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HAJI MOHAMAD SABU

MINISTER OF DEFENCE, MALAYSIA

Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS

Ladies and gentlemen, ministers, distinguished delegates, in the rules-based order of the Shangri-La Dialogue, we try to start on time. We had to extend the second session by ten or 15 minutes owing to the important statement and Q&A session we had in the first plenary. We were delighted with the richness of our discussions in the second plenary, with a really good debate on what the next steps needed to be on the Korean Peninsula to achieve that vision of peace and security in that region of East Asia, whose stability has not just regional but global implications.

We heard in fact in the second plenary, from the ministers of defence of Korea and Japan who were speaking about the Korean Peninsula, that security and defence in the Indo-Pacific required trans-regional cooperation. Both ministers of defence of Korea and Japan cited the important engagement of the European Union, but also specifically of key European states in upholding the rules-based order in the Asia-Pacific and ensuring that, specifically, the sanctions imposed on North Korea were enforced and not only repeated rhetorically.

We heard from the prime minister of Singapore last night on the importance of small states being able to maintain their diplomatic room for manoeuvre at a time when there was a good deal of great power competition. It is important for us always to hear on the first day of the Shangri-La Dialogue a perspective from ASEAN; therefore, we packaged together the third plenary session with all of those perspectives in mind.

The theme of this session is rather grandly titled Asia's Evolving Security Order and its Challenges. It gives license to each of our three speakers to pick out exactly what they want to prioritise, and I know each of them will have done that. It is a delight for us to have with us Haji Mohamad Sabu, the Minister of Defence in Malaysia, who joined us for his first Shangri-La Dialogue last year soon after his appointment to this post and it is a real pleasure that this year he will be formally addressing the Dialogue.

I mentioned last night that, just one month after her appointment, we were delighted to receive at the Shangri-La Dialogue Penny Mordaunt, our secretary of state for defence in the United Kingdom, who has previous experience in the Ministry of Defence having been a minister of state for the Armed Forces and having actually served also as a naval reserve officer. Thus, this is not a mandate that she has taken on without very long preparation and experience.

It is of course a pleasure again to receive Florence Parly, the Minister of the Armed Forces of France, who addressed the Dialogue last year and this year has come accompanied by a strong delegation, but also a rather large boat in the form of the *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier that is now stationed at Changi Naval Base and that some of you will have the privilege of boarding tomorrow afternoon. That is quite an important expression of the interest that France has in this region.

With that lengthy but necessary preface to settle the room, could I now invite the Minister of Defence of Malaysia, Mohamad Sabu, to address the third plenary?

Haji Mohamad Sabu, Minister of Defence, Malaysia

Salaam alaikum and a very good morning. Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, esteemed participants of the Shangri-La Dialogue 2019, foremost I would like to thank IISS – we cannot pronounce IS – for the invitation and warm hospitality. This event has always been a

conducive platform to synergise ideas and gain new insight on the current global security matters. Last year, for the first time, I came here as a participant to observe and understand overall perspectives and key issues of global security. Now I am deeply honoured once again to attend and share my perspective on the topic Asia's Evolving Security Order and its Challenges.

The foundation of the Asia-Pacific regional order evolved tremendously throughout the years and a new geopolitical landscape has emerged, fuelled among others by a high level of economic growth. Almost a decade ago, China overtook Japan to become Asia's largest economy, second worldwide to the United States in terms of gross domestic product. We observe that this and other posts are shifting the distribution of economic, political and military power across the region. In this regard, I agree with the prime minister of Singapore in the speech he gave last night. The Asia-Pacific region also witnessed the realignment and restructuring of middle powers' foreign and security policies. Therein exists regional anxiety if smaller nations would be forced to take sides, one that has detrimental implications on economic development and nation-building.

One of the greatest challenges with us today is the complex security dynamics in Asia and the Pacific region. It is the world's fastest-growing economies and the fastest-increasing military expenditures and naval capabilities. These facts reflect a bigger global security risk, especially when there is a strong evidence of fierce competition over natural resources and overlapping claims on strategic hotspots. The competition in the South China Sea has undeniably fractured the status-quo regionalism and created a new coalition.

I would categorise the security order scenario into three categories of outlook. The first outlook portrays the challenge to oversee the uncertainty and complex regional order due to geopolitical competition. This outlook occurs due to the multi-polar power structure manifested by the new US administration and China's robust economy and security policy objective for this region. The uncertain relationship between the US and China will remain as an implicit factor in shaping the stability of the Asia-Pacific region, particularly of Southeast Asia countries. That is why I agreed with the prime minister of Singapore last night.

The second strategic outlook foresees Southeast Asia in an intra-ASEAN dynamic concerning overlapping border claims, the large movement of refugees and a rush of internal conflict. The plight of the Rohingya is sheer evidence of internal conflict which has snowballed into a major humanitarian crisis. Malaysia's position on the Rohingya issue is well-known and consistent. We believe that the situation in Rakhine is no longer a domestic conflict.

The ASEAN Charter spoke very strongly about the principle of non-interference and Malaysia will continue to subscribe to this principle. However, beyond the humanitarian dimension, there are also the security and strategic dimensions. The widespread movement of Rohingyas creates instability in the region and could easily become a rallying call for violent extremism in the region.

The third outlook strategy foresees the issue pertaining to Non-Traditional Security (NTS) risks and emerging trends impacting the Asia region. This outlook will be in the limelight in the coming future as it poses a greater challenge. Maritime violence, terrorism and cyber-security are the main challenges which need to be addressed accordingly.

The maritime violence, particularly sea piracy and robbery, requires a more collaborative approach among nations. Maritime issues will be a potential threat among nations if concerted efforts are not tabled effectively. Obviously the Southeast Asia waters have faced multifaceted challenges, ranging from traditional to non-traditional threats within its shores and beyond. The rivalry of the big powers aggravates tension in the South China Sea as there is a greater risk for naval ship and aircraft encounters which pose possible clashes that could spark major conflict, dragging ASEAN member states into it. One such issue is the South China Sea, which concerns the security and sustenance of many neighbouring nations. The South China Sea should remain as an area of peace, friendship and trade rather than one of confrontation and conflict, where ASEAN and the rest of the world can leverage on our strategic location.

Ladies and gentlemen, economic development flourishes in peaceful countries with some security policies, and to each of these we need to rise above our tighter regional security cooperation not by being reactive, but working strategically together. Within the different sectors, a stronger collaboration would increase our interoperability and capability in facing our common threat.

For Malaysia, the national wellbeing is founded on strong and friendly relations with other countries and its commitment to the multilateral system. Malaysia will actively participate in the deliberation effort towards finding solutions to various global issues. Malaysia will continue with the principle of engagement and cooperation rather than isolationism and unilateral action. In response to the complexity in global affairs and expanding international relations, Malaysia's conduct will be guided by the principle of respect for independent sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the affairs of other nations, peaceful settlement of disputes, peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit in relations.

Lastly, I will take this opportunity to wish all Muslims Ramadan al Mubarak and Eid Mubarak in advance for the coming Aidilfitri celebration.

Before I end my speech, I wish to stress the virtue of togetherness in ensuring peace, retrieved from Henry Ford's quote on working together: 'Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.' This is it. Thank you very much.

Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS

Mat Sabu, thank you very much for those remarks. I think everyone will have been impressed by your simultaneous reminder of the important ASEAN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations, but also your earlier comment that the problems of Rakhine State in Myanmar cannot be considered only a domestic issue. I think this is an issue with which ASEAN is grappling a great deal now.