

19TH REGIONAL SECURITY SUMMIT

THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

SECOND PLENARY SESSION: MANAGING GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION IN A MULTIPOLAR REGION

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GENERAL (RETD) PRABOWO SUBIANTO

MINISTER OF DEFENSE, INDONESIA

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

Ladies and gentlemen, we have assembled the speakers in our second plenary and so I would invite you gently to assemble yourselves and we will begin in a minute. Let me just confirm that the title of this session is 'Managing Geopolitical Competition in a Multipolar Region'. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. The title of this session is 'Managing Geopolitical Competition in a Multipolar Region'. It is a region that has a huge variety of partnerships, friendships, what is now called minilaterals and even plurilateral arrangements. I think yesterday I said that the multiplication of these arrangements dazzle even the most astute and experienced of diplomatic observers. And we have with us here three speakers, all of whom have partnerships, alliances, residencies in the Indo-Pacific region, territorial seas that require their regular attention and even more so now for reasons that are geopolitical, not just geo-economic.

I will ask them to speak to us in the order in which they appear in the agenda. Let me just quickly remind you that we will have General Prabowo Subianto, the Minister of Defense of Indonesia. We are really delighted also to have Sébastien Lecornu, the Minister of the Armed Forces of France, who is only very recently appointed to that position, though he had prior responsibilities relating to France's overseas territories including those in this region. I do hope that you will listen to him carefully because he has come to Singapore today on the occasion of his 36th birthday so he is working hard on a day on which he might otherwise be excused. And really honoured to have also Kishi Nobuo, the Minister of Defense of Japan. Every year since the Shangri-La Dialogue was founded in 2002 the Minister of Defense of Japan has spoken and we are delighted that that record continues today.

So with that introduction could I please ask Babak Prabowo to address the second plenary of the Shangri-La Dialogue on the theme 'Managing Geopolitical Competition in a Multipolar Region'?

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

I would like to first of all thank Dr John Chipman and the IISS for inviting me again to this very important forum. I am very honoured and a bit awed by the presence of so many distinguished leaders. Also I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr Sébastien Lecornu, the new Minister of the Armed Forces of France. He is a bit younger than myself. His Excellency Mr Kishi Nobuo, Minister of Defense of Japan; His Excellency Dr Ng Eng Hen; Admiral Teo Chee Hean, Senior Minister for National Security of Singapore.

Distinguished colleagues, when we talk about managing geopolitical competition in this region I must remind many of you, and I do not think I need to remind my brothers from Southeast Asia, that Southeast Asia, in fact Asia, has been for many centuries the crossroads of imperialism, big-power domination, exploitation, deprivation for many, many years. The Second World War resulted in a new spurt of independence movements but these independence movements, the fight against imperialism and colonialism, has been going on for many hundreds of years. The experience of our brothers in Indochina, the experience of our brothers in the Philippines, in India, in many parts of Asia and Pacific, makes us very, very aware of the need for wise and benevolent leadership. We are the most affected by big-power competition.

Therefore, in our experience, during the last 40 to 50 years we have come to our own Asian way of resolving these challenges. We have decided that our common experience of being dominated, of

being enslaved, of being exploited forces us now to strive to create a peaceful environment. An environment of friendship. We have our differences, we have competing territorial claims. Even now we have territorial differences with our brothers from Malaysia. We have claims with Vietnam, competing claims. We have differences with other countries, with China. But our view is that we must strive for understanding, for communication, and we are proud that we have proved to the world that former rivals, former enemies, with bad experiences of confrontation, etc., etc., but we have resolved them. We have achieved, I think, maybe nearly 50 years of peace, 50 years of friendly cooperation, and we have succeeded in achieving prosperity.

Therefore, in facing the current international dynamics we are very concerned, yes. We are very sad at what is happening in Europe, in the Ukraine. It seems far away from us but it affects us directly. The food problem, the energy problem. We understand that. We understand the competing rivalry between the established world power and the rising world power. But for Asia, China has always been a great power for thousands of years. Our society, our culture is very much influenced by China, by India. The great religions in our country come from India, from China. Therefore, for us, we always will strive to respect all the big powers. For Indonesia, our stand is very clear. We respect all the big powers and all the powers that need to have their space, their rights respected. We support a rules-based international order because we are the most affected by any order that just relies on big power. Our experience of being colonised, our experience of being exploited is always in our subconscious.

Therefore Indonesia opted to be non-aligned. We opted not to be engaged in any military alliance. This sounds sometimes like we are sitting on the fence, but no. This is a conscious decision because for us to respect the interests of all our neighbours and of all the big powers in this region is essential. And we have achieved that with our brothers in ASEAN and therefore we are trying to achieve that in this situation. We are convinced that the leaders of the great powers relies the big responsibility on their shoulders. We are convinced that the leaders of China will stand up to their responsibility with wisdom and benevolence because it is their philosophical teaching. Confucius, all the great philosophers of China have always taught us that power and leadership must always come with benevolence.

Therefore we still are optimistic. We respect the United States. The United States actually has proven to be an anti-colonial power. They were one of the first colonies of the – of Britain that fought against colonialism. They supported our fight for independence. We never forget our friends who supported us. Australia also supported our independence. We have now – we are in the fortunate situation of being surrounded by friendly countries. And this is also I think part of our weakness. Because we are surrounded by friendly countries, sometimes our elite becomes complacent. And we think that when we are surrounded by nice people the situation will always be there in a friendly and conducive mood. What the situation in Ukraine taught us is we can never take our security and independence for granted.

Therefore we are determined to strengthen our defence, and that is exactly the key word. Our outlook is a defensive outlook. We have stated that we will defend our territory with every means at our disposal. And we learnt from the examples of our neighbours and of the situation in the world. We see the heroism of the Vietnamese people in their 30-year struggle against colonialism. We also see

how China fought against invasion, fought against foreign intervention for many years. And we respect all these countries.

I think I will not go deeper because I am limited by the time. And so therefore I will conclude my remarks by saying that with all the challenges that we face we are optimistic. We are convinced that wisdom, rationality, common sense will prevail. Thank you very much.

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

Babak Prabowo, thank you very much for that sentiment and that heartfelt perspective from the Republic of Indonesia. A statement not just of a Minister of Defense but also of a statesman. Thank you very much indeed, Babak Prabowo.