**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**BY**

**HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS**

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**AT THE**

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*“Transformation for 21st Century Diplomats”*

1. It is a pleasure for me to be here this morning to address such a distinguished audience at this eminent institution of learning and training. For over a quarter century now, the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, or IDFR, has nurtured young officials not only from Malaysia but also from several neighbouring countries in ASEAN and even beyond.

2. I am deeply conscious of the fact that I am speaking on the grounds where Malaysia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs once stood. It was here that some of Malaysia’s finest helped forge innovative foreign policy initiatives and conduct diplomacy second to none. My mind recalls the very formation of Malaysia; its turn to the Non-Aligned world; the ending of *Konfrontasi*;the formation of ASEAN; the declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in Southeast Asia at a time when the Cold War was in full swing; the bold and wise move to establish diplomatic relations with China; and the efforts to help resolve the Cambodian conflict.

3. This address therefore could not be delivered at a more fitting place.

4. All over the world, diplomatic services and their training arms are assessing the new demands of the 21st century, and striving to adjust to them. The nature and the extent of their adjustments are being shaped by their capacites and by their estimation of what is appropriate for their particular circumstances. As usual, the countries that are better endowed are able to respond more swiftly and with greater effect.

5. The need to transform and adapt is not something new for diplomacy. It has faced this challenge throughout recorded history. It has done so ever since organised political entities began interacting with one another. Then as now, the geopolitics, geoeconomics and geotechnology of the day have been the primary drivers of transformation. Communication technology, especially the technology with which countries and peoples communicate with one another, exerts an especially powerful influence upon the conduct of diplomacy.

6. I will cite a few of the landmark developments in the more recent past that have had a profound influence in transforming the diplomatic practices of their day. The Peace of Westphalia of the 17th century laid the foundation of the present state-based international order that diplomacy serves. This European system spread to the rest of the world and then continued, as colonised territories became independent states in the 20th century.

7. The Concert of Europe ushered in the era of multilateral diplomacy in the 19th century. During the century that followed, the establishment of the United Nations and other global and regional bodies made multilateral diplomacy a defining feature of international cooperation. These bodies include the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organisation of African Unity, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the European Union and ASEAN.

8. Although its antecedents can be traced back to the ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Persian, Indian and Chinese civilisations, the legal framework for modern international diplomatic and consular relations was laid down in the last century. The defining documents are the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and the United Nations Convention on Consular Relations of 1963.

9. These developments had a profound, game-changing impact upon the evolution of diplomacy. The transformation of diplomacy in the 21st century that we are pondering today is not, therefore, without precedent. Perhaps it is not yet even as far-reaching or systemic in comparison to the transformations of the past.

10. The changes occurring in the environment for diplomacy are nevertheless extremely important, and they have been gaining momentum since the end of the last century. It is impossible to ignore them. The changes are already impacting upon the world of diplomacy and becoming the new norm. Nations that respond astutely will be able to leverage more effectively the new environment. This will entail making appropriate adjustments to the ways in which states formulate foreign policy and conduct diplomacy.

11. To be sure, some fundamentals remain unchanged. Governments are still the official references in relations among states. The core functions of diplomacy – representation, negotiation and communication – remain intact. But diplomats operate in a much more complex world today, a complexity which has been gathering pace since the end of the Second World War. There is a much larger number of actors in international affairs now, many more forums to operate in and a greater variety of issues to address. All this has to be done in a time-sensitive manner in the digital age of instant information.

12. Diplomats now share the international stage with many more actors. Some see this as a constriction of the space that was traditionally enjoyed by the foreign ministry and its missions overseas. Others go so far as to challenge the relevance of the diplomatic apparatus that has been developed over the past few centuries. I see it differently. I think the emerging playing field is exciting and full of possibilities. It calls for a more dexterous and engaged foreign policy establishment. It requires a more active approach to facilitating the legitimate activities of the various players, and assisting them to achieve their objectives. It encourages the establishment to explore new areas in which the players may also be able to help serve the wider national interest, and advance national goals. And where the interests and activities of the players are perceived as impacting negatively upon the interests of the state, it calls upon diplomats to consider ways in which the parties can work together to limit the damage.

13. Among the most significant players in the international realm today are civil society organisations. These have mushroomed across the world in the past three decades or more. These organisations are active in a wide variety of areas including in support of humanitarian causes such as education and health; environmental protection and poverty eradication; the elimination of corruption; and the promotion of democracy and human rights, among others. The large majority operate in the domestic sphere, but they are a constituency to be reckoned with internationally as well. According to one reliable estimate, there are 40,000 non-government organisations that operate internationally. Their engagement with the United Nations, as well as regional organisations, has empowered them further.

14. National interest is best served when diplomats work together with civil society and NGOs to advance shared interests. Long-established and reputable cause- and issue-oriented international NGOs such as Amnesty International, CARE International, OXFAM International, Doctors Without Borders and Mercy Malaysia, all make invaluable contributions to the alleviation of human suffering and the improvement of livelihoods.

15. Working with NGOs may not always be easy, especially on the domestic scene. Things can get uncomfortable when governments become sensitive to critical scrutiny by assertive and vocal NGOs. This is especially the case in developing countries with authoritarian tendencies or where democratic practices are still evolving. The existence of genuine political and socio-economic issues can aggravate matters further.

16. ASEAN is not without its challenges in this area. Efforts, however, must continue to be made. An initial focus by NGOs on non-political and less sensitive areas can help reduce trust deficits, and contribute to a stronger culture of cooperation between government and civil society. This can be pursued under the rubric of the Blueprint for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

17. Multinational companies are also prominent actors on the international scene. Some of them have budgets that exceed those of the smaller economies, while their supply chains account for more than half of global trade. Diplomats who in the past focussed more on political issues are now increasingly engaged in economic diplomacy. For Malaysia, this is nothing new however. Malaysia was ranked 26th in the world as an exporting economy in 2016, andit aspires to be among the top 20 before the year 2020.Promotion of trade is therefore a key mission for Malaysian diplomats and trade officials. The protracted negotiation and continued deliberation over landmark trade agreements such as the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement has further elevated the importance of economic diplomacy.

18. The 21st century is also witnessing a proliferation of the issues that lie within the responsibility of the so-called international community, comprising of states, international institutions and a myriad of other actors including corporations and NGOs. This trend, which began in the second half of the last century, is set to become a permanent feature, as globalisation both facilitates the internationalisation of issues and necessitates close collaboration in their management.

19. As a result, almost all government agencies, including the foreign policy establishment, have a seemingly endless list of issue areas to attend to. The list includes the environment and climate change; education; disease and health; human rights and its various sub-sets; poverty and development; banking and finance; food; tourism; aviation; maritime safety and piracy; migration; humanitarian disasters; transnational crime; and internet security. Other government bodies may be the lead agencies on some of these issues in international forums. But foreign policy and diplomacy are a common thread in all the areas.

20. Then there are the topics and issues that traditionally fall under the direct purview of the foreign policy and defence establishments. They include the violent internal conflicts with serious external repercussions, such as those in Africa and West Asia; internal or regional contests for power, in which external actors become involved, such as in Yemen and Syria; major power rivalry, which has escalated in the last few years; territorial disputes; growing threats from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction such as on the Korean peninsula; refugees and displaced persons; terrorism; and the Palestinian issue.

21. The strategic implications of the current shift towards a more multipolar global economic order merit close attention. It is a situation in which the United States remains, for the foreseeable future, the military superpower. But the rise of China, and its attempt to free itself from what it considers containment by the United States in its own neighbourhood, could yet lead to a potentially ugly confrontation. Could the Thucydides trap come to pass again? Could timely and skilful diplomacy, not least from the two sides themselves, help to avert it?

22. The diversity and complexity of the issues that I just sketched call for a diplomatic service that is much more knowledgeable and literate in many areas. Governments can mobilise expertise from their other agencies, as well as from outside the government. But diplomats require a good understanding of the subjects themselves, with all their nuances and implications.

23. Beyond basic knowledge, a sharp insight into the politics of these various issues, and how they impact on the interests of the country, is crucial. The diplomatic service must therefore become more knowledge-rich. Training institutions can assist in this task by devising appropriate learning programmes that draw on innovative material and approaches. Diplomats themselves, however, must also engage in ‘self-help’ as well. As in every vocation, learning is a life-long process.

24. I must highlight one other important feature of the environment for diplomacy and foreign policy in the 21st century: the media. Diplomacy was once conducted largely in secret by a small group of the political elite and their advisers. Their focus was primarily high politics. The failure of this secret diplomacy, with its secret treaties, to maintain the peace, however, led to its disrepute after the outbreak of World War I. Today diplomacy is largely conducted in the open by a variety of actors. The media has in fact become a tool of this much more public diplomacy.

25. Modern media, with its instant global penetration, is a powerful force in international politics. The most dominant media organisations are from the West. These electronic and print media shape the international news agenda, influence perception and opinion, and propagate positions on international issues that coincide with those of the West. Their dominance is due mainly to their superior resources, reach and sophistication.

26. Diplomats from emerging nation states have to make the best of this media environment. It pays to cultivate the mainstream Western media as well as other important media. Higher priority has to be given to training in public diplomacy, and the development of skills in media management. Language skills are an important aspect as well.

27. Social media in its various forms has already become a defining feature of the 21st century landscape. Establishing a credible presence in it has become indispensable. Social media becomes even more relevant for conveying information and opinion that the Western mainstream media prefers not to carry or fails to portray impartially.

28. Think tanks that engage in the international sphere are a prominent feature of 21st century diplomacy. Understandably, as emerging nations came a little later on the scene, their think tanks are not as numerous. Nevertheless, the Track Two diplomacy conducted by them plays a crucial role in levelling the playing field of international policy discourse. Engaging in candid and informal mode, they are less burdened by the need to be politically correct when speaking truth to power. They can focus instead on being intellectually honest.

29. Thus far, I have dwelt on the changes taking place in the environment in which diplomacy operates. I have spoken on the adjustments that can be made in order to adapt to the changes afoot, and leverage them effectively. My comments derive from observation of what many foreign policy and diplomatic establishments are presently doing. Whether these adjustments amount to genuine “transformation”, however, is a moot point. In my view, transformation implies change from one condition to another. It has to be something systemic or radical, such as some of the landmark developments in the evolution of diplomacy that I alluded to earlier.

30. The establishment of the state-based international order that was ushered in by the Treaty of Westphalia qualifies as a transformation. The multilateral diplomacy that was formalised in the Concert of Europe is another such transformation. The initiatives for global governance in the 20th century, in the form of the League of Nations and its successor the United Nations, also amount to a game-changing transformation, whatever the shortcomings. Sharing the diplomatic stage with a number of other players; grappling with numerous issues new to traditional diplomacy; conducting diplomacy in the full glare of the public eye; and leveraging upon the global media in the digital age, are all very important developments. Their significance should not be underestimated. But for diplomacy and diplomats to be truly transformed, something more remarkable has to take place.

31. I would like to share with you one idea that, if well received, could contribute towards making a difference to the fruits of diplomacy in the 21st century. I believe it is not out of place to air this thought here in an institution of learning. I am under no illusion that what this idea seeks to achieve will be easy. I am reminded, however, that the significant advances made in previous millennia were also not easy. Indeed, they happened in circumstances that appeared even less conducive. The United Nations, the grandest experiment in global cooperation, was launched immediately after two of the bloodiest wars that had divided the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights came just three years after the brutal Holocaust. Most of this century is still ahead. In my view, there is still much time and opportunity to make a marked difference to world peace and human well-being in the 21st century.

32. The idea is a research project that has a two-fold objective. The first is to assess the contribution that the realist paradigm, which underpins relations among states, has made to the management of global peace and security. The second is to consider whether there can be an alternative model that could be more relevant to the current strategic environment, and yield better results. This model could be a dramatically new one, founded on different assumptions and principles. Or it could be a significant modification of existing realist principles, that could induce states to alter their behaviour in specific areas for the benefit of all.

33. The initiative would be a full-scale research effort that mobilises some of the best strategic minds. It would scrutinise the available literature on the subject and touch base with leading experts in the field. Among them would be figures from the realist, idealist and constructivist schools of thought. It would consult policy makers and practitioners among some of the major, middle and smaller powers. A crucial constituency not to ignore would be international humanitarian organisations, leading peace advocates, environmental movements and religious leaders. The study would be best done under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary General, if possible. Its findings, however, should not be subject to United Nations approval.

34. Allow me to elaborate a little further on this idea. Rudiments of the realist paradigm have defined relations between organised political entities since antiquity. The realist model has since been elaborated upon. It is now largely accepted as the most pragmatic and practical model for the ordering of relations among states.

35. Realism in international relations has a long and haloed history. Sun Tzu of 6th century BC China, Thucydides of 5th century BC Greece, Kautilya of 4th century BC India, and Machiavelli of 5th to 6th century AD Italy, are all pioneers of the realist school. Modern advocates include Hans Morgenthau and George F. Kennan. The practitioners of the realist paradigm include well-nigh every leader, diplomat and soldier all over the world. Realist assumptions, with some modifications, underpin the foreign policy, diplomacy and defence of all states.

36. The strongest argument for the realist paradigm put forward by its advocates is that there is simply no practicable alternative to protect state security and maintain international order. The international system is anarchic, and there is no supranational authority with the ability to enforce peace. In such a system, states must take care of their own interests, and pursue power to protect themselves and maximise benefits. Weaker states must seek ways to defend themselves against stronger states, usually through balance of power. While experiments with institutions such as the United Nations and international law are positive, in the end

it is power, the German *realpolitik* and the French *raison d’etat,* that really matters.

37. The primary criticism of an international relations system based on realist principles, however, is that it merely describes things as they are. It does not seek to make things any better. Indeed, it is designed to legitimise and serve the exercise of power. It is not a coincidence that the primary authors of the realist paradigm and its champions come from those associated closely with the powers of the day. I have just mentioned some of these names, and the countries and eras they come from.

38. An anarchic system based on self-interest and power also favours the powerful. The powerful states dictate the rules, call the shots and, unless there is countervailing power, impose their way. The celebrated dictum of Thucydides, that, “In the real world, the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must”, still rings largely true for our system, some twenty-five hundred years later.

39. In the 17th century, it was France that spelt out the rules. In the 18th and 19th, it was the British. In the 20th, it was the United States. The United States continues to hold sway, but its primacy is being contested by China and others. The question arises as to how the rules could change, if there is going to be a new hegemon in the 21st century.

40. The realist system depends very much on a balance of power to maintain stability. A measure of restraint on the dominant power is exercised when there is countervailing power, as in the European Concert system, or during the Cold War before the collapse of the Soviet Union. But as Kissinger has noted, balance of power systems are rare in history. For the most part, it has been empire, or domination by one superpower.

41. An international order based on self-interest and the pursuit of power is a gift to what President Dwight D. Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex. This holds true for every major arms producing and arms exporting country, all of which have a critical stake in sustaining the realist paradigm. Huge arms industries are important for the economy. As recently remarked happily by the president of one such country, after signing a mega billion dollar arms deal with another country “…jobs, jobs, jobs”.

42. Realist assumptions of an international system based on the state as the primary actor, and self-interest as the primary driver, are increasingly becoming anachronistic, however. As I have noted, while the state is still the most important political actor, there are many more actors on the international stage now that the realist paradigm does not take sufficiently into account. Similarly states, societies and economies have become much more interdependent in a globalised world. National interests have become closely intertwined and complementary in many areas. As the authors of the Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy note, “in a globalizing and highly interdependent world, the traditional power-maximizing pursuit of competitive foreign policies may not just be anachronistic, but acutely counter-productive. Instead, what is needed is the identification of problems that are common to many, if not all, actors and the adoption of solutions that require collaboration”.

43. The realist-based system of states, self-interest and pursuit of power has yielded some periods of peace, stability and well-being. But in the long sweep of history, these periods have been short and unsustainable. They have worked best for the most powerful states and their allies, but not necessarily for the rest of the world. The period from the 16th century to the mid-20th century, for instance, was oppressive for much of the world, as swathes of Asia, Africa and the Americas became the colonies of European states.

44. The opening decades of this century have been far from encouraging too. Terrorism, wars, violent conflict, countries turned into war zones, cities reduced to rubble, continued occupation and expanding illegal settlements colour the landscape. The most tragic casualty is humanity itself. The scale of the refugee and displaced persons crises in West Asia and Africa is without precedent. The conflict in Syria alone has produced more than 6 million refugees and 10 million displaced persons. The war in Iraq and its aftermath have resulted in 6 million refugees and an equal number of displaced persons.

45. Unless there is a radical shift in the way in which the international order functions therefore, the 21st century does not look like it is going to be any different from the centuries before. Global diplomacy will adapt to changes in the operating environment, but it will still serve and bend its knee to the same petty god: power. We can choose to continue to endure such a brutish situation. Or we can elect to make a difference.

46. In the meantime, I would like to suggest that Malaysian foreign policy and diplomacy continue to strive for a better regional and world order. This can be done in concert with like-minded friends in ASEAN and beyond. Some of the elements are already in place. The proposed research I sketched out on the impacts and possible adaptations of the realist paradigm could play a role here.

47. In my view, this order must be one that places the welfare of the human person, not the state, at the centre. The state is a vehicle and instrument for that purpose. The order must be based on the pursuit of peace, prosperity and justice for all, according to the enforceable rule of international law. It must be an order that effectively criminalises war and the threat of war unless manifestly and demonstrably for defence. In such a system, states cannot merely proclaim the existence of an imminent and serious threat. They must prove it.

48. It must be an order premised on the principles of cooperative security and common security, not the zero sum principle of the realist paradigm. Such an order must seek to fully honour and enforce the provisions of International Humanitarian Law to protect innocent civilian populations. This requires, in particular, the scrupulous observance of the law’s principle of distinction, and the principles of necessity and proportionality.

49. This better regional and global order does not call for the complete re-invention or overhaul of existing international institutions and instruments. It merely entails selective reform to empower them further.

50. Such an order must rest on a strong moral and ethical foundation. This is already reflected to a large extent in the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and the ASEAN Charter. But they need to be strengthened. And they need the moral force that the voices of noble men and women can give.

51. In this spirit, let me end this address with excerpts from Pope Francis, from his Mass of November 19, 2015, at Casa Santa Maria :

“Everywhere there is war today. What shall remain in the wake of this war, in the midst of which we are living now? What shall remain? Ruins, thousands of children without education, so many victims, and lots of money in the pockets of arms dealers.”

“The men who work war, who make war, are cursed, they are criminals.”

“It will do us well to ask for the grace of tears, for this world that does not recognise the path of peace, this world that lives for war, and cynically says not to make it. Let us pray for conversion of heart…. let us ask that our joy, our jubilation, be this grace: that the world discover the ability to weep for its crimes, for what the world does with war.” **(Mass of Pope Francis, November 19, 2015, translation by ZENIT.org)**