

PM CSIS-ISIS SPEECH

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MENTERI MALAYSIA

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Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a pleasure to be with you, here in Washington D.C., today.
2. First of all, let me express my appreciation to the CSIS Southeast Asia Program and to ISIS Malaysia for co-organising this event. I am aware that both institutions have a long history of working together to advance US-Malaysia relations, and I fondly recall the last time I was here to address a seminar on bilateral ties back in April 2010.
3. Two years later, you published a study “From Strength to Empowerment: The Next Generation of US-Malaysia Relations”. This contained a comprehensive set of recommendations which covered political and security, trade and investment, science and technology, as well as educational and socio-cultural connections.
4. Many of these recommendations resonated with me and I encourage you to continue your collaboration. It is symbolic of the larger US-Malaysia partnership which has remained steadfast, albeit understated.
5. One example of that is Malaysian-US defence cooperation - which I sometimes joke is probably the best-kept secret of our relationship. It may not receive a lot of publicity, but the fact is that our forces regularly train together - both

bilaterally and multilaterally - through, for example, the annual Keris Strike and Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training exercises, as well as most recently, the Rim of the Pacific Exercise - the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise.

6. Many of these operations have evolved in complexity over the years. This marks a growth in trust and capability between our forces. Military operations have increasingly involved crossing between the physical and virtual domains, and I strongly encourage our forces to share their expertise and experiences as military doctrines, rules, and norms develop in cyber space.

7. Just as we are firm partners in defence cooperation, so we are in the fight against violent extremism, another challenge that afflicts both Malaysia and the United States. Travelling to Washington DC on the anniversary of the 11 September 2001 attacks offered me a sobering reminder of that.

8. There has, so far, been only one successful Daesh-linked attack in Malaysia (and, thankfully, no fatalities), but that has not been for want of trying. In fact, it is only thanks to the efforts of our law enforcement agencies that at least 13 major terrorist attacks have been thwarted since 2012.

9. Nonetheless, Daesh has ensnared some of our citizens both in life and in death, from Mosul to Marawi. Men, women, and children from Malaysia have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight for a false cause, burning their passports, and hoping never to return. Others seek to kill members of our Government and other prominent figures.

10. These people, both those who encourage others to go down the path of violence - and those that do so themselves, are our enemies just as much as they are your enemies. Indeed, by claiming their terrorism is Islamic in nature, these individuals blaspheme against our religion - something for which we simply cannot forgive them.

11. I want to reiterate here, in your capital, that Malaysia is the United States' firm ally in this battle.

12. In this battle we fight as a proud partner in the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, and through the strategic dialogue between our Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon.

13. Rest assured, Malaysia will always stand shoulder-to-shoulder with America on this vital mission to eliminate a terror group whose acts sicken all of civilised humanity.

14. Indeed, our security agencies are taking the battle to Daesh and other extremists, through intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism measures, on the ground not only in our region but also beyond.

15. However, this is a battle that cannot be won solely by military means. It is just as important to fight the ideology that drives them.

16. This is why we set up the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation in our capital Kuala Lumpur, and the Wasatiyyah Institute, which promotes the Quranic concept of moderation. And we instituted a deradicalisation programme that has had an over 90 percent success rate.

17. I believe there are lessons and good practices to be traded on both sides here, as we encourage the development of narratives to counter extremist propaganda, online and offline. In addition to the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Malaysia hosts the newly-established Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communication Centre, and we will soon establish the King Salman Centre for International Peace.

18. So we look forward to even closer intelligence and law enforcement cooperation with the United States, and in sharing our expertise in countering radicalism and violent extremism of all ideologies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Seven years ago, when I addressed some of you here, I underscored just how pressing a challenge the proliferation of nuclear weapons and related materials was for the international community. Today, the threat of weapons of mass destruction looms even larger in the Asia-Pacific region.

20. North Korea's repeated missile and nuclear tests and Pyongyang's acts of provocation threaten peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula and far beyond. Earlier this year Malaysia was also confronted by the use of a chemical nerve agent on our soil in the killing of Kim Jong Nam.

21. Let me be very clear - there can be no place for the use or proliferation of WMDs.

22. They pose a grave concern to the peace, security, and stability of the region and the world. Asia must not be held hostage over the prospect of either a WMD or conventional war breaking out in our midst. The stakes are simply too high.

23. There must be adherence to the principles of international law that our nations signed up to as responsible members of the international community. Malaysia has been consistent in pressing North Korea to fully comply with all its obligations under the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and to return to the negotiating table, with a view to achieving the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

24. President Trump and I discussed this at length yesterday, and Malaysia offers its full support and assistance in resolving the current very dangerous tension over North Korea.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. One of the reasons why Malaysia is a strong and natural partner for the United States is because of the deep-rooted values that we share.

26. We share your commitment to the rule of law, and to rules-based means of resolving tensions. Last month, China and ASEAN agreed on a framework for an eventual Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Ladies and gentlemen,

27. We share the compassion America has long shown to those suffering around the world. As you may know, I have for quite some time personally expressed my concern over the plight of the Rohingya, who have had their community identity denied for decades and who have been forced to flee persecution and brutal attacks.

28. Many have said that the atrocities committed against them could be rightly described as constituting ethnic cleansing or genocide.

29. In January, we convened an Extraordinary Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to discuss this. But now I believe the world is almost completely united in being appalled by the latest wave of violence - which also has the potential to radicalise desperate young people enraged by their government's treatment of them.

30. I promised the Malaysian people that I would raise this with President Trump - and I did. I am glad to say that the president shares my concern, and that is why this heart-rending humanitarian crisis was included in our joint statement. While I cannot speak for exactly what the US Government plans to do, I can tell you that there is now a distinct possibility that they will also provide humanitarian assistance to these desperate victims of atrocities that the world simply cannot ignore.

Ladies and gentlemen,

31. It is not just the Rohingya. The concern Malaysia has over much broader issues around migration has also been shown by the State Department's Trafficking in Persons report upgrading us to Tier Two.

32. This was after a notable increase in convictions in Malaysia for human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and other related offences. We are completely committed to combatting modern-day slavery, and are very serious about protecting and improving the lives of those exploited.

Ladies and gentlemen,

33. One of the other values that Malaysia shares with America is your commitment to democracy and free speech.

34. I hope you will allow me to share some thoughts on this as I know there are elements that have been trying to create false impressions lately. There was even one article that said Malaysia was in danger of sliding into dictatorship. That really is preposterous!

35. Malaysia has been a democracy ever since independence. In fact we have the longest and most consistent record as a democracy in Southeast Asia. Elections are fiercely contested, and they are real fights - which is shown by the fact that opposition parties have won state elections. They won five out of Malaysia's 13 states in 2008, for instance.

36. Cabinet ministers and prominent politicians have lost their seats in elections. I myself only just retained my parliamentary constituency in 1999. There were particular reasons why the Government was not popular at that time; but my point is that ours is a genuine democracy and no one is guaranteed election, no matter how high their position. It is the people who have the final say - which is how it should be in a democracy.

37. Similarly, it is simply not true that our Government jails its critics. Ministers and state chief ministers from both sides of the political divide have been taken to court, which shows the impartiality of our judiciary. And it is the judges - certainly not the Government - who then decide if jail is appropriate.

38. If an opposition politician breaks the law, he may well be arrested, yes. But not for being a critic. No, his arrest would be for having broken the law - which is actually the norm in most countries, and both Malaysians and Americans would be worried if it was otherwise.

39. Now it is true that one of the Malaysian opposition's leaders has admitted that he was a "dictator" when he was in power. When he was prime minister, hundreds of people were summarily locked up under the Internal Security Act. Newspapers, including a major national daily, were closed.

40. The judiciary was emasculated. Crony capitalism was rife, with deals made that significantly burden ordinary Malaysians today. People had no right to demonstrate, and students were not allowed to participate in politics.

41. But Malaysia's democracy survived, and under my Government, it has been strengthened. We repealed the ISA - and ended the State of Emergency that had existed for over 60 years.

42. These were major steps that required great political courage - but we went forward with them because removing these outdated and repressive pieces of legislation was the right thing to do.

43. We increased media freedom by scrapping restrictions on newspaper publishing licenses. We reformed the Universities and University Colleges Act to allow undergraduates to participate in political activities.

44. Large demonstrations, that would never have been allowed under the former leader, have taken place in Kuala Lumpur over the last few years. Why? Because we passed the Peaceful Assembly Act, for the first time enshrining in law the right to peaceful protest - which we recognise as being part of a democratic society.

45. The opposition has tried to make out that free speech in Malaysia is under threat. Why, then, is it that you will find praise for opposition politicians in our national newspapers, and vigorous debate - including plenty of criticism of the Government - on Malaysia's web portals?

46. There is one well-known academic who, ever since he came back to our country to take up a chair funded by the Noah Foundation - set up by my own grandfather - has taken every opportunity to attack me and my policies, from our participation in the TPP, to the administration of welfare payments, to foreign investment in Malaysia.

47. He is at perfect liberty to do so, as are others - however much I and my colleagues may think they are wrong. Why? Because we believe in, and we practise, free speech in Malaysia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

48. It is important that I set out these facts for you, because going forward, as we discuss Malaysia-US relations, I want those conversations to be backed by the correct impressions of Malaysia.

49. Whether it be in the context of the US-led Young Southeast Asian Leadership Initiative, which I hope will be continued; or programmes like the Fulbright US-ASEAN Visiting Scholar Initiative and the Fulbright English Teaching Assistants programme; working to achieve visa-waiver status for Malaysians seeking to travel here; or much larger matters.

50. I want you to be fully aware why it is right that we build on the Comprehensive Partnership we forged in 2014. Don't be misled. Democracy and free speech are safe in Malaysia. The harmony our multi-ethnic and multi-faith society enjoys is precious to us, and we will always safeguard it.

51. We share your values on working towards a world that is secure; where nuclear threats are contained; where we come together to fight violent extremism; and where we face the future confident that trading with each other will enrich both our nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

52. Our friendship has been deep and durable over 60 years of bilateral ties, and I trust that the next six decades will see our partnership grow even stronger. I would

like to thank CSIS and ISIS Malaysia for their work in fostering good relations and such valuable exchanges, and let me say how much I welcome the proposal for a US-Malaysia PETRONAS Strategic Initiative here at CSIS.

53. In cooperation with ISIS Malaysia, the two think tanks propose to deepen ties through the creation of an Eminent Persons Group to work on bilateral relations; through the writing of a US-Malaysia paper, and the holding of a US-Malaysia Conference in Washington and Kuala Lumpur.

54. Let me tell you now that we have agreed to support this excellent idea, and I am sure this news will further stimulate our discussions later.

Thank you

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