



MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

EXECUTIVE TALK

NIK NAZMI NIK AHMAD
MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

MALAYSIA'S ENVIRONMENT POLICY: MOVING TOWARDS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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PUTRAJAYA

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Salam Malaysia Madani.

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. I am very pleased to be here and honoured to have been asked to speak again. Since I was last year, the title of my Ministry and scope of my portfolio changed ever so slightly—from NRECC to NRES. What has not changed is my determination to help preserve Malaysia’s environment and my admiration as well as desire to work closely with distinguished institutions like the NRC.
2. The NRC plays a very important role in shaping the strategic thinking of our defence community. Your mission is critical for our nation’s future. It is hence very gratifying but also very appropriate that the NRC considers the environment a topic of importance.

DEFENCE PERSPECTIVES IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICYMAKING

3. But then again, this should not be a surprise. It is now common knowledge that climate change and environmental disasters are seen as among the most pressing non-traditional security threats facing nations today.
4. Malaysia’s 2020 Defence White Paper after all noted that: *“Natural Disasters and Environmental Hazards. Malaysia faces a range of environmental security issues.*

The nation is exposed to natural and environmental hazards such as floods, cyclonic storms, landslides, haze, droughts, tsunamis, hazardous and toxic waste problems, as well as air and water pollution. Climate-related natural disasters and other extreme weather incidents are on the rise, threatening the security and health of the rakyat as well as national development.”

5. Indeed, it is no stretch to say that climate change may be one of the greatest threats to security in our country and our region—equal to that of those arising from geopolitical tensions or crime and terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

CLIMATE CHANGE AS A SECURITY THREAT

6. About 80% of people in China, South Asia and South-East Asia live within 200 miles off a coast, with the trends going up as economic opportunities tend to be near ports and facilities that support globalisation. These coastal areas are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change, from rising seas (the nearest example is Jakarta and its sinking) and extreme weather events.
7. This has a direct impact on the ability of governments to ensure citizen access to food, water, shelter and safety – thus having a direct impact on effective governance and political stability.
8. Access to water was identified by the US National Intelligence Council as a major concern in a 2008 report, which stated that ‘climate change could threaten domestic stability in some states, potentially contributing to intra, or less likely, interstate conflict, particularly over access to increasingly scarce water resources.

9. In a February 2024 interview with McKinsey & Company, General (Rtd) Tom Middendorp, chair of the International Military Council on Climate and Security, highlighted the growing recognition of climate change as a national security threat and emphasises the critical role of the defence sector in mitigating its impacts. Climate change, alongside population growth, scarce resources, and shifting geopolitical landscapes, intensifies global tensions and competition, increasing the risk of conflicts over dwindling resources.
 - a. Middendorp argued the need for the security sector to be part of the solution by leveraging its forecasting capabilities to assess risks, enhancing resilience through adaptation measures, and mitigating climate impacts by adopting green technologies and innovative practices.
 - b. He underscored the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, as seen in initiatives like the FieldLab SmartBase, to develop self-sustaining military operations. Middendorp called for a shift in mindset, viewing climate adaptation and mitigation not as costs but as opportunities to enhance autonomy, reduce vulnerabilities, and strengthen security in an increasingly unstable world.
10. In a separate July 2024 address to the World Defense Show 2024 in Saudi Arabia, Middendorp emphasised the critical need for environmental sustainability in the defence sector. He highlighted four key challenges: global trends in resource scarcity, climate change as a risk multiplier, resilience against severe weather events, and evolving policies.

- a. Middendorf **warned of climate-induced conflicts and disasters**, stressing the **unsustainability of current resource consumption** and the need for innovation in efficiency and circularity. He urged the defence sector to **reduce its carbon footprint, enhance operational self-sufficiency, and integrate civilian technologies** to build resilience, calling for a collaborative public-private approach to ensure future readiness and global security.
11. Malaysia's push to embrace the digital economy, such as through data centres now also means that security must encompass the more effective protection of these critical infrastructure. Like climate change, the importance of cybersecurity is also growing. This in addition to traditional pieces of infrastructure like dams and water-reservoirs.

WHAT MALAYSIA IS DOING

12. The issue is clearly multi-faceted. The Madani government has made sustainability the hallmark of its plans for the country, including Malaysia Madani, Madani Economy, NETR, HETR, NIMP 2030, NSS and the EV push.
13. On my end, we are working on:
 - a. Climate Change Bill.
 - b. Updating our NDCs.
 - c. The NAP.
 - d. Plastics Treaty.
14. We have already had certain successes such as (via NRECC and then PETRA) the passing of the Energy Efficiency Act, and increasing allocations for the EFT.

15. I feel this matters to the military, if nothing else then because our serving men and women have homes and hometowns and loved ones there. And the least we can do is to help protect these areas, protect all Malaysians from the worst of climate change while they protect our borders on land, air and sea.

DEFENCE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

16. In many ways, militaries around the world must also respond to the rise of climate change and sustainability consciousness. This means that military planners and their political leadership must now account for evolving security concerns that include climate change, both in terms of how defence and security services must adapt their skill sets, training and equipment to changing missions, as well as adapting troops, bases and equipment to changing weather patterns.

17. Such unconventional thinking must now range from national response capabilities to increased natural disasters, both in scale and in frequency, and to dealing with large population shifts due to changes in liveability of their present locations. The worst-case scenario is the collapse of a political state, where mass influxes of migrants fleeing their former residences for perceived safer areas may impact its neighbouring states.

18. At minimum today, security forces have to actively consider capabilities in Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief, being the arm of government most capable of being deployed with minimal notice, in response to natural disasters, which involves a shift in thinking for militaries to operate in a largely civil environment, and having to work together with civil authorities for rebuilding.

19. New contexts for HA/DR include ground, aerial and naval evacuation capabilities, temporary housing and medical support for a displaced population, search and rescue capabilities, and to a lesser degree, supporting the civil authorities to preserve law and order during recovery and rebuilding efforts.
20. Changes in the climate are also slowly affecting global food production patterns, and as countries become more focused on domestic food security, there is an elevated risk of potential conflict, particularly over food resources in shared or disputed areas.
21. Climate challenges that have a security perspective include increasing temperatures, causing heat waves, droughts and increased fire risk on one hand, while rising sea levels, flooding and other extreme weather events also requiring a diversion of our limited resources to manage. Dealing with the consequences of these challenges will also involve an array of responses, ranging from a temporary deployment of forces for missions they may be ill prepared for, to adapting bases and operations to new weather realities.
22. While Malaysia itself has begun to adapt to these changes, we are not able to influence nor predict the preparations of other nations in the region, and their inability to cope in the event of a major climate-related disaster or change in circumstance may have direct impacts to us.
23. This is why our participation in international and regional platforms, especially ASEAN is so important. This is only tangentially related to the fact we are chairing it in 2025. ASEAN is an underutilised platform on so many fronts and one feels this also includes for climate change.

24. Much can be done, including HA/DR cooperation and on a wider scale, a stronger voice for a more just climate financing. More thought leadership on how this can be realised should be a challenge for bodies like the NRC.

Ladies and gentlemen,

CONCLUSION

25. The nexus between climate change, defence and security is not an uncontroversial one. US Presidential candidate Donald Trump for instance, recently and infamously attacked the idea of military hardware being run using renewable energy or electricity. But this perhaps reflects a failure of imagination on his part. Energy transition for the military may not be an issue we can tackle soon—it would be unwise to simply dismiss it out of hand or refuse to even think about it.

26. Indeed, it is tremendously encouraging that the NRC is integrating environmental issues into their thought leadership and curriculum. It shows a willingness to think outside the box and address challenges that are crucial to the rakyat now. Malaysia is doing what it can and all it can to address climate change. It is heartening that the MAF via the NRC is also contributing, as it always has, to our nation's security by increasing awareness on its various facets.

27. The NRES is always willing to collaborate and cooperate, in any way we can, to assist Malaysia's defence establishment in disseminating knowledge on crucial environmental issues and sustainable practices. I thank you all once again for this opportunity to speak and I look forward to the upcoming exchange of views. Thank you.