

Foreword

I thank my good friend, Dr Yeo Lay Hwee, for inviting me to contribute a foreword to this important and timely book. My foreword is written from an Asian perspective. I wish to make three points.

MOVING FROM MIGHT IS RIGHT TO RULE OF LAW

First, let us look at the world in the past 100 years, from 1918 to 2018. In the past 100 years, we have progressed from a world in which might is right to a world governed, although imperfectly, by the rule of law. We have moved away from a world where mighty nations acted alone to a world in which countries, big and small, cooperate in order to achieve their common objectives. We have moved from unilateralism and bilateralism towards multilateralism. We do not have a world government and never will. But, we have a system of multilateral institutions or international organisations, spanning every field of human endeavour. We cannot imagine life without them.

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION BENEFITS NATIONS BIG AND SMALL

Second, I want to make the point that multilateralism serves the national interests of all countries. Let me cite some examples. We cannot live without our mobile phones and the internet. Most of us are not aware that we have an international organisation called the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) which makes this possible. The world economy would collapse without international trade and international trade would not exist without the shipping industry and, to a lesser extent, the aviation industry. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) are critical to those industries.

Free trade benefits all countries. Free trade has enabled millions of people, in Asia, to work their way out of poverty and to join the world economy. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) plays an indispensable role in promoting free trade, in adopting a set of agreed rules to govern trade and in providing a compulsory system of dispute settlement.

Take another example. There is currently a dispute over whether chemical weapons were used in Syria and, if so, by whom. The various parties to the dispute have turned to an international organisation, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapon (OPCW), for help. OPCW is both impartial and expert in this domain. It is trusted by all parties. I think I have demonstrated the point that the civilisation we enjoy is the result of international cooperation through multilateralism.

I want to make the additional point that the global challenges we face, whether it is global warming and climate change or terrorism or the spread of pandemics or cybercrimes and cyber-attacks, cannot be solved unilaterally or bilaterally. They can only be solved by international cooperation and multilateralism.

ASIA AND EUROPE MUST WORK TO DEFEND MULTILATERALISM

Third, Asia is on the rise. In the not too distant future, four of the world's top five economies could be Asian, namely, China, Japan, India and ASEAN. Asia's spectacular progress in the last 30 to 40 years was made possible by a combination of hard work and a conducive external environment. That external environment includes open economies, free trade, globalisation, the rule of law and multilateralism. Multilateralism is of strategic importance to Asia's security and prosperity. Asia's leaders and Europe's leaders must have the courage to stand together to defend multilateralism.

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