In 1996, Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam saw the need for a think tank to grapple with, and decipher, the fast changing strategic environment. The Cold War had ended but new and more complex strategic challenges loomed on the horizon. DPM Dr Tony Tan decided to set up IDSS, which would be dedicated to scanning the emerging security environment and analyzing how it impacted on Singapore and the region.

I was privileged to be asked to be the first Director of the fledgling Institute. At the inauguration of IDSS in July 1996, I explained what I thought should be the purpose of the Institute. First, “to develop, and in due time nurture, a core of knowledgeable scholars engaged in the continuous study of questions of strategic interest to Singapore and the region around us”. I had hoped that the Institute would “in due time develop….expertise to seek answers, and develop persuasive tools, to address complex problems of diplomacy and security” so that they can help us “understand how best to limit the risks….in an unpredictable world.”
Through its research, teaching and networking, the staff and students of IDSS have fulfilled these hopes and more in the last ten years, under the able leadership of Barry Desker. Its research on Asian security issues has won the appreciation and respect of scholars and officials and institutions of significance abroad. In addition to having analysts and programmes that seek to enhance scholarship of strategic developments in and around Southeast Asia and the related trends in the interaction of powers such as China, India and the United States, IDSS has also responded to the times by bringing in experts and initiating programmes that address new issues impinging on security questions that affect the interest of Singapore and the region. I refer to the Centre of Excellence for National Security, the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, and the programmes on Multilateralism, and Non-traditional Security. As the names of these centres and programmes suggest, they focus on some of the less conventional and traditional sources of insecurity: economic crises, terrorism, infectious diseases, the environment, and how all these new threats affect our social and psychological fabric.

IDSS has also fared well as a Track II organization. Many of you are familiar with the numerous public lectures organized by IDSS, featuring politicians and thinkers from the region and beyond. Less familiar to some might be the IDSS “summer camp,” known more formally as the Asia Pacific Programme for Senior Military Officers (APPSMO), which has brought, in the last eight years, colonels from the Asia Pacific to spend 7-8 days in Singapore in early August to dialogue on issues of professional military interest and the opportunity for participants to develop bonds with counterparts from other participating countries. Together with the Asia-Pacific Security Conference (APSEC) organized by IDSS during Singapore' biennial aerospace exhibition, these events have contributed to enhancing defence diplomacy in our region.

Unlike traditional think tanks, IDSS, since its early days, has offered a taught Masters degree programme. Initially in strategic studies, but now also in international political economy and international relations - all of which have grown from strength to strength over the years. I remember the first class of ten students, all from Singapore, very fondly. I have been told that this year, the three Masters programmes attracted 132 students, the majority from overseas.

All these achievements would not have been possible without the encouragement and steadfast support of the Nanyang Technological University (under Presidents Cham Tao Soon and Su Guaning), the Singapore Totalisator Board, and many of you who are here tonight.
In congratulating IDSS for what it has achieved in its short history, it is indeed appropriate for IDSS to reach even higher as it enters into its next phase of its development. On 1st January 2007 the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies will be the beginning of this next phase of development. The Rajaratnam School will be an autonomous graduate school of the Nanyang Technological University. It is fitting that Singapore’s first school of national security, defence and international affairs is being named after the late Mr Rajaratnam, one of Singapore’s former Deputy Prime Ministers and first foreign minister. IDSS will form the main pillar of the new Rajaratnam School, alongside the other existing Centres and programmes. I would like to acknowledge the efforts and support of the many parties that made it possible for the Rajaratnam School to become a reality, including the Ministry of Education, the University, IDSS staff and those who are helping in the raising of funds for the new School.

The aims of the Rajaratnam School shall be, first, to provide an excellent post-graduate professional education in international affairs to students from all over the world; second, to perform fundamental as well as policy-relevant research that address the key traditional and non-traditional security challenges faced by Singapore and the region; third, to disseminate these research findings so that they can inform policy makers here and beyond as well as encourage policy debates on related subjects. Finally, it will help build networks with like-minded professional Schools around the world. Having followed the progress of IDSS in the past many years, I have no doubt that Mr Barry Desker and his team of well-qualified professors, analysts, and administrators will meet these challenges with determination, passion and make an even greater success in their endeavours.

It is with great pleasure that I now launch the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.