

Domestic Problems Loom larger than External Threats*

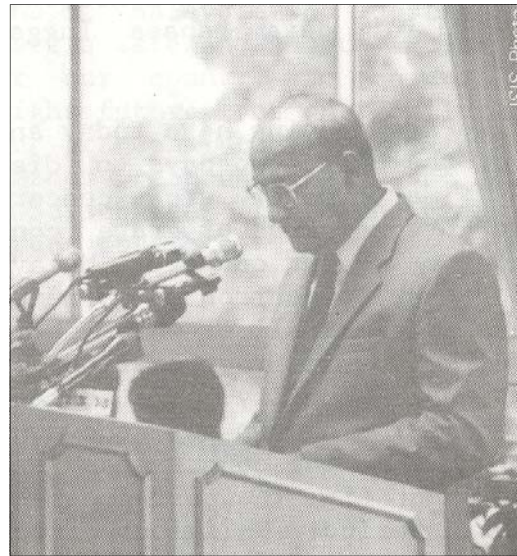
IISIS Focus reproduces here the full text of Tun Hussein Onn's opening address to participants at the First ISIS National Conference on Security entitled, 'Comprehensive Security: Challenges and Responses,' July 15-17, 1986, Kuala Lumpur.

We are meeting here today and over the next two days to discuss matters of great concern, and in some cases, of grave consequence to our country. Malaysia today is confronted by numerous problems, all of which have a direct or indirect bearing on national security.

The current economic slowdown is the most severe that the country has experienced in the post-independence period. Religious extremism and racial feelings threaten the very fabric of our society. The number of *dadah* (drug) addicts has increased to over 100,000 and illegal immigration is becoming a serious issue – especially in the light of the economic slowdown. We continue to face communist insurgency and subversion and we have to attain a state of preparedness to meet external threats that may arise – if not in the short term, then in the longer term.

None of these threats or problems are new, we have experienced nearly all of them at one time or another. We have shown national resilience in the past. What might be new is the severity of the threats, and more importantly, the fact that so many of them confront the country concurrently, with one complicating the other.

These problems traverse political, socio-cultural, psychological and economic dimensions — thus emphasizing the total or comprehensive nature of Malaysia's national security. It is vital to recognize this and to view individual problems in the light of the overall totality.



Tun Hussein welcoming the prime minister and guests to the conference

Malaysia's present security concerns, like those of its Asean partners, emanate from the domestic and international environments. In common with its Asean partners, the domestic threats remain the more critical dimension. They must, therefore, remain our primary concern.

In a multi-ethnic multi-religious country like Malaysia, the attainment of national security is dependent, to a very large degree, on the satisfaction of two very basic conditions.

First, there must be a tolerable level of harmony between individual security, group security and national security. Individual liberty is vital and

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must be protected – except for certain curtailments in the interest of the society at large. Group security is also vital. As human beings can only find security through association in groups, it is important that group security is also not undermined.

In the implementation of policies, it is obviously important that we do not create unnecessary tension between group security and national security; it is important that this tension be managed and reduced.

True national security rests on the attainment of harmony between all the three levels of security – individual, group and national security.

The second condition is that our external environment must be made conducive and supportive of internal political and socio-economic development. Malaysia's regional environment must be made safe. In this regard, the development of Asean has contributed a very great deal. Let none take Asean for granted. To a significant degree, because of Asean, we no longer perceive Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei or the Philippines as posing threats to our national security.

We must work in the context of Asean to enlarge the zone of peace already established in Southeast Asia, to include the other states in the region and

to ensure that the interaction of great powers in this part of the world does not lead to tension and conflict. In fact, our external security environment has improved markedly in recent years and we should work to maintain and improve upon this situation through political and diplomatic means.

We have assembled here today, some of the best brains in the country and nearly all the key officials involved in the formulation and execution of security policy in the country. I believe this is a unique forum – possibly without precedent. It is our hope, therefore, that all present will participate fully and be candid in their views. To facilitate this, all sessions of the conference are closed and participants do not even have to identify themselves when expressing their views.

We are not here as representatives of the various institutions, but as responsible citizens of Malaysia, who desire to chart a safe and smooth passage for our country, and to ensure a bright future for our children and grandchildren. Ours is an onerous responsibility; let us discharge it to the utmost extent possible.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you all for your participation in this conference, I now have great pleasure in inviting the Honourable Prime Minister to deliver his keynote address.

Thank you.