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HOW MALAYSIA SHOULD RESPOND?

Let me begin by congratulating ISIS for its initiative in organizing this very important national conference on terrorism. Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts with you on the subject.

We have now come to the end of the Conference. What needed to be said and discussed had already been done by previous speakers, panelists, participants for the last two days. In fact it had been sufficiently and adequately dealt by other speakers before me beginning with Dr. Mahathir.

Be that as it may, my focus would be more from the foreign policy imperatives, as what may be perceived as international issues do have a direct and indirect impact on our domestic policies.

For this purpose let me recap some of the points touched by Dr. Mahathir in his keynote address, which had spelt out Malaysia's response to international terrorism.

1. He emphasized on the need to define terrorism, from the aspect of the act itself. No matter how just or respectable the cause may be, acts of terror will negate its acceptability. These acts of terror must be equally punished by all, whether it is committed by individual, group or state.

2. He stressed that there is a need to look at the root causes that caused them to commit such crimes against humanity. Examples of injustices that had created so much anger amongst Muslims are the Israelis treatment of Palestinians, situations in Iraq, Chechnya, Kosovo, Bosnia to name but a few. Unless these issues are resolved in a fair and just manner we cannot achieve a lasting and durable solution to the problems of terrorism. R. Reich said appropriately "we must not only be tough on terrorisms but also on the causes of terrorism".

3. Malaysia condemns terrorism and agrees that there is a need for international cooperation to combat it but we did not agree that launching of conventional war, will resolve the problems of terrorism. It must be borne in mind that terrorists are not only present in Afghanistan but it also exists everywhere.

4. The need for the holding of an international conference on terrorism under the auspices of the United Nations.

5. Muslims or the religion of Islam should not be targeted whether in practice not by

way of innuendos through actions taken by government or states or by the media that seem to create perceptions that Islam and terrorism are synonymous.

Now, I wish to address the issue of what should be Malaysia's response to terrorism. I like to address the issue from two perspectives, namely, geo-politics and geo-economics.

The Perspective of Geo-Politics

The immediate aftermath of the 11th September terrorist incident witnessed a series of geo-political realignments of the United States of America in forging an international coalition to provide the legitimacy of UN Security Council Resolution and NATO military capacity to declare and wage war on the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda. Global hegemony and unilateralism seem to be untrammelled and some have characterized the action of the US especially in the sphere of the military operation as a sign of intense anger and revenge. In making these comments, I should reaffirm Malaysia's condemnation of the terrorist incidents and our sympathy for the victims of the terrorists' attacks which cost the loss of lives of people from 80 nations including three Malaysians and 500 Muslims.

The international consensus forged by the Bush Administration is very much seen as an Anglo-Saxon and NATO effort. Since terrorism is a global problem, there is a need to forge a global consensus of non-Western and non-Anglo-Saxon values. This consensus should encompass the views of the developing world, both Islamic and non-Islamic. In this context, Malaysia as part of its response will use its political, economic and social linkages in assisting to create this additional consensus.

The objective must be to enhance and strengthen the framework of the UN in the international and security issues. Many observers and analysts have expressed disappointment on the manner of action of some Security Council members in obtaining international legitimacy as and when they needed it. The UN system, and in particular the Security Council is seen to become like an international legitimacy supermarket.

Another task of this consensus group is to assist in bringing about a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with UN resolutions that fulfill the legitimate political aspiration and demands of the Palestinian people. Malaysia is well-positioned to contribute positively in this direction.

A further direction of Malaysia's response will be within the framework of strengthening the ASEAN regional security mechanism. The onslaught of the Asian financial and economic crisis had eroded the capacity and resilience of the member states of ASEAN both individually and collectively. In the context of the new security culture, ASEAN has a critical and vital role in maintaining and enhancing regional security.

Probably, one of the most positive responses of Malaysia to the issue of global terrorism as exemplified in the September 11 incidents, is to galvanize and to infuse a stronger sense of unity within the international Islamic community. Malaysia's role within the OIC can be an appropriate and effective instrument in presenting the Islamic viewpoint and input in seeking solutions to the issue of global terrorism. But the OIC has to make a paradigm shift to be seen on a united and cohesive grouping that contribute to the well being of its members as well as to be accepted in the mainstream of world view.

The Perspective of Geo-economics

It is not only geopolitics but the international economic system that has been seriously affected by the events of 11 September. Malaysia is closely linked to the international economic, financial and trading system. With the downtrend of the US economy and the general slowdown in global growth rates as projected by IMF and other sources, the Malaysian response will be in the following directions: -

1. Diversification of Trade Patterns

The US is Malaysia's largest trading partner and any development in the US economy is bound to affect us. Within the framework of long-term trading relationships, Malaysia will emphasis for a stronger and sustained ASEAN and Asian trading relationships, especially with East Asia. The resurgence and endorsement of the EAEC concept at the recent ASEAN summit is a testimony to the development in this direction.

2. Islamic Financial and Banking Systems

In the wake of US government action to shutdown and freeze the asset and money management of terrorist networks, it is imperative for countries like Malaysia and other like-minded Islamic nations to develop and strengthen the Islamic financial and banking system.

Malaysia's response to the crisis brought about by the September terrorist attacks encompasses on wide range of initiatives. Briefly, I have dwelled on some of the more salient ones within the framework of the geopolitical and geo-economic contexts.

However, by way of summation and in view of time limitation, let me touch briefly on a number of other responses reflecting both Malaysian capacity and willingness to contribute effectively not just to the issue of global terrorism but also the humanitarian tragedy currently taking place in Afghanistan.

1. UN Peacekeeping Operation

Malaysia has had more than four decades of experience in taking an active part in UN Peacekeeping Operations from the Congo in 1960 to recent operation in Cambodia, Somalia and Bosnia. Malaysia will undoubtedly consider taking part in any peacekeeping operation under the United Nations in Afghanistan.

2. International Humanitarian Aid

Malaysia is raising funds for international humanitarian efforts to aid and assist the innocent victims of the recent bombing and also to alleviate the refugee problem created by military action.

3. Reconstruction and Development of Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan have paid a very high price for the power politics of the post-Cold War and for the schemes of various groups and individuals and the consequent reaction of the world's strongest military power. It is not too far from reality to speculate that after the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda are eliminated much is needed to be done in Afghanistan. It is incumbent on the world community, and international institutions like the United Nations and IMF to actively plan and implement the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan and its people. Malaysia will be more than ready to do its part both within the framework of the United Nations and in the context of its South-South cooperation.

It is in this context that Malaysia's foreign policy is perceived by others to be principled, consistent and courageous. This posture has to be defended at all times within the country and outside the country, bilaterally and multilaterally.

Why are we considered consistent? This is premised on the fact that since the beginning of the incident up to now, we had not wavered our position regarding the issue of terrorism. Yes, we condemn terrorism, but we said no to the bombing of Afghanistan, because it will not achieve the objective of bringing the perpetrators of the crime to justice. The collateral damage to the innocent civilians cannot be justified as they are not the ones that commit the acts of terror.

Moderate Muslim countries like Malaysia will find difficulty to explain to its citizens on the need to cause so much damage to Afghanistan and its people who are innocent.

This same message had been put across to all the Permanent 5 leaders by Dr. Mahathir in personal meetings, through telephone conversations or in the letters he wrote them. The articulation by YAB PM had been well-received and respected. We did not relent to pressure because our position is principled.

We can afford to be courageous in making our views known because of the harmony and support the people had given to the government as a whole. There had been many instances when the media, both foreign and local, tried to drag Malaysia as if it is a country supporting terrorism or harbouring terrorists. We had not succumbed to this type of pressure.

It is important that we continue to show the world that multiracial, multicultural and multireligious Malaysia is a true model of tolerance and harmony. No one can change our position if we remain united and cohesive. Thus all members of our society have to collectively stand together in support of the government's position notwithstanding the political differences. The government, private sector, NGOs, religious organizations and political parties must at all times ensure that elements of

extremism and militancy will not be allowed to weaken the fabric of our society or cause disorder and chaos in our country. This position taken by the government is fortunately supported by the Muslims and non-Muslim segments of our society.

We are consistent in saying that the root causes have to be found, before we can find a durable and lasting solution to the problems of terrorism. We had dared to question the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians in all international fora. We had clearly stated the selective treatment of Muslim issues should cease. We had stated that there is a need to openly discuss terrorism and define it. We want a collective effort at the international level to tackle acts of terror, no matter who committed them, individuals, groups or states. We had made our views known at the UN meeting, at APEC leaders meeting, at ASEAN and ASEAN plus 3 Summit, and at the Commonwealth, at the NAM meeting, either by our head of government, minister and or officials. Sometimes we succeed in getting our articulation into statements and declarations, at other times we accommodate certain semantics so long as our overall objectives are achieved. In the world of international politics and diplomacy we have no alternative.

What is evident is that we had not change our response to the issues of terrorism including the need for an international conference to be organized by the United Nations. We want the United Nations to play a primary role in resolving global issues of this nature. The United Nations should not be dictated by a few.

As a country, we have to look at the issue of terrorism as a challenge as well as an opportunity. A challenge for us to chart our policy that will be appropriate to the dictate of time whilst accepting our responsibility as a member of the international community. An opportunity for us to create new alliances and realignment.

Finally, let me say that Malaysia's response is from the national and international dimensions. At the national level we have to consider our economic, strategic, political, social, legal, security, policy imperatives in sustaining our position. On the international sphere, we have to continue to reaffirm and reassert for a true international cooperation based on justice and equity. The Muslim nations and developing countries must work closely together so that their inputs will be taken in and not counted out in the collective desire to combat international terrorism. We must deal with the issues from the aspects of both realities and perception. With this, ladies and gentlemen, I conclude my short intervention.

Thank you.