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Speech by Second Minister for Defence Chan Chun Sing, at the 4th Brunei International Defence Exhibition (BRIDEX) Conference

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Forging a Stronger Regional Security Architecture

Good morning Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It is always a pleasure to be back in Brunei and be in the warm company of friends. Let me thank MINDEF-Brunei for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts at the BRIDEX conference on Asia's evolving regional security architecture, and we also look forward to hearing your views.

New Geopolitical Realities in Asia

I will begin by sharing some perspectives on the changes that I see in Asia's strategic landscape. Global economic power has shifted towards Asia. Asia now accounts for 30% of the world's total trade. For ASEAN, our GDP has been growing at an average rate of 4-5% since 2008. Foreign direct investments flowing into ASEAN from extra-ASEAN sources have doubled between 2009 and 2011. Asia is now an important engine of global growth, and ASEAN, sitting astride key trade and energy routes, is at the confluence of strategic and economic interests of major global players.

The shift in global economic power eastwards has many strategic and security implications. The most obvious is the growth in Asian defence expenditures in recent years. From 2002 to 2012, Asia's defence spending rose from US\$203 billion to US\$356 billion; a 75% increase compared to a 12% increase in Europe over the same period. Last year, for the first time, Asia spent more on defence than Europe. This trend is likely to continue as Asian economies appear to have weathered the recent global financial

downturn much better than their Western counterparts.

Asia's increased defence spending is also not surprising. As economies expand, countries have more to defend and more strategic interests abroad to safeguard in order to maintain their economic growth. However, as regional militaries grow, the stakes in any conflict also become higher as clashes have the potential to become more deadly and widespread. Rising nationalism in many Asian countries has also increased the pressures on governments to respond decisively to any perceived challenges to their national interests. The mix of more confident, well-equipped militaries, and rising nationalism should not be taken lightly. Existing flashpoints in the region, such as on the Korean Peninsula and in the East and South China Sea, continue to simmer with no clear resolution in sight and demand strong restraint on all sides to maintain regional peace and stability.

Beyond traditional state-to-state conflicts, the emergence of transnational security threats in the areas of maritime security, cyber security, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, lend urgency to multilateral cooperation. These threats cut across national boundaries, and no one country, no matter how well-resourced, can solve these problems on its own. To effectively tackle the whole spectrum of modern security challenges, a robust regional security architecture is necessary to promote peaceful accommodation between states, and facilitate effective transnational cooperation.

Regional Security Structures: A Work in Progress

Unlike Europe, the security structures in Asia are less matured. Our regional security architecture is still evolving. However, the unique challenges of the region will require our structures to be evolved, rather than copied, to meet the interests of the regional and extra-regional partners. The structures may not be similar to structures elsewhere and it should not be. But the structures must serve the objectives of building trust, pre-empting and resolving potential conflicts.

We have made progress thus far, and we see in our region today a matrix of overlapping and multi-layered security structures. At the broadest level, multilateral forums such as East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) bring together all relevant stakeholders who can make useful contributions to regional security.

Sub-regional groups such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus have more targeted membership and specific focus areas. In addition, functional groups such as the Malacca Strait Patrols have a niche membership to address specific challenges. Finally, the last layer is the web of bilateral ties between countries that underpins the multilateral relationships.

Each layer serves a purpose and complements the others, strengthening the overall security architecture and helping it to move forward. Asia's regional security architecture is a work in progress. Asian countries need to work with each other and our extra-regional partners to support its development so that we can lay a firm foundation for continued peace and stability in the region.

Key Principles in Forging a Stronger Regional Security Architecture

Allow me to suggest three key principles that should anchor our regional security architecture.

First, the regional security architecture must be open and inclusive to all stakeholders, big or small. Due to the transnational nature of today's challenges, the security and prosperity of all countries are closely intertwined. A system that ensures all stakeholders have a seat at the table encourages countries to engage constructively in dialogue and tackle regional security challenges together. For this reason, events like the BRIDEX Conference and Shangri-La Dialogue are important as they bring together regional and extra-regional players to discuss issues of common security interests.

Second, disagreements between states should be settled peacefully and in accordance with international law. Commitment to internationally accepted norms and legal frameworks provides the only viable and peaceful way to prevent conflict when differences of views arise. In disputes, all sides should exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalating tensions or precipitating confrontations. This is exactly what the 7th ADMM hosted by Brunei in May 2013 discussed. Ministers proposed various measures to reduce tensions in the South China Sea, including establishing hotlines between countries to keep channels of communications open.

Third, a robust architecture must be able to facilitate strategic dialogue and practical cooperation amongst key regional stakeholders. Strategic dialogue between stakeholders is crucial to share perspectives, promote confidence and increase transparency, minimising the chance of miscalculation which could threaten regional stability. At the same time, we must strengthen practical cooperation, including military-to-military cooperation, in areas of shared interest. Together, strategic dialogue and practical cooperation build trust and mutual understanding, cornerstones of our regional peace and security.

Progress for the ADMM and ADMM-Plus With ASEAN at its core, both the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus are key components of the maturing regional security architecture. While the ADMM is a relatively young forum, it has established itself as a credible and valuable platform for dialogue and practical cooperation among the ASEAN defence

establishments. The ADMM-Plus is a bold response to the evolving strategic developments in the wider region. The ADMM+8 format allows the 10 ASEAN member states and its eight major partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia, United States to work together to enhance the peace and stability of the region.

A prime example of collaboration and cooperation was shown in the ADMM-Plus HADR and Military Medicine exercise hosted by Brunei in June this year. This was the first ADMM-Plus exercise and involved about 3,200 personnel with 15 helicopters, six naval ships and six search and rescue teams from all 18 ADMM-Plus nations. Soldiers from the ADMM-Plus countries, including those of the US, China, India, Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines, worked alongside each other as they evacuated casualties and displaced personnel, and delivered aid to affected communities. The participating militaries took advantage of the exercise to learn more about one another, participating enthusiastically in joint training and visits to each other's ships during the exercise.

Such activities contribute to regional stability by building trust amongst participating countries. Brunei provided strong leadership in running this inaugural exercise, which laid the groundwork for the equally successful ADMM-Plus Counter-Terrorism exercise hosted by Indonesia and the ADMM-Plus Maritime Security exercise hosted by Australia, both in September 2013. These exercises were great opportunities for militaries to increase their mutual understanding through working together. This familiarity makes it easier for our militaries to work side-by-side during real crisis, for example during the relief efforts in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan. We certainly hope that such exercises will be continued in the future series of ADMM-Plus meetings.

However, equally important are the months of discussions at the policy level beforehand in conceptualising and planning for the exercises. These conversations allow our countries to share their perspectives and work towards consensus, which builds confidence and increases trust at the strategic level. Yet on another frame, this allows our officers to grow up together, knowing each other at a personal level, in time to come when they are called upon to work with each other in operations.

Conclusion

As the balance of the world's strategic and economic weight shifts towards Asia, a robust regional security architecture that can accommodate all stakeholders and rising aspirations is vital. Relationships marked by strategic rivalry and uncertainty increase the risks of friction and conflict, which could have devastating consequences on the global economy given Asia's increasing influence. Asian defence establishments and extra-regional partners who have a stake in Asia's continued prosperity must therefore engage

in ways to increase mutual understanding and confidence, and cooperate to deal with transnational threats to regional security.

In this regard, platforms like BRIDEX and the Shangri-La Dialogue play an essential role in allowing defence leaders to exchange views and interact on a pan-regional scale. One can never underestimate how important it is for leaders at all levels to meet, establish relationships, and form networks. This web of personal ties is as important a part of the robust regional security architecture as the institutionalised links between our defence establishments. Warm ties facilitate the frank exchange of views, which reduces uncertainty and encourages countries to look beyond their differences to focus on where we can work together for mutual benefit.

So on this note, I look forward to hear your insights, and continue the conversation on how together we can sustain regional peace and stability to ensure continued prosperity for all. Thank you very much.

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