

**CLOSING ADDRESS BY
THE HON. TAN SRI MUHYIDDIN BIN HAJI MOHD YASSIN
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF
MALAYSIA**

24TH ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

**SHERATON IMPERIAL HOTEL
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
9 JUNE 2010, 6.00 PM**

Heads of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Chairman of ISIS Malaysia

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Dr Mahani Zainal Abidin, Chief Executive, ISIS Malaysia

Your Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

1. I would like to thank the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) and, in particular, ISIS Malaysia for inviting me to deliver the Closing Address of this year's Asia-Pacific Roundtable. I trust that you have had a good conference, and that the deliberations of the past two days have resulted in greater understanding of the security perspectives of the various regional stakeholders. I am delighted to note that this year's programme addresses a range of pertinent and timely issues, such as climate change, the recent developments in the Korean Peninsula and America's engagement with Asia.
2. The global map is becoming increasingly multi-polar. Previously, economic and military power was concentrated in the West. However by middle of this century, some experts are anticipating that the four global corners of the world would most probably be China, the US, India and the European Union. Inevitably the world is getting smaller as it gets inextricably linked. In this regard, allow me to share with you my perspectives on regional cooperation and security issues in the Asia Pacific.

Distinguished participants,

3. In the past decade, we have seen two seemingly diverging strategic developments in the Asia-Pacific region. On the one hand, regional cooperation has flourished. Indeed, the scope of our cooperation has been significantly widened to include, among others, tackling human trafficking, countering the threat of terrorism and responding to natural disasters.
4. For instance, there is a growing momentum towards the ratification of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism, which underlines the commitment of regional countries towards harnessing our respective capacities to combat this threat. Additionally, cooperation with extra-regional countries is growing, as shown by the extensive collaboration in this area between Australia and Indonesia. I am happy to note that there is a reservoir of goodwill, which extends to other functional areas as well. This bodes well for the security and prosperity of the region.
5. At the same time, there appears to be a growing sense of insecurity as demonstrated by the growth in defence spending. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, military expenditure in East Asia alone grew by 56 per cent between 1999 and 2008.

This is before factoring in the sharp increases in spending by the United States and Australia, which can be attributed to counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan.

6. Increasingly, regional countries are building up their air and maritime capabilities. To be sure, the military modernisation programmes of some nations have been scaled down due to the recent global financial crisis. Nevertheless, we are likely to see the resumption of high military spending in tandem with the recovery of regional economies.
7. How could the region be joining hands to strive towards peace and prosperity and be arming up at the same time? Some have attributed this phenomenon to the emergence of China as a regional military power. However the fact of the matter is that China, even with its massive size, only accounts for 5.8 per cent of the world's total military expenditure.
8. There is no denying that China has embarked on a concerted military build-up over the last two decades. But so have other countries in the region, though not on the same scale. However, we need to put the rise in defence spending into context. To a large extent, these build-ups have been driven by the imperatives of military modernisation and operational enhancements, particularly in the maritime domain. Securing maritime borders against non-military threats such as smuggling, human trafficking and piracy are some of the major driving factors in the purported regional arms build-up.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. When analysing regional strategic affairs, it is important to start by posing the right questions. Asking if any single country is a threat, whether it is China, India, Japan or the United States, is counterproductive. We need to approach the discourse with more sophistication. Indeed, the possession of a strong military force does not necessarily make a country more prone to conflict.
10. Military power is a necessary but insufficient condition for war. The same power for destruction can be harnessed for the common good. Helicopters and large surface ships, which are normally ominous demonstrations of military might, are also extremely useful platforms for delivering humanitarian assistance in times of natural disasters. They can also be used to address common security concerns. The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), of which Malaysia is an active participant along with our regional friends such as China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and the United States, is one of the many examples in which our military capabilities can be a positive force when used with good intentions.
11. Perhaps this is an overly optimistic view of the growing strength of military capabilities in the region. But I believe that it would be irresponsible for us to forsake the possibilities of cooperation and mutual benefits because we allow ourselves to be blind-sided by traditional threat perceptions. I am therefore pleased that ASEAN-ISIS has chosen "Strengthening Comprehensive and Cooperative Security in the Asia Pacific" as the theme for the Roundtable. I for one strongly believe that we should continue to adopt a comprehensive approach towards assessing regional stability, with equal emphasis between traditional and emerging security issues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. History tells us that the rise of a new major power has often led into an intense competition with an established power. And if left unchecked, this competition carries the potential for a major conflict. Indeed, it is the intensification of strategic competition between major powers that explains almost all of the major wars since the advent of nation-states in the seventeenth century. A careful examination of the historical record tells us that the responsibility for the outbreak of a conflict between major nations can rarely be attributed to the actions of a single antagonist. Instead, it is the result of a series of interactions, where one major power upgrades its military capabilities and thereby prompting the other to respond in kind. In academic jargon, this is called a security dilemma.
13. History seems to suggest that for peace to prevail there must be a balance of power. Is this the only future attainable? I believe that balancing of power as a strategic option is unfeasible and would, in the long run, bring grave consequences to the region. Balancing, regardless whom it is directed against, be it China, the United States, Japan or India, would divide the region and give rise to a new Cold War.
14. An ongoing rivalry between the major powers is counter productive for the stability and peace in the region. Peace and cooperation are evidently better than conflict and bloodshed, particularly if conflicts are based on unfounded premises and avoidable. To ensure that the region strides along a peaceful path, it is critical for China, India, Japan and the United States to accommodate each other's interests and prevent self-regarding nationalism from rearing its ugly head. At the same time, the concert of the major powers must not be at the expense of the ASEAN states and other regional members. The operative word is regional cooperation.
15. For Asia Pacific to prosper, the region needs to further enhance its cooperative mechanisms. Such mechanism can exert a moderating force on potential rivalry by fostering dialogues to deliberate constructive rather than destructive measures and to appropriately respond to a perceived challenge by any power. Such regional platforms can help place matters in proper perspective, separate myth from fact and rein in counter productive response that aggravate rather than improve the situation.
16. Indeed, we have made great strides in promoting economic growth and development through our regional institutions. After the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, many regional countries had deepened their economic links through trade and investment liberalisation agreements. These efforts were reinforced by private-sector initiatives in linking the regional economies. These achievements should be built upon and extended to non economic dimensions as well, to ensure a better future for us all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

17. The Asia-Pacific region faces a number of challenges that require constant and careful management. Countries in the region must remain united in the belief that regional cooperation is the key to build an enduring peace and stability, and the key to unlock the region's boundless potential for economic growth and development. We must never allow the seething frictions that inevitable arise from becoming boiling fissures and leading to permanent fractures.
18. Equally, the development of regional cooperation via wider regional platforms worthy of respect relies very much on political stability and good governance of its respective members. The wider regional processes will be at risk, if the anchor organisations itself becomes feeble. Our commitment, first and foremost, must be for the comprehensive well-being of our people, not grand designs for influence and control.

19. The discussions you have had on the various existing regional architectures are hence very important. We already have existing substantial regional assets in this regard. ASEAN, ASEAN Plus Three, APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit are all testaments of our commitment to a common prosperity and peace. Rather than thinking of one single overarching institution to replace all existing institutions, and disturbing the delicate equilibrium in the process, however, it would be more productive to view these institutions and processes as complementary to one another, each focusing on one aspect of regional cooperation.
20. Obviously, we should not duplicate efforts. We should try to rationalise overlapping areas of responsibilities wherever we can, in order to arrive at more coherent and effective institutions and institutional processes. For instance we should be using specific platforms for economic dimensions whilst using other specific platforms for wider community issues such as climate changes or disaster management. In the process, we must be willing to consider proposals for the much needed restructuring and reform.
21. A more focused approach in community integration will help participants put aside political rivalries and suspicions and concentrate on common welfare of the respective region as a whole. We must also be open to new ideas, especially if these are in relation to relevant regional issues affecting us all. We should never use the excuse that these are too difficult or sensitive problems to be tackled and therefore end up doing nothing at all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. The Asia-Pacific Roundtable is a very important Track Two forum in providing policy-makers such as me with invaluable input and in assisting us all to think through some of the most intractable issues.
23. I would like to again congratulate ASEAN-ISIS and ISIS Malaysia for the successful hosting of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable for the 24th time. I would also like to bid an especially warm gratitude to our friends from near and afar who had taken time away from your loved ones to participate in this year's Roundtable. Thank you.