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"Issues Confronting Defence In The 21st Century"

Respected Co-Chairs,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen.

1. Practitioners of diplomacy like to joke that the term "military intelligence" is one of the most ironic oxymorons in the English language – an apparent contradiction in terms. With matters of defence in my portfolio, and having being Malaysia's Defence Minister for over a decade, I can assure you that the role of the military is much more than the mere exercise of brute force. To effectively assure the security of a nation requires men and women who possess not only the tactical skills of efficient military operations and manoeuvres, but equally, leaders who demonstrate the clarity of careful strategic analysis and thinking both on and off the battlefield.

2. In matters of defence and security, most of the world has always been guided by what we now call the "realist" philosophy. This was true even long before the realist paradigm was articulated by strategists such as Sun Tze in China, Kautilya in India and Machiavelli in Europe. Unfortunately, many countries have and will continue to be guided by this "realpolitik" world view.

3. I used the word "unfortunately" just now deliberately, because if we reflect deeply, the realist paradigm has not really served mankind very well at all. Our history has been full of conflict and war, and they have caused immense suffering and loss in every age and on every continent.

4. It is with this realisation in mind that the leadership of this country have consistently chosen to walk a different path. If we trace back through our history, we will find that Malaysia has always put moral and ethical considerations above narrow self interests in matters of regional and global importance. Recall our leadership in articulating the concept of ZOPFAN: the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality during the early days of ASEAN in an era where we could have easily played off one super power against the other at the height of their rivalry. Recall our active engagement and leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-77, and the Organisation of Islamic Conference, groupings that have been dismissed as representing the powerless many against the powerful few. Recall also our support for UN action against Iraq in the First Gulf War – when Iraq was the aggressor – and compare that with our rejection of the American-led invasion of Iraq in the Second Gulf War. This principled approach to matters of foreign policy, defence and security

has become a core element of our DNA, and we will continue to be guided by this overarching philosophy.

Ladies and gentlemen

5. With that paradigm in mind, and given that I have been asked to speak on issues that confront defence, I would like to now turn to focus briefly on just two things: the strategic environment that Malaysia's defence establishment must respond to, and the principles that will likely guide its defence policy now and in the foreseeable future.

6. It is a truism that many things can and do change. We must be prepared for surprises, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant ones. Indeed, it would be surprising if there were no surprises. Nevertheless, if present trends continue, I think that the strategic environment governing Malaysia will be distinguished by a few major characteristics. I will cite five.

7. First, we should be optimistic in expecting an improved security climate in Northeast Asia. We recognise, of course, that there are unresolved legacies of history which may be aggravated by apprehensions regarding the strategic rise of China. But we should also recognise that there are encouraging early developments that point to a rapprochement between the states of Northeast Asia. To take the case of Sino-Japan relations, we are seeing a softening of the rhetoric and less attachment to the symbolism of certain acts that have affected bilateral relations in the past. Ultimately though, I firmly believe that it is the growing and deepening economic integration between the countries of Northeast Asia that will be the strongest bulwark against aggression. Cross-border investments and trade, particularly across the Straits of Taiwan and between Japan and China, will continue to rise, and with it the costs of any act of aggression on all parties. I am confident that our northern neighbours will continue to find their best interests to be served through dialogue and the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

8. Second, we can expect a further improvement in the generally favourable security environment in Southeast Asia through the gradual development of an ASEAN Security Community as envisaged in Bali Concord II. In this regard, let me state unequivocally that we do not believe China will pose a major military threat to any country in the region. I always like to remind audiences that if China wanted to invade Malaysia, it would have done so 500 years ago when Admiral Cheng Ho landed in Melaka at the head of a 28,000-man army. In my discussions with Chinese leaders, it is clear that economic growth, prosperity and stability are the most important priorities for China, and that friendly, open relations with the rest of the world is absolutely critical to the continued economic success of China.

9. Third, we need to recognise that America has traditionally been, and will continue to be, a major Pacific power. This is, of course, in the US' own geo-political interests, given that half of the northern Pacific Ocean faces the West Coast of the United States. As the world's remaining superpower, it possesses the maximum strategic freedom to act in any theatre and in any geography, including in ours, to further and secure its strategic interests. Malaysia will continue to work with the United States in areas where we share common interests, and where our fundamental beliefs and values are aligned.

10. Fourth, we can expect unresolved territorial and sovereignty issues in Asia to continue to pose problems to security, some that could lead to occasional low-level conflicts. We may expect continued progress in demarcating borders and resolving disputes in Southeast Asia. I also hope that the Six Party talks will eventually succeed, and that cross-Straits relations will improve to a point where they are no longer potential flashpoints. Until they do however, the concerns will remain for many of us that have a stake in peaceful co-existence of Asia.

11. Fifth, we hope that the trend towards improvement in the domestic security situation of many countries in the region will be sustained into the future. We recognise that problems of extremism and militancy will not disappear overnight. But overall, we continue to see countries in the region collaborating effectively to tackle non-traditional threats together. For example, as a result of the close partnership between our police, intelligence and security forces, the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia is now under control and slowly but surely abating. The little public support and sympathy that existed for these groups have all but evaporated. In the specific case of the fugitive Noordin Mat Top, I believe that it is only a matter of time before he is caught and neutralised.

Ladies and gentlemen

12. This is the how I see the strategic environment of Malaysia and the region developing in the years ahead. How Malaysia responds to it in the defence and other spheres will be for both present and future Malaysians to decide. No doubt we will review the situation as it unfolds, and plan our strategies accordingly. But unless there is a revolutionary change in the strategic situation, I think I would not be too far wrong if I say that our defence policy now as well as in the foreseeable future shall continue to be grounded on a number of key fundamentals.

13. First, our defence posture will be based above all on the protection of our sovereignty, and maintenance of the Malaysian way of life. We will continue to keep our airspace, our maritime waters and our landmass safe. Our security situation must be such that we can go to bed every night with the assurance that when we wake up the next morning, Malaysia will remain secure and safe for everyday life.

14. Second, Malaysia will continue to be wedded to the principle of effective deterrence. I am confident of this because we have always been pragmatic, and

have kept our priorities sound. Our greatest challenges are in the field of nation-building. We have set our sights firmly on becoming a comprehensively developed country by the year 2020. Our resources will continue to go primarily towards educating our young, building our human capital, keeping our population healthy and providing the necessary facilities and infrastructure to enhance economic competitiveness and prosperity.

15. But defence and security will nevertheless be accorded due priority. Our peace and stability were won after much sacrifice and supreme effort. The present leaders, and no doubt the future leaders as well, will not be prepared to give them away easily. We will continue our efforts to build a compact, modern 21st century military force that can be a credible deterrent, with the ability to address both conventional and non-conventional threats.

16. A third fundamental is cooperation with other military forces in the region. We believe that Malaysia's security is best secured through working with others rather than working against them. We subscribe to the philosophy of the ASEAN Regional Security Community, which is based on cooperative and comprehensive security. This Community essentially entails the commitment to settle disputes by dialogue, and the renunciation of the threat or use of force.

17. We have been well-served by the various frameworks for shaping regional security – the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN + 3, ASEAN plus One, the ASEAN Security Pillar Concept, and the East Asia Summit. These efforts will serve our region well as we strive to build a Regional Security Community that is broader, deeper, more encompassing and more entrenched than frameworks and structures. A community is something that is the natural outcome of progression. It is by definition more meaningful and more lasting. On our part, Malaysia's commitment towards building this Regional Security Community remains unwavering. The recent inaugural meeting of ASEAN Defence Ministers which Malaysia hosted last month, is a significant step to ensure that those responsible for the operations of defence and the military, are also brought into the confidence building process. ADMM. Familiarity and mutual understanding among military personnel are important factors that can minimise the escalation of tensions between neighbours.

18. Fourth, Malaysia does not envisage participation in any new alliances. We hold steadfast to our policy of not joining or forging military alliances, although we will continue to cooperate closely with other countries. We believe that such alliances are unnecessary, can be provocative, and bring greater costs than benefits. We will continue however to be party to the Five Power Defence Arrangement, because it is a legacy of the past, it is a threat to no one and it has served us and region well. We should also recognise that the partnership has evolved into its present focus on building capabilities for dealing with non-traditional threats such as terrorism and piracy.

19. Finally, we believe that the use of the military instrument is only a part of Malaysia's array of tools for guaranteeing peace and security. Peaceful negotiations,

the use of arbitration and the international legal process must always be the preferred mechanism for settling disputes and overcoming our differences, no matter how large or small.

20. Having said that, we find that our military is now increasingly being deployed to address non-traditional threats, particularly in tackling threats of terrorism, domestic strife and in providing humanitarian assistance in cases of large scale natural disasters. Malaysian forces have played a constructive role in Aceh during the Asian tsunami tragedy and more recently in Java. Where we have been invited by host governments, and with the sanction of the UN, Malaysian military personnel have helped to resolve internal conflicts, most recently in southern Philippines and in Timor Leste. Ultimately, I believe we will continue to see increased use of the military in non-traditional situations, as such the role of the military continues to evolve to meet new challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

21. Just a few days ago, Prime Minister YAB Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reminded members of the Non Aligned Movement of the importance of a multilateral approach to international relations. He said: "The future of the developing countries, indeed, the entire world, lies best in an international order that is based on active multilateralism."

22. Our priority in the 21st century should be to help build a culture of peace in the region and beyond, based on active commitment to the principle of multilateralism, mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will do this by helping to promote the principles and conduct that are necessary for such a culture. They include moderation, pacific approaches to settlement of disputes, reasonable deterrence, and respect for international law and norms. We will also do our part to build and strengthen the institutions for consultation and cooperation in the region, and in fully realising the ASEAN Security Community.

23. God willing therefore, a culture of peace that is guided by a strong sense of morality and our larger common interests, will be our enduring response to the issues confronting defence in the region in the 21st century.

Thank you.