fight against extremism is not about Christians vs Muslims or Muslims vs Jews but moderates vs extremists of all religions. The rallying call is for us to join together and ensure that religion is the source of healing and blessing rather than conflict and destruction. The greatest challenge to National Security now is to ensure that

youths not only avoid radicalization but were actively engaged with society. In the Malaysian context moderation is also about acceptance and here the key word is for us to accept our differences, find common ground on the problems we face and move forward together.

Finally, winning the cyber war is crucial. It is not surprising to note that the strength of IS came from its mastery of the social media. There have also been marked increases in the number of extremist sites the past few years. These websites have indeed penetrated even universities where the IS have been actively persuading students to join its cause. It is crucial that all government agencies come together in a concerted effort to dispel and counter the propaganda posed by the IS. The creation of several websites and dedicated personnel could play an important role to counter the IS influence on the younger generation. These may include religious authorities who could correct misunderstandings immediately online and via other means including the media to educate the public on the true meaning of Jihad, a hadith or even a misconception rather than relying on giving public sermons or lectures through the conventional way.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, it has been 58 years since we achieved our independence. This great country of ours has progressed as a nation despite the turbulent period in our formative years, as well as the many incidents in the past that threatened our national security. The security challenges have certainly evolved and become more complex with the emergence of non-state actors with excellent connectivity which transcends all borders. The threats that we now face are almost unprecedented and beyond prediction. This is

because they are not bound to regional or specified areas but may affect all of us with the speed, lethality and uncertainty. This is particularly so with the extremists and militants and their deft handling of the social media.

Addressing the threats posed by extremists and militants will need a multi-faceted approach by all. Winning the war against them will require not only the deft handling of the social media but the ability to educate Malaysians on the perils of extremism and militancy. I must also remind that although we have numerous security and economic policies in place, we must remain vigilant against all threats in a most comprehensive manner. Our recent experiences have taught us that a security threat will come from the most unlikely source and in a non-traditional manner now. Similarly, uncertainties in the global economy are bound to have a spiralling effect on our economic well-being which in turn may be used by extremists and militants to fortify their causes.

I congratulate MiDAS and am pleased to note the three sessions today and the topics of discussion which highlights the spread of *Militant Ideologies and Radicalism in Malaysia*; the *Threat by the Islamic State* and *Countering Extremism and Radicalisation*. I have no doubts that through the learned speakers and moderators as well as the discussions, we will be able to bring and formulate new ideas to complement the current efforts undertaken by the government to enhance our national security. With that I officially open the **MiDAS Conference, on Extremism and Militancy: A challenge to National Security.** Thank you.

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