

# Speech by Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein at 16th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue



The following is the speech text by Defence Minister and Minister with Special Functions in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein at the 16th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's premier defence summit, on June 3, 2017, Singapore.

1. It is a real pleasure for me to be speaking at yet another Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD). It seems as if I have become a permanent fixture here—not that I mind, because the SLD remains a premier forum for the best security minds in the Asia-Pacific to come together. It hence is always a privilege to be able to contribute to this gathering.

2. I have been asked to speak on the topic of “New Challenges for Crisis Management in the Asia-Pacific.” This title may seem a little self-evident - but make no mistake, we as a region are facing challenges and crises. Indeed, six months after the climatic global events of 2016, the Asia-Pacific seems to be faced with the prospect of fires—small or big—across the length and breadth of our lands that we will

have to scramble to put out. Doing so will not be easy or quick – so this topic is highly timely.

3. In many ways, the Asia-Pacific is in a paradoxical position. We are in a position of relative peace with no major wars being fought here. However, underlying tensions, as well as the action of non-state actors continue to threaten the tranquillity of our shores. Global economic gravity is rapidly shifting eastwards. Our economies remain fragile, and truly equitable development has eluded us. Also, our regional security architecture remains predicated upon the whims of major or external powers. It can be said therefore, that the Asia-Pacific is constantly being confronted with new challenges and potential crises.

4. After thinking about what challenges I should address at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue, I have decided on 5 which I feel are most relevant, especially in my primary job as Malaysia's Minister of Defence. I make no apology for this, as Malaysia is in many ways—perhaps unwittingly—at the centre or even frontlines of the great security question facing our region. The five challenges that stand out most to me:

- i. Proliferation of DAESH's Asia-Pacific ambitions and expanding global footprints
- ii. Escalating tension and volatility in the Korean Peninsula
- iii. Inconsistencies in the quest for hegemony over the South China Sea
- iv. Democratisation of information flow : The punishing 24/7 news cycle, fake news and vulnerable cyber security infrastructure
- v. The rise of authoritarian and populist nationalism sentiment as antithesis to globalization

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The most immediate challenge in my mind is meeting the on-going, but also rapidly evolving threat of the so-called “Islamic State” or DAESH. Although the situation in Syria and to a lesser extent, Iraq, remains tangled, especially from a political point of view - it cannot be denied that real military gains have been made against DAESH in the last couple of months.

6. This however then gives rise to the disturbing prospect that the AsiaPacific is now in DAESH’s crosshairs. DAESH’s threat to our region is real and multidimensional, whether from returning fighters, regional franchises or more disturbingly, from self-radicalized lone wolves. There is a grave danger that existing fault-lines in our region will be exploited, as well as exacerbated by the increasingly insidious presence of DAESH. You are all of course no doubt aware of the recent attack in Manchester in the United Kingdom, Jakarta in Indonesia and Marawi in the Philippines. These incidents were horrible and involved the needless loss of innocent lives. To our British, Indonesian and Filipino friends: our hearts, thoughts and prayers are with you. Malaysia stands in solidarity with you in your hour of need and will not falter. We will stand together firm, determined and ready to confront them decisively.

7. Malaysia, too has not been spared from the DAESH threat. Over the last week, at least 6 individuals linked to DAESH were arrested. From 2013-2016, Malaysia has arrested some 250 individuals suspected of militant activity. It also pains me to say that Malaysians were also involved in the Marawi attacks.

Many of the individuals involved were from seemingly good, even prosperous background or professions. This highlights

the insidious nature of radicalization: we cannot generalize on who can turn into a lone-wolf. How do we meet such challenges? Is the solution political?

Socio-economic? Theological? All this defies easy answers.

8. My second point is 2017 has witnessed the steady worsening of the situation on the Korean Peninsula. No one, certainly not Malaysians, could have foreseen that we would be directly impacted by it. The cruel assassination of Kim Jong-Nam, who everybody knows, reminds us Malaysians again that we were not insulated from the world and its troubles.

9. The problem is not exclusively due to the erratic, unpredictable nature of the Pyongyang regime. While President Moon Jae-in's desire for negotiations with the North is highly laudable, the fact is that this has not stopped the North from conducting what seems to be almost weekly missile tests. The controversies over the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system makes for a potentially combustible situation. Allow me to take this opportunity here to reiterate Malaysia's call for restraint and dialogue in the Korean Peninsula: no one will benefit from conflict, especially when nuclear weapons are involved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. This leads me to my third point: the South China Sea dispute. While the progress made on the "framework" for a South China Sea Code of Conduct (CoC) between China and ASEAN is heartening, it is only prudent for our optimism to be guarded. The chance for a "black swan" event or unforeseen, unintended and accidental incidents at sea or in the air remain very great.

Undoubtedly, this is a complex issue and we must do whatever it takes, putting aside our egos, pride and anger in moving forward. Combative statements, whether from inside or outside the region are not helpful. This is critical as a small trigger can spark into something greater. Malaysia's position is quite clear and will not shift: the South China Sea issue must be resolved peacefully and via multilateral platforms, especially a platform that involves direct stakeholders like ASEAN.

11. While the "problem" of the South China Sea may seem like an old one, it has in fact evolved rapidly. The recent "Belt and Road" Forum in Beijing has highlighted how China is rising as the fulcrum of growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific. However, its ambitious plans for New Silk Roads, as well as the dream for countries in our region for better infrastructure and stronger economies will be futile if we cannot rid ourselves of the suspicions and hostilities the on-going disputes have caused.

12. This brings me to my fourth point - governments are now increasingly finding themselves having to manage the seemingly uncontrolled spread of information and news, whether real or fake, facilitated by the rapid growth of information technology. The 24/7 news cycle has long been a reality: but the proliferation of multiple social media applications often means that we are dealing with several streams at once, often with vastly differing narratives.

13. How do we manage the flow? Especially of so-called "fake news" which for whatever reason certain groups of consumers seem to find so much more credible or attractive. Fake news, hate news, hacked news - we need to wrap our minds around it. Linked to this is the fact that the internet has also exposed countries to new threats. The alleged hacking of the 2016 US Presidential Elections is of course well-known. Recently, the apparent hacking of official websites in

Qatar nearly caused a diplomatic incident after it was alleged that its Emir had criticized President Donald Trump, backed Iran and criticized the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. But such problems are often not malicious in nature: simply witness the travel nightmares caused by the recent British Airways IT glitch just last week.

14. This is in addition to the fact that extremists often use the internet to pursue their insidious agendas. There has also been a few cases of lone wolves having been radicalized or even workshopping attacks through “resources” available online. So while we are now becoming more dependent on the Internet of Things (IoT), it is also the source of constant and evolving dangers.

15. This brings me to my final point - the challenge posed by the growth of authoritarian, populist nationalism. While it has manifested itself most potently in the West, the fact is that it is not a phenomenon exclusive to any part of the world. Discontent over the failure of globalization to also bring about equity and social engagement is being felt worldwide. The irony here is that Asia— which was once on the receiving end of lectures on the importance of globalization—may very well end up as its standard-bearer.

16. The East has certainly benefited from a more open and interconnected world. But then again, if we fail to ensure that it benefits everyone, the political turmoil that is stalking Europe and America could very well visit our shores.

There is nothing wrong at all with wanting to put our country or citizens “first”. The problem is when such sentiments are accompanied by religious and ethnic chauvinism, or even outright hostility or xenophobia to international cooperation. The seemingly unending plight of the Rohingya people of Myanmar—while Malaysia has raised repeatedly—is a case in point.

17. Stable societies, a stable world for that matter, can only be built by common understanding, acceptance as well as give-and-take. This cannot come about if we see nation-building and managing the world's affairs as a zero-sum game - if we regard every concession a sign of weakness, or if we let our personal insecurities dictate policy, allowing the weakening of multilateral institutions or processes, whether it be ASEAN, the European Union, NATO or the United Nations in the name of national interest, will be disastrous for everyone. Dealing with this multi-faceted struggle that we now find ourselves locked in, between nationalism and globalization, between populism and technocracy, between the closing of hearts and minds and pluralism, these New Challenges For Crisis Management could very well be the cause of our lifetimes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. So how are we to deal with these challenges? 2016 has left many people with a rather bitter taste. And the new problems that I just outlined may seem overwhelming but we should not lose hope. We must never surrender to evil, we must never give up. Other countries with weaker leaderships would have given up. Many will disagree, but I believe humans by nature are essentially noble and inclined towards good. I believe this because I have lived this: in Malaysia's darkest hour, during the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 and the shooting down of MH17. There were times when I felt like giving up, there were times I prayed that it would go away, but it was there every morning and I had to address it. As religion taught us, "God will never give you more than you can handle". It was during this time of need that our friends from the region and beyond came to our aid without hesitation and selflessly, giving me the spirit to continue. Old friendships were strengthened while new ones

were forged. And we will always be grateful for our neighbours near and far for helping us during the tragedy.

19. This reminds me of the Malay saying “Ada hikmah dalam ujian” which translates to the trials we face and their blessings in disguise. The coming together that the disappearance of MH370 caused is evidence that nations can still cooperate, that the worst of times can still bring out the very best in us and that adversity can still bring opportunity.

20. But we must be clear, this was based on a disaster. The issues I alluded to earlier are much more dire. We would need stronger conviction, unity and cooperation on all fronts and aspects. We simply must do more. Therefore, I would like to propose five solutions to the challenges:

- i. Championing moderation both within and across borders
- ii. Renewing commitment to regional and international cooperation
- iii. Building trust and confidence with common humanitarian objectives (via HADR)
- iv. Making security relevant in digital age
- v. Bold, firm yet compassionate leadership

21. First, meeting the threat of religious extremism cannot be met by one country alone. The problem, as we have seen, does not respect national borders and thinking that any one nation can go it alone is delusional. Moreover, our focus cannot solely be on “hard” solutions. As I said at the last Shangri-La Dialogue : “The DAESH threat cannot be resolved by simply bombing certain countries into submission, nor can



it be resolved by knee-jerk reactions.” I believed this in 2016 and even more this year.

22. As such, we must also seek to win the war of ideas. It is not enough to stop terrorist attacks — we must also defeat and discredit the arguments that are used to justify them. Moderation is key. While it has not always been smooth sailing for us, moderation and pluralism has always been at the heart of what Malaysia is. But as I said, we understand that we cannot stand alone. Towards that end, Malaysia has engaged in several initiatives with friends and partners throughout the world.

23. The King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP), which is a joint initiative between Malaysia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have just begun operations 4 days ago. The KSCIP will seek to counter terrorism and extremism by promoting peace in our part of the world, working in close contact with other bodies such as the recently launched Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology (GCCEI) in Riyadh.

24. Of course, much more work will be needed to completely defeat the threat of DAESH, but we would rather do the little that we can, than live out the adage that: “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” Remember, evil takes one step forward, when the good choose to sit silent and do nothing. As much as the problem of extremism is a universal one, like it or not, it has been laid upon the door of the global Ummah and we must take leadership in resolving it.

25. Therefore, it is my belief that today more than ever, it is very important for us to put a united front, building a coalition and a movement of moderates, a host of like-minded nations, to be the voice of reason to counter terrorism and extremism - a principle which have guided Malaysia’s recent overtures in

foreign policy. With like-minded friends on board, burden is shared and courage is multiplied, and this will lead us to the light at the end of the tunnel, InsyaAllah. There is no denying that there is evil in this world but the light will always conquer the darkness.

26. My second point looking forward is that nations must also commit even more strongly than before to regional cooperation and processes. But instead of looking beyond ASEAN, the foundations of wider security cooperation can be laid via smaller building blocks, such as sub-regional cooperation initiatives.

The key is to adopt a gradualist approach: we should seek to build many small bridges, rather than one large highway. For instance, Bapak Ryamizard from Indonesia, Secretary Delfin from the Philippines and I are working towards a trilateral partnership that will provide greater security in the Sulu Straits via joint patrols.

27. This year will mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN. While we still have a long way to go in perfecting regional integration, I still believe that the pillars of mutual respect, non-interference and inclusiveness is a model for successful regional partnerships moving forward. It is now, more than ever, we need to show the world which is full of hate and divide, full of tears and suffering, that the ASEAN Way - which is far more than just leaders holding hands in photos - does work. Certainly, no other model, despite the inherent difficulties, could work in a region as diverse as Southeast Asia. We must be proud of our achievements, we have gotten this far – being tested on DAESH, the South China Sea and North Korea but most importantly – we as the ASEAN States must believe it ourselves. We in ASEAN must rise to the occasion and take leadership. All difficulties can eventually be surmounted so long as mutual trust, respect and transparency remains. Still,

it is always better to be a do-er than just a talker, even in regional affairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

28. The third solution I am proposing today is that greater confidence and trust can be built through initiatives such as military diplomacy and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). I have often felt that it is vital to connect our serving men and women together, not only to discuss the profession of arms but to also to work together to assist the vulnerable. The increasing incidences of natural disaster, brought on by our callous neglect of the environment, makes such HADR initiatives all the more necessary.

29. For instance, I have mentioned countless times before with regards to the successes of the ADMM Plus platform in addressing HADR, amongst other various areas of security concern. In addition, our ASEAN Military Ready Group (AMRG) established under the ADMM mechanism is another platform that can be explored in forging a practical form of cooperation in HADR. These measures will no doubt help to facilitate integration in our region regardless of the wider global scenario. But we don't need to look very far beyond ASEAN - widespread flooding and devastating mudslides in Sri Lanka have killed at least 200 people and displaced more than half a million. Helping just one person in Sri Lanka may not mean anything to the world, but for that one person, it will mean the world.

30. Fourth, the challenges posed by the cyber-sphere means that this must now be regarded as another theatre of defence for our countries. We should not only seek to defend our people on land, air and sea, but also the internet.

A few countries along with terrorist organisations of all hues are wreaking havoc across the world, displaying their cyber prowess at crippling infrastructure — political and financial — of countries without deploying conventional violent means. This means that tomorrow's warrior will be a very different one from today's. The soldier, sailor and airman of the future must not only be a shooter but also a coder and hacker. Wars will no longer be won with just bullets and missiles, but also algorithms. Therefore, nations must cooperate to not only crackdown on cybercriminals but to ensure the security of both regional and global cyber-infrastructure.

31. Finally, leadership. I have always said, that this is an indispensable part of global affairs. Again, the events of 2016 have reinforced this. If there ever was a time that patience, courage, wisdom, sincerity and a stomach of steel was needed, it is now. Cool heads and measured words may not grab headlines, but they are more likely to contribute to a future of peace and prosperity.

32. It may not excite your followers. But it will do more to create a world which their descendants will be grateful to be living in. In the months and years to follow, there may be many incidents where lashing out will seem like the easiest option. Indeed, these will come again and again. But if we love our children, then these are the hardships that we must bear. To work patiently, to unite our fractured world, to heal the divide, and to endure whatever tomorrow will bring.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

33. Finally, as I have always said - the only thing constant in life and our world today is change. Referring to the saying "The more things change, the more they stay the same". While everything may appear to be different, but it was, and

always will be, part of the same picture, the bigger, ambiguous, picture, which remains the same throughout time.

34. I would like to end by just saying I am an optimist and I must be, because I am a father and a grandfather to two beautiful boys, Ayden and Adryan. It is up to us, to build the kind of future that our children will have to live with. They will pay for our mistakes, our shortcomings and our hesitations. Let us hope and pray in this holy month of Ramadan, to give us strength as somehow or another, we must be wise but bold. We must find it in us to be all of this and soon—because a better tomorrow must and can only be built today.

Source: [New Straits Times](#)