

Changes in the Focus of Education and Problems Faced

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**PRESENTATION BY FIRST ADMIRAL MAT RABI, COMMANDANT OF THE
MALAYSIAN ARMED FORCES DEFENCE COLLEGE ON CHANGES IN THE
FOCUS OF EDUCATION AND PROBLEMS FACED AT THE FIFTH ARF
MEETING OF HEADS OF DEFENCE COLLEGES**

Ladies and gentlemen, first and foremost I want to thank the organizer of this meeting for giving me the opportunity to join the others in giving this short presentation on the subject of education at the Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College. I understood fully the theme of this meeting where experiences were to be shared on the issue of changing focus of the military education to suit the supposedly changing roles of the military at present and towards the future. Admittedly, most countries are experiencing changes in the roles of their armed forces and certainly this will impact on the education and training of their military professionals. With this in mind, my aim is to discuss our experiences and I hope it is worthwhile and will contribute to the theme and the conceptual framework of this meeting.

Let me begin my discussion by stating that the issue of the changing roles of the military as experienced by most countries, especially after the end of the Cold War, is not profound in Malaysia. As a new nation, after our independence in 1957, we were concerned with law and order in the country and the threats to the national security then were mainly internal. We were troubled with the communist challenge and the country was in a state of emergency. The Malaysian Armed Forces, though designed for war fighting was forced to carry out the roles internally in order to safeguard the national security. It is worth noting here that Malaysia's understanding of the term national security was already comprehensive in nature to include the so called new concept of security as understood by most countries at present. The military was regarded as a major player together with the police and other civil authorities responsible for security. In fact the police and the military are termed as 'security forces' until the present time. The military is accustomed to the jobs which are constabulary in nature, such as checking the flow of refugees and illegal immigrants, terrorism, piracy and other tasks related to our national security. Therefore the organisational structure and the training of our military personnel were tailored to meet the requirements in order to counter the threats both real and potential.

In essence the training of our military professional takes into account the primary professional skill of war fighting and other skills which are non military in nature even before the end of the Cold War. We never subscribed to the policy whereby the military should remain professional, isolated from society and concerned only with the achievement of victory on the battlefield, without regard to non-military factors.

The Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College established approximately twenty years ago is the highest training institution in the country offering training to officers of the rank of lieutenant colonel/colonel or equivalent. Limited places are also offered to Police and Public Service officers. The mission of the College is to prepare officers for higher level appointments at the military strategic level. From its inception the Defence College course has generally followed three main modules – The Strategic Studies and International Relations, Military Studies and Policy Formulation. The Strategic Studies and International Relations module is concerned with the broader issues of national security and defence that revolve centered around a multi-dimensional comprehensive concept of politics, diplomacy, economic, social, psychological and military. It attempts to expose course participants to the more theoretical and academic aspects of the aforementioned dimension. The content of this module is revised from time to time to suit the changing nature of the strategic circumstances. At this present time the focus is on the philosophy that the country should be engaged in a good mix of diplomacy and military activities in finding ways to prevent wars rather than engaging in them. An increasing emphasis is in providing understanding on the requirement to create a regional security environment to reduce the possibilities for tension and conflict. The Military Studies module is designed to equip the course participants with the spectrum of knowledge and skills to contemplate doctrines and strategies and operational concepts with the focus at the military strategic level. Lastly the Policy Formulation module deals with the understanding of the national defence policy. The objective of this module is to provide the course participants an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the policy formulation process particularly at the strategic and the higher defence organisation levels. This module brings into focus the roles of the military. It must be agreed that the roles of most armed forces are closely linked to the defence policies of their countries.

The teaching and lectures at the Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College are carried out by academics from outside and practitioners from the government and private sectors. The College does not have any teaching staff except for Directing Staff. The mixture of civilian and military teaching staff is a good thing, even though most militaries traditionally preferred to train their own personnel. We have recognised that the complexities of military business seem beyond any one person and further many skills in the Armed Forces have become essentially similar to those of civilian. The new tasks of the military require that the professional officer develop more and more of the skills and orientations common to civilian administrators and civilian leaders.

As the move towards the convergence between military and civilian affairs are more pronounced at present and into the future it is more important for the College to embark on a joint venture training with the civilian organisation in certain areas. At present we are working with the Malaysian National University in order to gain academic recognition at masters level for the Defence College Course with some minor changes in its contents. The challenge for the College will be to ensure that

the professional aspects of training are not affected and instead it should support and enhance the professionalisation of the military.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I am not in collision with the theme of this Conference. The Cold War and the end of it have not indeed affected our military roles and our military professional. Hence the training of our officers at the Defence College has evolved with our our own perception of our national interests and the concepts of domestic, political, military and social organisation and behaviour and have taken shape best suited to our national culture and interests. The emphasis on non-war fighting military missions has always existed in our military history.

In a lighter vein, let me conclude by stressing the oddity about military profession in that most of its members hope they will never actually be called upon to employ their skills in a real war. Since we are living in a warless situation, we are likely not be able to assess these skills. So, it is better for us to concentrate on our skills to prevent wars and other skills that could be readily assessed. Thank you very much.