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LIEUTENANT GENERAL (RETD) PRABOWO
SUBIANTO
MINISTER OF DEFENSE, INDONESIA

Lieutenant General (Retd) Prabowo Subianto, Minister of Defense, Indonesia

His Excellency Sheik Muhammad ibn Mubarak Al Khalifah, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain; His Excellency, Lieutenant General Abdulla bin Hasan Al Nuaimi, Minister of Defence Affairs, Kingdom of Bahrain; Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain; Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive of the International Institute for Strategic Studies; Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. First of all, let me thank you for the great honour you have given me inviting me to take part in the Manama Dialogue, and also to give me the great honour of giving an opening address. I hope I will not be too long in my address. It is my privilege to address this Dialogue, especially with this most timely theme of multilateralism.

I have been asked to comment on Indonesia's global and regional priorities, how Indonesia articulates its defence and security policies and its relationship with the Middle East. It is easiest for me to address the last point first. To say that Indonesia and the Middle East – the Arab world – are closely interconnected would be an understatement. I do not need to remind those here that Indonesia has the largest Muslim-majority population. We are the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, and our people look with respect and affection towards the Middle East, towards the Arab world, which is the birthplace of our sacred faith. There was also in this past hundreds of years a vibrant Middle Eastern Arab diaspora that settled in the Indonesian archipelago, and their descendants now count among the leaders of Indonesian society. They are leaders in Indonesian political life, in our business and in our religious and educational communities.

On a personal level, while this is my first visit to this outstanding kingdom which I have heard a lot about, I count myself fortunate to be here today. I have also been on close terms with many leaders of the Middle East for the past years. I greatly value their views and counsel, and I am confident that will never change.

Regarding Indonesia's security interests in the Middle East, let me also offer a few words. It is no secret that many Indonesian religious hardliners and extremists have been greatly influenced, not to mention trained and funded, by like-minded groups in the Middle East, for example, the nexus between al-Qaeda and Gamaat Islamiya and between ISIS and its Indonesian affiliate, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). We obviously monitor these ties very closely, and we maintain cordial ties with our Middle Eastern counterparts in the counter-terrorism sector. More generally, we maintain a close eye on regional security complications. What happens here in the Arab world can reverberate greatly in Indonesia. We sometimes joke that when the Middle East sneezes, Indonesia catches a cold. This is only a slight exaggeration. Tensions here can significantly agitate the Indonesian grassroots.

It goes without saying that stability, peace and prosperity in the Middle East, in the Arab world, is greatly welcomed in Jakarta. Our people follow events and developments in the Middle East very closely. The conflicts and the tension and the violence that occur in the Middle East greatly saddens our people. The Indonesian people always would like to see a renaissance in the Arab world, a renaissance of peace and prosperity. For us, of course, the Palestine problem, the Palestine issue, remains a matter that's of great concern to the Indonesian population. Indonesia, I would like to reiterate, supports a peaceful resolution that encompasses a two-state solution for Palestine, and we are very willing to do all we can to enhance and improve the prospects of such a solution.

Indonesia is situated in the crossroads between two great continents and two great oceans. About 60% of world trade goes through Indonesian waters. Indonesia today is a melting pot of many races, of many ethnic groups, of many cultures, of many religions. We are the home of nearly all the world's great religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity. And we have our own indigenous religions, which were practised many centuries before the arrival of the great religions of the world. Therefore, our basic nature and character is one that is open to external relations, welcoming to all

guests, and always trying to achieve a harmonious atmosphere, to live in peaceful coexistence with all parties. Therefore, our defence posture is basically a defensive one. We have no territorial aspirations outside our national territory. Therefore, we have no real need for power projection too far away from our national homeland.

This will reflect, and this is reflected, in our continuing development of our defence posture and defence strategy. Historically, we have always relied on the concept of the total people's defence, what we call in the Indonesian acronym *hankamrata*. For many centuries, this has been the defensive posture of nearly all our kings, our sultans, our princes. The Indonesian archipelago consists of many kingdoms, principalities and sultanates, and the military system has always been not of a big standing army, but of a smaller standing army with a big people's military. When there were no emergencies and no wars, most of the armies would return to their villages and would take up their profession, mainly as farmers. When the kings, princes and sultans called for an army to be assembled, then the farmers would take up arms and join their leaders, answering the call of their various kings, sultans and princes.

This has been our tradition. This was how we gained our independence fighting against the colonialists. We have fought the foreign invaders and colonialists from ancient times. Many times it would take us many years, and we experienced many defeats, but ultimately our experience convinced us that without the strong support of the people, no foreign invader can endure in our archipelago. This is the background of our defensive posture. Therefore, in its implementation, we organise our military in territorial commands, starting from the sub-village to the village, sub-district to the district, and thus to the province and the national level.

As I took over as minister of defence, it has been my policy to reorientate our defensive posture back to our historical experience, back to our roots. I am convinced that we must build up again our self-confidence, believing in our own strength, not relying on any external protectors. We must believe in our own strength, our own collective experience as a nation and as a culture. Of course, that means that we have to maintain the best of relations with all countries, all neighbours and all powers.

I want to describe now Indonesia's priorities that have intersected with multilateralism. In our experience, we have always been non-aligned. We have always tried to maintain equal distance and friendship with all the great powers. But we realise that sometimes we will be drawn in by the dynamics of any regional struggle for influence, for dominance and for power. That is the nature of humanity, and therefore we must be realistic.

Sometimes the need and the desire to maintain neutrality, to maintain non-alignment, will be very difficult. Indonesia has always been influenced by the great ideological struggles of the world. The Cold War came to Indonesia. There were great ideological contests between communism, between capitalism, between religious extremism, and between ethnocentric and ethnonationalist separatism. We also had problems with our neighbours. There were territorial claims overlapping. There were also rivalries based on ideology. Many countries of our neighbours were very close to the West; others were close to the communist powers.

We did have our problems, but we resolved it through multilateral solutions. Indonesia and four of our neighbours formed a multilateral association, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and through ASEAN, we have overcome many of our territorial problems, many of our conflicts with our neighbours. We resolved our conflict with Malaysia; now, we are very close. Now we consider Malaysia one of our closest partners. We resolved our problems with other countries. Now we are very friendly with Australia – Australia is also a very good partner of us. We have the best of relations with the Philippines. Although the Philippines had a very long-festering insurgency in the south Philippines, which basically are of the same ethnic stock as Indonesia and Malaysia – the

south Philippines basically are Muslim and Malay culture – we decided on the ASEAN tradition, which is not to interfere in the domestic problems and affairs of our neighbours, to respect our neighbours, and this we have managed to keep throughout all these years. This is the positive experience of a multilateral approach.

I would like now to address, I think, what we all now realise, which is the main problem in the Indo-Pacific area, or main issue, let us say, something that keeps many leaders of East Asia and the Indo-Pacific awake at night. We can call it the elephant in the room, which is, of course, the situation in the South China Sea and the possibility of a flare-up around Taiwan. As we look now once again to regional dynamics, we are now forced to face the reality that tensions could flare up at any time. The world has become a smaller place. What happens in one place will influence many, many places elsewhere.

There is an ancient proverb which says a thousand friends are too few; one enemy is too many. What does that mean for Indonesia? First of all, we offer respect for all powers. We recognise the interests of the US as one of the pre-eminent powers ranging across hemispheres. But we also have stood very long by a One China policy. We recognise Beijing's legitimate core interests, and we support and respect Beijing's rightful place as a great world power. China has been for thousands of years a leading civilisation; it is only natural that they will take their proper place in the destiny of mankind. For us, acknowledging both of these realities is not a zero-sum game. We seek understanding and cooperation with both.

Secondly, we seek regional stability, especially with regard to unimpeded access to sea and air lanes in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond.

Thirdly, we remain committed to a multilateral approach through ASEAN to include the defence realm. Steps have already been taken in this regard, such as multilateral maritime exercises. We also launched the Our Eyes intelligence-sharing programme. We also have maritime exercises, joint patrols. We have trilateral patrols between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. We are now preparing trilateral patrols between India, Indonesia, and Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore. This is what we are trying to enhance. Recently, of course, we see more and more realignment in the Indo-Pacific area. We see lately new multilateralisms. We support basically the right of every country to defend and enhance their sovereign rights, and we respect these sovereign decisions.

Distinguished guests, I will not go too much into detail. Maybe my speech can be distributed after it has been edited a bit. I would just like to share with you that, although we have been blessed for basically nearly 40 years of basic peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia, perhaps we have been a bit too complacent because of our lively democratic process and because, in our experience, the Indonesian military, let us say 22 years ago, voluntarily withdrew from political life. I think we are one of the first maybe few militaries who withdrew voluntarily from political life.

I was at that time one of the few military leaders who supported and basically engineered this withdrawal from active political participation. Why? Because Indonesia spans a very wide territory. We have the same national territorial size basically as Western Europe; Western Europe, London to Moscow, is like flying from our westernmost point to our easternmost point, seven and a half hours' flight. We have three time zones. We have nearly 300 million people now, many ethnic groups. We have maybe 300, 400 local languages.

Therefore, the military leaders realised that no military can manage the governance of this large size, and therefore we opted for democracy, and we withdrew from active military political participation. What does that mean? This means that the Indonesian civil society has taken a very strong role, and

as we understand, civil society everywhere, maybe in Indonesia especially, do not like a strong military. They do not like big defence spending because defence spending which is large is sometimes considered to be at the expense of social spending, of economic development. This is what we are trying to convince our civil society, that defence is a requirement for peace. There can be no peace without a strong defence. There can be no prosperity without peace. And even if you are willing to forgo a strong defence, history teaches us that well intentions do not ensure security. If we are weak, history teaches us that the strong usually will trample on the weak.

So, let me conclude my comments by offering the famous teaching from the Greek historian Thucydides. He said the strong will do what they can; the weak suffer what they must. Therefore, if you want to be independent and free, it is not enough to have good intentions. One must be strong to protect our people. One must be strong to protect our sovereign rights. While this teaching from Thucydides is certainly true, I would repeat the cautionary note that I have made many times. The world has become a small, crowded place, made that much smaller in a virtual sense by the digital-information revolution. We have many big threats to our planet – the environmental threat, the climatic change; we are experiencing a pandemic. We do not know what other pandemics will come and when.

Therefore, in my defence planning, next year alone, we will build 40 new hospitals, and we will enhance the 110 military hospitals that we already have. We will add 40 to the 110 we already have, and we will open our hospitals to support civil society, to support our civilian population. For instance, my experience a few weeks ago, I opened a hospital, 200 beds. In the first month, we had 400 COVID patients. Thank God the 400 patients all survived. None of them died, and that shows that a real effort to participate in the mitigation of this biosecurity threat will really help the welfare of the people.

As I said, the strong will do what they can; the weak suffer what they must. However, strength alone does not ensure peace and security. We know that universal values now have become more prevalent and more urgent. By this, I mean the desire for peace has become global. The desire for freedom of expression, for social justice, for freedom of creativity have all become necessary. This should and must make those who wield power and strength take pause. They must place more emphasis on values and rules, respect for human rights, protection of minorities, and safeguard against further degradation of our environment.

In the end, power must be balanced with benevolence. As Confucius noted, those seeking to retain the mandate of heaven are leaders that reflect benevolence, respectfulness and deference. The great powers of today would best be served to take this to heart. Only then will history judge them to have become not just great powers but, more important and enduring, great civilisations.

Thank you very much.