20TH ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT
THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

SEVENTH PLENARY SESSION
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GENERAL TEA BANH
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER; MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, CAMBODIA
As Delivered

Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS
Thank you very much. We will open the seventh plenary session, which is the de facto if not the de jure concluding session of the Shangri-La Dialogue. It allows the ministers to offer some reflections from the national point of view, but perhaps pick up a couple of points that they have heard during these three days. And in the question and answer period that I will operate after this plenary is concluded, I invite interventions or thoughts that are general, not just specific to those that have been inspired by our excellent panel.

In the last session, we had two heads of government and one minister. We are trying to keep up the altitude, and we have two deputy prime ministers and one minister and are really delighted to have, again, General Tea Banh, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense of Cambodia. I promised him at dinner on the first evening that I might have time later next year to make my first visit to Cambodia, one of the rare countries in the Indo-Pacific that I have not yet had an opportunity to visit.

Richard Marles, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Australia, for his second consecutive appearance at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. His first was last year, only three weeks after he had taken up his post as Defence Minister, and we are delighted that he is coming back for a return match with an extra 372 days of training.

And, of course, particularly honoured and, as is customary, to have Dr Ng Eng Hen, the Minister for Defence of Singapore, offer his important strategic reflections on Indo-Pacific strategy and cooperative security.

With that, could I please invite the Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia to take the floor. Thank you, sir.

General Tea Banh, Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of National Defense, Cambodia
Your Excellency Dr John Chipman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the International Institute for Strategic Studies for granting me this opportunity to share my perspective regarding ‘Developing Models for Cooperative Security’ in such a crucial forum. I would also like to thank the government and the Ministry of Defence of Singapore for the warm hospitality towards myself and my delegation.

At the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, we could not fully appreciate the scale of disruption and the effect that it would have on our society. It is apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic was a disaster that we will never forget. We acknowledge that we were unbelievably underprepared to manage the situation. Nevertheless, in the end, we have triumphed over this pandemic through practical measures and a broad scope of cooperation.

For Cambodia, a nationwide response mechanism was formulated and rigorously led by Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen. Through concentrating our workforce resources and harnessing the commitment of our officials from all levels, our armed forces and our people throughout the country, Samdech Techo Hun Sen has also highlighted the balance between national security and humanitarian compassion. This led to the decision to allow MS Westerdam to dock in Sihanoukville amidst the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when her requests to dock in numerous places were denied. I believe that this event is a great example that Cambodia has set in terms of humanity, indiscrimination, assisting each other and not being self-preserved during the pandemic.

With regards to comprehensive cooperation, Cambodia, last year, initiated a concept paper concerning cooperation amongst the defence forces of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states in cross-border pandemic containment. Along with this, Cambodia and Singapore also co-chaired the Phnom Penh vision on approaches to support COVID-19 recovery. All of this can be
considered a model for the efforts towards encouraging multinational cooperation well into the future, not only in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic but also with regards to national interests and each other’s interests simultaneously.

Other than the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also been plagued with various regional and global security issues. One vital objective is the collective effort to bring an end to the Russia–Ukraine war. Cambodia opposes the use of force by one country against another, state separation and occupation of a sovereign state. Cambodia believes that terminations of war require mutual concession, which includes stopping the use of force to solve problems, respecting international laws, pausing external encouragement to expand the war and ceasing economic sanctions.

It is evident we do not have any specific models to follow in this situation other than the acknowledgement that we cannot end war through war. The most suitable choice is to end the bloodshed and return to the negotiation table in the spirit of win–win outcome, as Russia, Ukraine and other countries in the region will continue to live alongside one another in the region. That will continue for hundreds of years in the future. And these solutions should focus on honouring each other, and we certainly do not want to see anyone being forced against the wall.

Cambodia supports all initiatives which provide political solutions to end this war, such as China’s 12-point initiative to resolve the Russia–Ukraine crisis. Cambodia appeals to the international community to provide initiatives with similar objectives to obtain a political settlement. If the fighting continues, both parties will ultimately endure significant losses.

Tension between major powers has hindered the harmonisation and prosperity of other nations. It is obvious that competing parties will not gain any substantial benefit as it is inevitable that they remain dependent on one another for the long term. Recently, Samdech Techo Prime Minister stated that we do not want to see either China or the US entering decline. The decline of one or both would bring about many risks for the region and the world. As a member of ASEAN, Cambodia wishes to see changes in the practice of rival nations, from tit for tat to working together in order to achieve shared benefit, stability and prosperity for the region and the world. We also wish to see the easing of tension and a return to normalcy in the South China Sea as well as finding an acceptable solution to bring an end to the Russia–Ukraine war.

The establishment and proceeding of mechanisms and partnerships introduced by some major countries within the region is being judged from different perspectives. It would be a perfect scenario if these mechanisms or partnerships served the purpose of encouraging peace, stability and prosperity of the region. On the contrary, actions that cause destruction to other nations generate tensions within the region, regardless of the reasoning of a strategic balance. On the other hand, we need to weigh between transparency and each country’s interests. Cambodia has faced the issue of Ream Naval Base. Certainly we would provide transparency of our activity to avoid misunderstanding. In relation to this point, Cambodia has clearly reaffirmed that we respect our laws and our constitution. Meanwhile, everyone should understand the requirement of each country, such as the need for military modernisation, to serve its own interests as well as to be able to participate in promoting the peace and stability in the region.

The situation in Myanmar is a concern that greatly affects ASEAN’s credibility as well as ASEAN centrality. In my perspective, the role of ASEAN is very important for the settlement, but success is not guaranteed if there is no true commitment from Myanmar itself. Finding trust among relevant parties is the key to solving this issue. In Cambodia’s experience, the Win–Win Policy offered concessions, value and trust towards one another, which acts as a strong foundation for sustainable peace, harmonisation and prosperity. This is another model that is derived from the inevitable combination of political will, national unity and the pure-heartedness of external support, based on the spirit of shared benefits.
While there are still internal conflicts and civil wars occurring, especially in Africa, causing tremendous humanitarian crises, peacekeepers are indeed a well-needed element. Acknowledging this, Cambodia is strongly committed to enhance our capability and participation in peacekeeping operations under the United Nations framework in order to help and build harmonisation for those in suffering. Notably, last year Cambodia initiated a concept paper to enhance ASEAN women’s participation in overseas peacekeeping operations.

My last point concerns the issue of climate change. Without a doubt, destruction of our ecosystem and pollution occur all over the world. However, industrialised countries remain a major contributor to climate change. We have witnessed numerous efforts to reduce the risk to our Earth. Unfortunately, we have not seen any substantial improvements. We continue to see reports on the climate-change situation worsening. There is a strong necessity for more robust collective effort in this matter, especially from major industrialised nations, in setting examples and trying to reduce greenhouse gas and pollution in all forms.

Thank you.

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

Deputy Prime Minister, thank you very much. I think everyone will have noted in your remarks your commitment to transparency on the facilities that you offer to other countries in your country and your reminder that there remain a number of strategic disruptions in this part of the world for which, to coin a phrase that I used on Friday night, the instruments of strategic peacekeeping must still be found.