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IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: STRATEGIES, MECHANISMS AND BEST  
PRACTICES**

*"INTERSTATE CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA"*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and the Research and Education for Peace Unit (REPUSM) in extending to me this invitation to speak here today on the occasion of the opening of the 4th Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN) Regional Workshop on "Interstate Conflict Resolution in Southeast Asia: Strategies, Mechanisms, and Best Practices." I wish to inform that YB Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar is unable to be here today due to other pressing matters.

2. I intend to give you an overview of the underlying security situation in this region, and what we have done to ensure that the security, prosperity, and peace of our country, and the region as a whole are preserved. I hope that all present here today will leave the Workshop with a better insight as to how we, countries in the South east Asian region have tried to overcome our differences, and hopefully even come-up with some new ideas on ways in which we can continue and improve on this.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. We are indeed grateful that this region has been free from the interstate conflicts that afflict other parts of the world. However, let me just stress that the peace and stability which we enjoy is not from any inherent lack of tension or conflicting interests between states, but the result of the mechanisms that these countries have put in place to define and govern inter-state relations to ensure that obstacles and hindrances in their relations are resolved in a diplomatic and amicable manner. Countries remain vigilant and focused on the need to maintain friendly relations in order that a secure, stable, and peaceful environment so that our common interest for national development can be realized. We in Malaysia continue to stand by this goal, and work with others to strengthen this resolve.

4. Looking back, it can be said that the past decade has been a challenging yet fruitful time in interstate relations in Southeast Asia. The end of the Cold War brought with it an end to the ideological divide that separated countries in this region. We no longer viewed each other in the lens of either a capitalist or a communist, a democratic or an authoritarian. Instead, our common aspirations for development, stability, and peace have brought us even closer together.

Undoubtedly, the countries of this region were blessed with the unique opportunity to shape the new world order, as it was popularly described at the time. For most of us, at the time of our independence we were compelled to be part of the superpower confrontation. Others, like Malaysia, took a neutral stance and made a commitment to be part of the Non-Aligned Movement. Despite that, the development of the global political and economic system was one in which we were never really allowed to be a part of. The end of the Cold War changed that and the countries of the region were determined that they no longer be left at the sideline on the international stage. We had begun taking our rightful places in the community of nations, and a new paradigm was created for us to shape our destinies.

5. Yet, out of the many shifts and transformations that Asia experienced during the dynamism of the 1980s and 1990s, one of the most important developments was that it became much clearer that our destiny and prosperity is very much interconnected in a way unprecedented in history. We can say this now with hindsight, without justification, and without a need for apology.

6. However, despite the peace that we in this region enjoy, admittedly there continue to exist issues of contention between countries. There are disputes over national boundaries, a number of claimants to the Exclusive Economic Zones, as well as the islands and resources in the South China Sea. This is in addition to the competition arising from indirect state interests in trade and economy, environment and its effects, or some of the issues between as best illustrated between Singapore and Malaysia. And growing rapidly in terms of threat to the peace and stability in the region are soft security issues that includes transnational crimes such as terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, piracy and trafficking in small arms, trafficking in persons.

7. Fortunately, despite the potential for turbulence in interstate relations in the region, there has been no serious case of interstate conflict since the 'Konfrontasi' between Malaysia and Indonesia. Some may disagree with this and point to tensions and threats emanating from Vietnam after its War of Reunification against the Americans or its 1979 invasion of Cambodia. Yet, it must be remembered that in these cases, the tensions between Vietnam and the ASEAN countries were a result of the Cold War, and that this example is void in terms of the ideological differences, and the sidelining of the Indochinese countries from the mainstream regional and global decision-making processes of the time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. I welcome wholeheartedly the convening of this workshop and I know that there will be many questions raised by participants including among them as to why is it that the situation in Southeast Asia is as it is? Why is it that the tensions between us have not led to armed conflict? Why is it that despite differences in policies and at times conflicting national interests, we can still work together? And also, can this situation sustain itself further, and adequately grapple future conflicts?

9. I believe it can. Peace in this region can be sustained if countries continue to abide by the principles, mechanisms and practices that have worked so well for us. In this context, I would like to touch on ASEAN and how it had played a central role in contributing to peace and stability in Southeast Asia.

10. In specific terms, ASEAN's contribution to regional peace and security is through the building blocks it has put in place. The main building block is the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). The TAC is the principal regional diplomatic instrument to strengthen regional peace and stability. The principles of the TAC have also been established as a code of conduct in inter-state relations among ASEAN member states.

11. The TAC declares that inter-state relations shall be guided by the fundamental principles of mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; the right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; renunciation of the threat or use of force; and effective cooperation among themselves.

12. Over the last 34 years, ASEAN has encouraged the development of patterns of behaviour that reduce risks to security by enhancing bilateral relations as well as fostering habits of open dialogue on political and security matters including establishing confidence building measures. Cooperating through ASEAN, bilaterally or multilaterally, on the basis of accepted codes in the conduct of relations between members, has enabled Southeast Asian countries to manage their diversity and establish in the region a generally peaceful environment. This has enabled each ASEAN member states to focus on nation-building and regional efforts to promote economic development. Indeed I would add that today members of ASEAN view themselves as stakeholders in each others' progress and development.

13. In a region as diverse as ours, cooperation between the various countries is imperative. Not cooperation whereby there are junior and senior partners, but cooperation as is the real meaning of the word i.e. a co-operation where all members are on an equal footing; a co-operation where all comments, questions, and concerns will be carefully and evenly considered. Cooperation enhances the understanding of the thinking and policies of our countries, and reduces uncertainty. Furthermore, it has allowed us to build new institution and to prevent and resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner.

14. It is a common misperception that ASEAN was created simply as an economic, social or cultural organisation. ASEAN goes beyond this. Underlying ASEAN is the belief that differences between countries in this region can be better solved if countries were guided by common values and interests, achieved through mutual cooperation and understanding. Through ASEAN, countries in Southeast Asia can focus on their known mutual desires for development, thereby eliminating the use of arms as a means for conflict resolution. It has been said that "War is an extension of

diplomacy through other means". I would like to rearticulate that by saying that diplomacy is a means to prevent war. Yet, diplomacy is only as effective as the importance that countries give to it. With national development being the goal, and peace and stability a prerequisite to achieve this, diplomacy is imperative. ASEAN is here to stay and it is, and will continue to be, an important diplomatic and political organisation for the countries of this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. ASEAN is not and was never intended to be a military alliance. Alliances are conventionally intended against a specific or potential threat. We have long realised that our relative strengths lie not in creating of alliances and thereby moving into a state of belligerency but in the engaging of extra-regional players to bring us together into a position where our common interests can be addressed.

16. However the ending of the Cold War following the collapse of the Soviet system gave rise to a general sense of uncertainty about how new security equations would evolve in the Asia Pacific. Therefore, following the decision of the Fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore, 27-28 January 1992, ASEAN decided to put regional security explicitly on its agenda.

17. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was formed the ARF in 1994 as a forum for consultations on regional political and security issues to foster the habit of open dialogue even where there were different ways of looking at some issues. It was felt that such dialogues could encourage patterns of behaviour that reduce the risks to security. Since its formation, the ARF has grown to include not just the ASEAN members, but in fact all the major powers, including Russia, the United States, China, India, Japan, and the Europeans through the European Union. The ARF has also incorporated other countries of the region no matter their size or strength.

18. The ARF's strength lies in its ability to dispassionately analyse and address the key challenges facing the region. The ARF process which involves meetings of the Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures (ISG on CBMs), the ARF Senior Officials Meeting and the Ministerial Meeting are fora where issues of common concern are addressed. Various Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are also organized on many issues ranging from improving collaboration on military law and logistics, responding to oil spills, search and rescue and disaster relief. In addition, seminars and workshops are also organized to discuss specific issues in greater detail with the aim of enhancing cooperation. Following September 11, the ARF has been extensively involved in counter-terrorism cooperation. For this coming year the ARF is looking at the possibility of creating a special ARF mechanism to handle issues related to terrorism.

19. The ARF is still very much in an evolutionary stage. A three-stage process, the first stage involves the promotion confidence building measures; the second stage is about the development of preventive diplomacy mechanism; and the final stage that of the elaboration of approaches to conflicts. The 8th ARF Ministerial Meeting in Ha

Noi in July 2001, adopted three paper namely on the Concepts and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy; Enhanced Role of the ARF Chair and the ARF Register of Experts/Eminent Persons. At present, the focus of discussions is on how to move from confidence building towards preventive diplomacy. Discussions will also include on how the Enhanced Role of ARF Chair and the ARF Register of Experts/Eminent Persons may assist in this respect. The preventive diplomacy in the ARF context is actually a non-coercive approach to security issues that relies on diplomacy, and not military force as its leverage. It adheres to international norms and laws and consensus of the ARF members consensus.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. As stated earlier, ASEAN and the ARF work through consensus. From the successes of these two organisations in relieving tensions, it is clear that this practice represents a dependable way of making sure that all concerns are taken into consideration.

20. Successful economic development of countries will, I believe, help prevent conflicts. In Southeast Asia, interstate conflicts have been avoided due to the investments and premium placed on peace; brought about by our institutions and methodology. The focus on development is so because we are in agreement in that there can be no stability if some countries continue to be rich while others struggle to meet the basic needs of their people.

21. This, however, does not mean that we should follow the old realpolitik perspective where wealth from economic development is translated into strengthening military power. What it means is that smaller countries will be able to make their voices and concerns heard louder on the international stage if they can become full participants in the regional, and on the whole, the global economic and political systems.

22. Let me wish you a successful deliberation at your workshop and I hope you will have a pleasant stay here in Malaysia.

Thank you.

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