



ASIA-PACIFIC
ROUNDTABLE

APR 34

DISRUPTION REDUX

0900 - 1400 (UTC +8)
17-18 August 2021

Our Partners



Report by:

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Introduction

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia convened successfully the 34th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) on 17 and 18 August 2021. The APR process is supported by the Asean Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (Asean-ISIS), a network of Southeast Asia's leading policy-focused think-tanks.

First held in 1987, the APR has over the years earned a reputation as the premier Track Two forum in the region. Because of the travel and other restrictions, this year's roundtable was held virtually – the first in its 34-year history. Its theme, Disruption Redux, reflected how much of present-day realities and future challenges were driven by past problems that were never addressed.

This year, the roundtable brought together more than 500 policymakers, practitioners, experts, thought leaders and interested individuals from governments, international organisations, think-tanks, academia, the private sector and media organisations, who engaged in candid discussions regarding major strategic challenges confronting Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific.

Herizal Hazri, chief executive of ISIS Malaysia, and Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak, chair of Asean-ISIS and director of the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand, gave the welcoming remarks. Both reflected on the changes and challenges to the strategic landscape of Southeast Asia and how the APR programme itself has had to adapt to these realities.

Herizal reemphasised the fundamental aim of the APR – one that is focused on policymaking but not dominated by policymakers, where discussions lead to traction in the service of more effective policies for this region. Thitinan paid tribute to the previous chair of Asean-ISIS, the late Professor Aileen SP Baviera, president of Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation Philippines, who spoke at the opening of the 33rd APR in 2019.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation, delivered the opening remarks. He spoke of the increasing signs that Covid-19 was becoming a two-track pandemic, between the haves and the have-nots, and called for the development of a global framework for pandemic preparedness and response.

Ambassador Ouyang Yujing, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to Malaysia, and Dr Justin Lee, high commissioner of Australia to Malaysia, also participated in the 34th APR. Both centred their remarks on the theme of disruption and how their respective governments are working with counterparts in Southeast Asia to address its multiple ripple effects.

The approved text of the remarks by Tedros, Ouyang and Lee are available at the end of this report. Also attached are the welcoming and closing remarks of Herizal.

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

Session 1

The Pandemic and Global Realignment

Instead of tempering major power competition, the pandemic has instead become yet another avenue of rivalry and has forced the world to confront issues of governance competency, economic resilience and adaptability, and socio-cultural cohesion.

Instigator



Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak
Professor and Director
Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand
Thailand

Speakers



Mr Richard Maude
Executive Director of Policy
Asia Society Australia;
Senior Fellow
Asia Society Policy Institute
Australia



Professor Tosh Minohara
Graduate School of Law
and Politics
Kobe University
Japan



Dr Shafiah F Muhibat
Head
Department of International
Relations
Centre for Strategic and
International Studies (CSIS)
Indonesia

Session time : 10.00am (UTC + 8) | 17 August

Session 1

The pandemic and global realignment

The session explored the impact of the pandemic on the global realignment of power and influence.

Session instigator Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak highlighted the pandemic's unprecedented nature with national and regional challenges. While international cooperation has been the order of the day, the pandemic has also exacerbated major power competition.

Starting off with some remarks on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), Richard Maude pointed to three big trends leading to the rebirth of the Quad. The first emerged from a sort of balancing behaviour across the Indo-Pacific in response to growing concerns about China. The second comes from the Biden administration and its commitment to work closely with democratic allies and partners to promote a rules-based order. Here, he describes the contest with China a "contest of systems". Finally, the most potent trend is the decoupling of US (and its allies) and China.

Maude described the Quad as a mechanism not solely focused on containing China but as a means to find some balance to its power. This is in addition to being a practical mechanism for cooperation. He highlighted that the Quad will not be an "Asian Nato", reiterating that the Quad will continue to invest in Asean through shared principles instead of shared values.

Professor Tosh Minohara shed light on how the pandemic has revealed the true nature of China and

exposed major weaknesses in the US. While China is emboldened by its success in managing the pandemic and taking more decisive policy moves, it is not a status quo power. China's rise is time-bound and will depend on President Xi Jinping's time in the politburo.

Minohara also opined that the US must take a more proactive approach to the Quad and translate its intentions into tangible initiatives. If the objective really is to contain China in the current scenario where there is almost no possibility of peacefully coexisting with Beijing, then the US will need to demonstrate greater leadership in the Quad.

Dr Shafiah Muhibat's remarks focused on the bases of global realignment. The pandemic has led countries to adopt one of two methods of cooperation. Countries can form groups based on trust or proximity, whereby the latter could lead to stronger regionalism. The widespread impact of the pandemic has necessitated structural changes to systems such as supply chains, bringing countries closer together.

The pandemic has increased tension between a number of countries, primarily due to the unintended consequences of Covid-19, such as border control, migration and repatriation and the re-emergence of nationalist stances, fuelled by "vaccine passports".



Session 2

The Social and Political Costs of the Pandemic in Southeast Asia

As borders closed throughout the region, its knock-on effects began to reverberate, effecting labour and supply chains, to services and capital, and human mobility. Beyond economics, what are the human and political costs of border shutdowns in Southeast Asia?

Instigator



Mr Herman Joseph S Kraft
Professor, Department of Political Science
University of the Philippines-Diliman;
Fellow, Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation (APPF)
The Philippines

Speakers



Associate Professor Simon Tay
Chairman
Singapore Institute
of International Affairs (SIIA)
Singapore



Dr David Capie
Director, Centre for
Strategic Studies;
Professor, School of History,
Philosophy, Political Science
and International Relations
Victoria University of Wellington
New Zealand



Dr Sarena Che Omar
Deputy Director of Research
Khazanah Research Institute (KRI)
Malaysia

Session time : 11.05am (UTC + 8) | 17 August

Session 2

The social and political costs of the pandemic in Southeast Asia

The session explored the social and political costs brought upon by the Covid-19 pandemic. Instigator Herman Kraft highlighted how expectations of cooperation have given way to increased competition because of the region's ongoing struggles to attain a "new" or "next" normal, while failing to address the serious costs to livelihood. The discussants provided their insights into the broader effects of such social and political costs.

The session opened with Dr David Capie, who provided an overview of the political costs surrounding the external relations between Southeast Asia and other states. He prefaced his presentation by emphasising the difficulties in creating a generalised assessment of Southeast Asian states because of individual differences and the fluidity of the pandemic situation. Southeast Asia's position as an epicentre of worsening pandemic conditions and geopolitical competition is exacerbated by ongoing developments, such as the Delta variant and geopolitical competition among major powers. He highlighted the main impacts for external players in Southeast Asia that require attention – for example, the competing narratives concerning American power, limitations of virtual diplomacy and overall preoccupation with securing vaccine supplies.

Associate Professor Simon Tay discussed the prospects of Asean's centrality and its resilience following major disruptions. While Asean's role should remain complimentary to the stability brought by the individual

efforts of member states, both fronts are expected to buttress wills and capacities to meet the social and political costs of the pandemic. As the pandemic presents multi-dimensional stressors, he highlighted the importance of a country's social system to bear such pressures to provide for healthcare and food security. The inability to support such social system can poorly reflect on the government and its overall legitimacy. He drew references across Southeast Asia, such as the instability in Thailand, Myanmar and Malaysia.

Building on to the previous point of food security, Dr Sarena Che Omar shared her thoughts on the importance of addressing the human costs of food insecurity in such challenging times. Considering Southeast Asia's capacity in agricultural production, Sarena stressed on ensuring the four criteria of achieving food security: availability, affordability, quality and safety and overall climate change resilience. She also addressed concerns and preconceptions of the immediate effects of food security in the onset of the pandemic. While domestic supply chains possess some degree of resilience and an ability to adjust themselves, there remains issues in the affordability of food supplies. Such concerns can pose severe impacts on marginalised and "invisible" groups, such as Malaysia's Orang Asli communities, and urged those directly engaged with such communities be more proactive about aiding them.



Session 3

Digital Sovereignty: Contesting Ideas, Singular Objectives

Pre- and post-pandemic, approaches to digital sovereignty have been coloured by techno-nationalism, innovation mercantilism and development gaps, even as digital adoption has skyrocketed. Is Cyberspace still a Wild West, beyond taming?

Instigator



Ms Briony Daley Whitworth
Assistant Director
Cyber Affairs and Critical Technology Branch
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
Australia

Speakers



Dr Xu Longdi
Associate Research Fellow
China Institute of International
Studies (CIIS)
People's Republic of China



Mr Abid Adam
Group Chief Risk
& Compliance Officer
Axiata Group Berhad
Malaysia



Ms Farlina Said
Analyst, Foreign Policy
& Security Studies
Institute of Strategic &
International Studies (ISIS)
Malaysia

Session time : 12.10pm (UTC + 8) | 17 August



Session 3

Digital sovereignty: contesting ideas, singular objectives

The session focused on the evolving concept of digital sovereignty. It discussed the importance of standardised regulation and need to balance national security concerns with personal data protection. The plurality of stakeholders in cyberspace also calls for close public-private partnership in shaping the digital sphere.

Dr Xu Longdi shared China's concept of digital sovereignty based on President Xi Jinping's 2015 World Internet Conference speech on the right to development, right to construct legal mechanisms domestically and equal international participation, among others. Data governance is a complex issue which aims to address different issues for different stakeholders. This creates a diverse set of interests, such as privacy, wealth and security. Recognising that not all stakeholders and interests hold equal value, data governance needs to strike a balance between these interests. More importantly, data governance needs to find a balance between privacy protection and national or corporate interests. This requires establishing global norms on data governance. He raised the trilemma of international data governance in areas of privacy protection, data localisation and cross-border flows.

Abid Adam advocated for the role of standardised regulation through a holistic view of digital sovereignty. Although digital sovereignty is concerned with national interests, it does not need to carry the negative connotations of national security. The perspective that digital sovereignty can provide economic benefits understands data as an enabling factor for opportunities and value creation, instead of a concept which constrains behaviour. He also emphasised the

importance of adequate data protection laws. By identifying a minimum baseline for regulation, data governance sets the standard for engagement between stakeholders. This will lift the maturity and capabilities of both enterprises and the nation.

Farlina Said explored the role of civil society in digital sovereignty with concerns over data management practices and privacy issues. Data governance is underpinned by national security concerns, and countries that face challenges of innovation and unfair competitive practices may be compelled to develop tech indigenously. This may impact on diverging standards in areas ranging from smart devices to privacy laws. While there is a need for common standards, the differences in data classification introduce gaps in its application. She also emphasised the importance of transparency to allow data subjects to know how their data is being used and transferred to. This highlights the importance of private-sector engagement in digital sovereignty. It should be more engaged as a stakeholder by implementing norms, building cybersecurity and contributing to confidence building.

Each speaker offered final remarks on the future of data governance. Xu called for greater international cooperation to build a more prosperous cyberspace. Adam emphasised the importance of knowledge-sharing and digital inclusiveness. Farlina urged for greater partnership with the private sector in areas of common goals like cybercrime, as well as the implementation of the norms of responsible state behaviour.



Session 4

Simmering Waters and Unsettling Undercurrents: The New Normal of the South China Sea Dispute

Separating East and West Malaysia, the South China Sea is one of Malaysia's most strategic but vulnerable maritime domains. The multi-stakeholder territorial dispute continues with the status quo increasingly being defined by might-makes-right, instead of norms grounded in international law.

Instigator



Dr Asyura Salleh
Co-Founder
Global Awareness & Impact Alliance (GAIA)
Brunei Darussalam

Speakers



Mr Gregory B Poling
Senior Fellow for
Southeast Asia;
Director, Asia Maritime
Transparency Initiative
Centre for Strategic &
International Studies (CSIS)
United States of America



Dr Wu Shicun
President
National Institute for
South China Sea Studies
(NISCSS)
People's Republic of China



Dr Nguyen Nam Duong
Associate Professor of
Political Science;
Deputy Director-General,
South China Sea Institute
Diplomatic Academy of
Vietnam (DAV)
Vietnam

Session time : 9.30am (UTC + 8) | 18 August

Session 4

Simmering waters and unsettling undercurrents: the new normal of the South China Sea dispute

This session focused on the diplomatic challenges of the South China Sea. Dr Asyura Salleh, who instigated the session, emphasised how the pandemic has changed the contours of the maritime landscape and escalated existing fissures in both traditional and non-traditional maritime security threats. Domestically, the pandemic has also increased pressures on Southeast Asian governments to manage internal affairs while maintaining maritime security. Noting the increased involvement of extra-regional actors, she urged a reassessment of the new normal of the South China Sea.

Three themes emerged from this session – the potential militarisation of the South China Sea, involvement of extra-regional powers especially the Quad, and an emphasis on Asean centrality.

Gregory B Poling indicated that China's growing naval capabilities and persistent coercion in the area have created an environment of intimidation, whereby civilian activity by Southeast Asian claimant states are increasingly impossible. Claimant states, in particular the Philippines, are beginning to realise that their bilateral management vis-à-vis China in the past five years has failed. Moreover, the disproportionate balance of power in China's favour prevents Beijing from productive code of conduct (COC) negotiations. For this reason, the involvement of extra-regional powers, such as the Quad, incentivises Beijing to cooperate with other claimant states. Extra-regional powers aim to support, not overtake, Asean's efforts. The Quad's involvement should not be hyper-focused only on the

South China Sea, as it only represents one area of cooperation with Southeast Asian states.

Dr Wu Shicun described regional maritime affairs as evolving from stability to chaos this past year. He raised concerns about active intervention by the US in the South China Sea. In strengthening alliances with regional partners, the US aims to increase military deployment to target and contain China. The increased militarisation will pressure China to take countermeasures to defend its sovereign interests. There is also increased unilateral actions by Southeast Asia claimant states in disputed areas, especially in offshore oil and gas activities. These developments indicate a lack of political will in joint maritime cooperation with China, which is impeding on the ability to reach an agreement on the COC.

Dr Nguyen Nam Duong explored the concept of an Asean-centred maritime regime. In promoting Asean centrality, this maritime regime should synthesise existing regional instruments into a single coherent and comprehensive framework that promotes maritime cooperation. Apart from managing territorial disputes, the regime should explore areas of cooperation, such as commerce and maritime ecosystem. This regime does not seek to replace the numerous regional instruments but enhance their roles through a united and integrated system to ensure better coordination and efficiency on cross-sector maritime activities. Asean's inclusive and open strategic culture creates a complementary relationship with the Quad.



Session 5

Recovery Disrupted: The Challenge of Vaccine Distribution and Diplomacy

With demand for Covid-19 vaccines fast outstripping supply in Southeast Asia, governments are racing not just to secure vaccines but also to administer them. At the same time, vaccine diplomacy adds a significant new dimension in regional strategic calculations.

Instigator



Dr Khor Swee Kheng
Visiting Fellow
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia;
Associate Fellow, Chatham House
The United Kingdom

Speakers



Dr Jerome Kim
Director General
International Vaccine
Institute (IVI)
Republic of Korea



Dr Mely Caballero-Anthony
Professor of International Relations;
Head of Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Nanyang Technological University (NTU)
Singapore



Dr Anna Powles
Senior Lecturer
Centre for Defence and
Security Studies
Massey University
New Zealand



Ambassador Igor Driesmans
European Union
Ambassador to ASEAN
Jakarta



Major General Qian Lihua
Vice Chair
Council for Security Cooperation
in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) China
People's Republic of China

Session time : 10.35am (UTC + 8) | 18 August

Session 5

Recovery disrupted: the challenge of vaccine distribution and diplomacy

Instigator Dr Khor Swee Kheng shared that it is a marvel that the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine was administered only eight months ago and how since then, 30% of all humanity has received at least one dose and 16% fully vaccinated. Alarming, however, is that a mere 1.2% of the population in low-income countries have received a single dose.

Dr Jerome Kim built on this and highlighted if inequity is not be addressed immediately, three consequent crises are probable: (1) Humanitarian, where the absence of equity in the first two billion doses could mean deaths due to Covid-19 globally doubling; (2) economic, where 50% of global economic cost of Covid-19 in 2021 will be borne by advanced economies; and (3) biological, where prolonged community spread could lead to variants resistant to vaccines, placing the US\$20 billion spent thus far to develop them in jeopardy.

Looking at the topic from a non-traditional security perspective, Dr Mely Caballero-Anthony highlighted how the Covid-19 pandemic has raised the prominence of health security to the forefront of national security. This comes with consequences such as vaccine diplomacy now arguably captured by national interests (ostensibly over that of public health), and how vaccines have been securitised by those who can afford to do so. In the region, China has announced that it will be providing the vaccines as a "global public good", while the US, Japan, Russia and India are playing "catch up". Meanwhile, the G7's pledges to Covax have been slow to materialise.

Dr Anna Powles shared how most countries in the Pacific Island were fortunate to be spared from the first half of the pandemic in 2020. This year the situation has deteriorated with cases in PNG rising 17 times from

around between February and June, while Fiji has one of the highest positive cases per capita in the world. Most worrying is how the vaccination rate in PNG is among the lowest in the world outside of Africa and Afghanistan. Vaccine diplomacy seems to be the main way for Pacific Island countries to vaccinate their population, but success is mixed. Palau, with a close relationship to the US, has managed to vaccinate nearly its entire population while Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa are less fortunate.

Ambassador Igor Driesmans attributed the European Union's success at vaccinating so quickly down to the region investing in the vaccine manufacturing process last year. This allowed manufacturers to conduct tests and ramp up vaccine production in exchange of the EU securing a right to buy a specified number of vaccines in a specific timeframe. He highlighted how the region sought to meet its responsibility towards vaccine equity by setting up the Covax facility with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and Gavi. The ambassador also shared that challenges to vaccine manufacturing are not merely related to intellectual property but rather the inherent complications of the manufacturing process.

The last speaker, Maj-Gen (rtd) Qian Lihua, shared how China is honouring its commitment of making the vaccines a global public good. This is with Beijing's pledges that it will provide US\$3 billion for Covid-19 aid and vaccines to developing countries, and two billion doses of vaccines and US\$100 million to Covax. With the Delta variant wreaking havoc around the world, Qian stressed that the only way to stop Covid-19 is through international cooperation and not confrontation, and supply of vaccines, not politicisation.



Session 6

Myanmar in Turmoil: National and Regional Repercussions

The struggle for state power and recognition between competing factions in the aftermath of Myanmar's February 1 coup is worsening social unrest across the country, while ASEAN is under pressure to take the lead in persuading the multiple factions to resolve their difference peacefully, but itself remains divided on its course of action. Where is the path forward?

Instigator



Ambassador Pou Sothirak
Executive Director
Cambodian Centre for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)
Cambodia

Speakers



Ambassador Rizal Sukma
Senior Researcher
Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
Indonesia



Ms Gwen Robinson
Editor-At-Large,
Nikkei Asian Review
Senior Fellow, Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand
Thailand



Mr Stephan Pierre Sakalian
Head of Delegation in Myanmar
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Session time : 12.15pm (UTC + 8) | 18 August

Session 6

Myanmar in turmoil: national and regional repercussions

The session explored the political and humanitarian crises in Myanmar and the options to resolve the ongoing tension. The February coup unravelled the years-long thrust towards democracy and economic modernisation, plunging the country into crisis amid a harsher Covid-19 wave.

The Myanmar crisis presents a unique challenge to the notion of Asean as the most successful regional organisation and damages its credibility and utility. Asean has been staggeringly slow to address this crisis, only producing the five-point consensus three months after the coup and appointing a special envoy another four months later. Ambassador Rizal Sukma suggested three proposals: (1) Guidelines must be established to chart out the tasks and responsibilities of the special envoy so as to distinguish his role from the authority of the Asean chair (Brunei), where he hails from; (2) Asean needs to establish a permanent presence in Myanmar to facilitate the assignment of the special envoy; and (3) the envoy must be given access to all stakeholders to facilitate a peaceful resolution.

Gwen Robinson said the task of bringing every stakeholder to the negotiation table is complicated by the fact that anti-junta forces are disunited. If the National Unity Government (NUG) were to successfully unite these scattered forces, it will tip the scale in its favour. She highlighted the inability of Tatmadaw to establish control across the country and its repression against media and journalists. Information is mainly disseminated by international organisations remaining in the country. The news remains grim, with the country

heading towards complete economic collapse. It is projected that a large part of the population will suffer from food shortage by year-end. Some workers have returned to work at reopened sectors because the people still need to earn a living despite opposing the junta rule.

Stephan Pierre Sakalian stated that the humanitarian problem was already complex even before the coup. Decades of internal conflict have crippled the lives of many that in early 2020, Myanmar had the lowest humanitarian index in Asean. It is also the region's poorest country whereby at least one million people depend on humanitarian assistance. The Covid-19 vaccines also introduced another dimension to the problem as currently, the state practises prejudice on who gets the vaccines. This problem sits on top of the widespread lack of access to healthcare services and the lack of trust in junta-run health facilities. The current test case which can shed light on the Tatmadaw's position on this is whether it would allow international organisations to administer the vaccines to everyone, including the opposition. Sakalian concluded by proposing suggestions to deliver humanitarian assistance effectively: (1) Continue advocating for the Tatmadaw to give way for existing humanitarian actions; (2) leverage on existing international organisations which remain inside Myanmar to execute this agenda; (3) foster a coalition of countries to facilitate the delivery of assistance; and (4) encourage Myanmar's neighbours (such as Thailand) to facilitate cross-border humanitarian assistance.

Welcoming Remarks

Mr Herizal Hazri

Chief Executive
 Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
 Malaysia



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General,
 World Health Organisation (WHO)

Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak, Director of the Institute of
 Security and International Studies and Chair of the
 Asean-ISIS Network

Asean-ISIS Heads and Members

Board members and my hardworking colleagues at ISIS
 Malaysia

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you once again,
 to the Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR). As many of you are
 aware, this roundtable is organised by ISIS Malaysia in
 cooperation with the Asean-ISIS Network – a network
 made up of Southeast Asia's leading think-tanks.

In its nearly 3½ decades, the APR has grown
 significantly in scope, depth and size. It has gradually
 developed its own niche and reputation and is
 recognised worldwide as one of the most important
 annual Track-Two conferences in this region. This
 roundtable now regularly attracts policymakers,
 officials, policy practitioners, scholars, journalists,
 thought leaders, intellectuals, and interested individuals
 to engage in robust and constructive discussions on
 strategic issues concerning our region.

Initially, the APR was focused on strategic security and
 diplomacy issues that affected the stability of the
 Asia-Pacific region, and Southeast Asia in particular.
 Over the years, we have sought to widen these topics to
 reflect the evolving issues that have and continue to
 impact the national and international construct of our
 region. These include the increasing and undeniable
 enmeshment and overlap between security and
 diplomacy with sustainability and prosperity.

This roundtable had modest but earnest beginnings
 when it was first convened in 1987. Then, it was held at
 the conference room of ISIS Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.
 The tables that hosted those conversations are still
 there today, and still play host to frank and intellectual
 exchange of thoughts and ideas – at least till March last
 year when along with much of the world, ISIS Malaysia
 had to suspend in-person meetings and make the
 switch to virtual meetings and conferences. And here
 we are today, the first (and hopefully the last) fully
 virtual APR.

While the way we conduct the roundtable has changed,
 the aim – then and now – remains consistent. The APR
 seeks to serve as a platform for frank and policy-relevant
 discussions on the major strategic issues affecting the
 Asia-Pacific region at the Track-Two level. The APR,
 therefore, occupies a very specific space in the world of
 conferences. It is not an academic conference, even
 though many of our speakers and participants come
 from the academic world. The sessions and speakers are
 specifically chosen for their ability to speak and address
 the concerns of the policy world. But nor is the APR a
 conference dominated by officials. We are not primarily

here to listen the policy pronouncements of senior officials. Rather, our key aim is to go deep to investigate and inform – in a way to create traction for the making of effective policies that matter to the countries throughout the region.

So that's what the APR is about: it is not Track 1.5 but decidedly Track 2 in its orientation. And that is how we intend to position the APR well into the future.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

One of the challenges in developing a theme for a conference like the APR is to get the balance right between the realities of the day and the challenges of the future. For the 34th APR, we had to take into account another aspect – the past.

The theme of this year's conference is "Disruption Redux". In the preceding decade, as the lull of the post-Cold War euphoria wore off, the focus of APRs revolved around a plethora of disruptive issues and trends that were slowly but surely impacting the stability of strategic architectures which governed Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific.

Some of these disruptions were then-new issues, which are now major fixtures for many policymakers and practitioners, such as the ripple effects of the ongoing technology and cyber revolution, challenges to the resource-energy nexus and the impact of climate change to "traditional" security challenges. Others were older issues, those we thought were put to bed but are now back with a vengeance such as major power rivalry, terrorism, public health and the ever-troubling issues of refugees.

Many aren't unfamiliar to us. Yet our response has indicated anything but. Almost 1½ years into the Covid-19 pandemic, national and regional architectures and the norms that shape policymaking are in the midst of their greatest disruptive phase since the Second World War.

Among the issues that the APR will cover this year include an examination on the impact of this pandemic on the global realignment of multilateral institutions, mechanism, norms, power and influence in the Asia-Pacific. Closer to home in Southeast Asia, we

examine the social and political costs of the pandemic in Southeast Asia, and Asean's response to the issues.

We will also convene a session on the challenge of vaccine diplomacy and its impact on regional strategic calculations. More importantly is the vaccines' actual distribution, especially at a time when Southeast Asia, which is home and the subject of attention of most of our participants, is facing a deadly spike in infections of the Delta variant.

Still on the topic of disruption, the 34th APR will also explore the question of digital sovereignty in Southeast Asia, particularly an environment where the data economy and innovation are dependent on public policies and private sector progress, which isn't always reflected.

Also making a comeback to the APR is a session on the developments in the South China Sea. We are experiencing rising tensions from territorial disputes, and the seeming subsuming of the dispute in major power rivalry that are further compounded by a lack of meaningful progress on the Code of Conduct negotiations.

Lastly, this APR will conclude with a session dedicated to the internal and external repercussions of the 1 February coup in Myanmar – which whether we like it or not, will colour external perceptions on not just the country, but Asean and its member states as a whole.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

I wish to express sincere thanks and gratitude to the distinguished instigators and speakers for their readiness to share with us their time, knowledge and expertise in various ways and for their tremendous contribution towards enhancing the richness of the discussions during this conference.

I would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our partners, who have been with us through thick and thin – the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Google and the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia. Their support for the APR process have once

again made it possible for us to reconvene, albeit virtually, for the 34th APR.

Thank you also to colleagues in Asean-ISIS for your unwavering support and confidence in the APR process.

Last but not least, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to all my hardworking colleagues at ISIS Malaysia for without their dedication, this event could not have taken place. To the participants, I am humbled by your continuous support and active participation. Probing, thoughtful questions and insightful interventions from the floor are important components of a conference. It is such important inputs that form the distinctive hallmark of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

And while these exchanges will be taking place virtually, I am confident that the discussions will be as lively and engaging as in the past. I wish everyone a fruitful and enjoyable 34th Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

Finally, to all my family and friends in Indonesia and abroad, Selamat Hari Kemerdekaan yang ke-76. Semoga Allah senantiasa merahmati Republik Indonesia. Happy Independence Day, Indonesia!

Thank you.

Opening Remarks

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Director-General
World Health Organisation (WHO)
Geneva



Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear colleagues and friends,

I'm often asked when the Covid-19 pandemic will end.

My answer is simple: it will end when the world chooses to end it. It's in our hands.

We have effective tools to prevent, diagnose and treat this disease. But the world has not used those tools well.

Increased social mixing, inconsistent use of public health and social measures, and inequitable access to vaccines are driving transmission and creating a two-track pandemic, divided between the haves and the have-nots.

I know that several Asean countries are now facing sharp increases in cases and deaths, and WHO is committed to supporting you in any way we can.

Together with our partners, we are working to increase the production and equitable distribution of vaccines.

Even as we work to control this pandemic, we must learn the lessons it is teaching us, and prepare for the future.

I welcome the commitment of Asean governments to build a regional response to Covid-19 and future health emergencies.

There is now growing global support for the idea of a treaty or other international instrument to provide a

global framework for pandemic preparedness and response.

We seek the support of Asean countries for this important initiative, including through Indonesia's G20 presidency next year.

Thank you for your commitment to building a healthier, safer future for your region and the whole world.

I thank you.

Ambassadorial Session 1: Beyond Disruption

H.E. Ambassador Ouyang Yujing

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the People's Republic of China to Malaysia



On 17 August, H.E. Ambassador Ouyang Yujing was invited to attend the 34th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) and delivered a speech titled "Hope around the corner, road under the feet".

In his speech, ambassador Ouyang said that the year 2020 was a watershed in human history. Defeating the pandemic and restoring economic growth has become our common wish.

First, we must stick to solidarity to defeat the Covid-19 pandemic. The top priority is to make sure that vaccines are distributed around the world fairly and equitably. China has provided more than 770 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines to other countries. At the first Meeting of the International Forum on Covid-19 Vaccine Cooperation, President Xi Jinping announced that China will strive to supply two billion Covid-19 vaccine doses to the world throughout this year and offer US\$100 million to the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access (Covax) facility. It is science and solidarity that we should pursue, not political manipulation or stigmatisation. Unfortunately, however, one country has made every effort to politicise the pandemic, stigmatise the virus and use origin-tracing as a tool. It even mobilises intelligent agency to hype the "lab leak theory" which presumes guilty. The virus origin tracing is a serious scientific issue. Scientists should be entitled to study the origins of Covid-19 to prevent future risks. Only when we unite can we truly defeat the virus.

Second, we must stick to solidarity to promote economic recovery. Going beyond the pandemic, we need to stick to opening up and inclusiveness, deepen

regional economic integration, and promote the liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment. We need to uphold green homeland and promote sustainable development. China will firmly pursue a green, low-carbon and sustainable development path, and work with international societies to tackle climate change. We need to seize opportunities from innovation and develop the digital economy. We must boost the digital economy, further develop digital infrastructure, work for a digital business environment that is open, fair and non-discriminatory.

Third, we must stick to solidarity to break down barriers in our mind. The world is facing terrorism, climate change, food security, cybersecurity and other global issues. We should uphold true multilateralism, guard against the increasingly dangerous practices of creating imaginary enemies, stoking interstate division and building exclusive blocs. We should work together to promote dialogues of civilisations rather than clash of civilisations, to pursue win-win cooperation instead of a zero-sum game, and to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Over the past 100 years, the CPC has united and led the Chinese people in an unrelenting endeavour to achieve the tremendous transformation from standing up and growing prosperous to becoming strong. At present, China has effectively controlled the pandemic and keeps a good momentum of economic growth. China will stay committed to peaceful development, to openness and

inclusiveness, and to multilateralism. We want "having friends in every corner of the world".

Hope is just around the corner and the road is under our feet. As long as we stick to solidarity, rise above differences in ideology, social system and development phase, uphold the common values of humanity, we will prevail over this outbreak and recover the economy, and jointly build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity.

Ambassadorial Session 2: Partnering Through Disruption: from the Pandemic to the South China Sea

H.E. Dr Justin Lee
High Commissioner of Australia to Malaysia



Thank you very much, Thomas, and thank you to all of the distinguished participants who are on the line today.

You are right, Thomas, that this is my first public engagement since arriving in Malaysia. And I want to thank ISIS Malaysia for the opportunity.

Australia is very pleased to once again be supporting this premier forum, the Asia Pacific Roundtable.

This year's roundtable is very timely. At times of great disruption like this – and I was just listening to the previous discussion on Covid-19 and vaccines – when we are dealing with shared challenges, it's critical that we have opportunities like this to openly express our views and share our experiences.

It's also important that we further strengthen the close cooperation between our nations.

Covid-19, like other global challenges, can't be solved by any one country alone. We all know that we can only be safe when we're all safe, and that we need international cooperation.

Here in Malaysia, I'm responsible for the bilateral relationship. And we think the Australia-Malaysia relationship is a great example of this close cooperation.

Last January, our respective prime ministers signed a bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).

Amid the pandemic, we have taken our relationship to new heights, expanding the scope of our cooperation

on health and economic recovery to ensure we can support each other on the challenges and priorities we face.

Some of the areas we're focusing on under the CSP include education, combating transnational crime, maritime, digital, and science and innovation.

This cooperation will be critical in our health response and in bouncing back economically from the impacts of Covid-19.

Beyond the bilateral, Australia is of course a vital partner to Asean and Southeast Asia, a region that is at the centre of our international cooperation.

That is natural for us. Southeast Asia sits at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, with Asean as its institutional core. And it's here where we enjoy many of our most important relationships and feel that we can contribute meaningfully.

It's the region that will shape our collective prosperity, security and destiny.

We were Asean's first dialogue partner and, as Foreign Minister Payne said at the Asean meetings earlier this month, we will continue to be a committed, reliable partner, delivering practical, quality support for Asean priorities.

Evidence of this includes our support for Asean's response to the pandemic in the past year, and I know this has been a topic of this forum, so I'd like to run

through some of the support we've given for responding to the pandemic.

We've contributed to the Asean Covid-19 response fund.

We've supported the Asean Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases.

We've developed the Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative (VAHSI), which is helping support vaccine access and delivery in Southeast Asia. VAHSI is one of our premier programmes, valued at A\$523 million.

We've contributed to Covax for vaccine procurement and distribution.

And we are supporting the Quad initiative to deliver 1 billion additional vaccine doses to the region by the end of 2022.

On top of that, Prime Minister Morrison committed at the G7 to provide 20 million vaccine doses to the Indo-Pacific by mid-2022.

Already, that commitment is delivering vaccines to Southeast Asia – Timor Leste, Vietnam and Indonesia so far – with deliveries across the region set to ramp up over time.

Beyond vaccines, Australia is supporting the new Asean-Australia One Health Fellowship Programme, announced by our foreign minister at the recent Asean meetings this month, which will provide up to 40 scholarships for Asean health officials to undertake an online Graduate Certificate in One Health.

And we are organising the first Asean-Australia Mental Health Experts VTC and a Mental Health Youth Dialogue this year, recognising mental health as one of the key issues that has emerged during the pandemic and the measures taken to address it.

There has been strong interest among our regional partners in working together to address this particular challenge.

While the region is rightly focused on the pandemic – its health and economic impacts – we should not lose sight of the fact the evolving strategic landscape remains important to our recovery, resilience and prosperity.

Countries of the region must come together as sovereign equals to discuss and collectively resolve the major issues that we face.

Asean is a crucial forum for those discussions.

We believe in the power of the Asean-centred institutions like the EAS and ARF for convening inclusive exchanges on the future shape of our region.

And we support key Asean principles, in particular, those articulated in the Asean Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

Like that Asean outlook, Australia seeks a region that is open, inclusive and resilient, underpinned by rules, norms and respect for sovereignty.

A region where disputes are resolved peacefully and without coercion, in accordance with international law.

Today, I want to focus on how this vision for the region applies in the maritime domain, which is under particular pressure.

This pressure takes on numerous forms, as many of you will be aware.

Our oceans and seas are becoming more congested and contested.

There are ongoing maritime disputes.

There are familiar security threats, such as piracy, smuggling and illegal fishing.

And we face environmental challenges, such as marine plastic debris, deteriorating maritime habitats and the effects of climate change.

Covid-19 has exacerbated many of these pressures, not least by reducing the financial and human resources we have for tackling them.

It has also made communication and cooperation across borders to resolve issues more difficult.

The key to successfully addressing these pressures is supporting and upholding the maritime rules-based order – the accepted rules, norms and institutions that govern the actions of states at sea.

No body of water attracts more attention than the South China Sea.

It is the region's most notable hot spot and the clearest example of how established rules, norms and institutions can sustain peace and stability.

Australia is not a claimant state in the South China Sea.

But we have a substantial interest in the stability of this crucial international waterway, and the rules and norms that govern it – there are no “inside” and “outside” states when it comes to the South China Sea.

A substantial portion of Australia's exports pass through the South China Sea.

It is also a major trading route for many of our friends and partners, including China, India, the United States, Japan, Korea and of course Malaysia and the other countries of Southeast Asia.

It is a crucial waterway. Yet we have serious concerns about developments in the South China Sea, which could be destabilising and lead to escalation.

So, we think it's vital that states work to reduce tensions in the South China Sea and comply with international law.

Of course, we can't wish away all of the competitive dynamics we're seeing.

But we have a framework of agreed rules and laws designed to regulate state behaviour and help settle disputes in the oceans and seas.

Australia has been a strong and consistent advocate for the importance of adherence to international law in the South China Sea and particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – UNCLOS.

UNCLOS sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

And it contains clear rules that apply to all countries for maritime claims, the lawful use of maritime spaces, including freedoms of navigation and overflight, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Australia will continue to support the right of all countries to seek to resolve disputes peacefully, in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS.

Beyond support for UNCLOS, and the principles that underpin relations between states in the maritime domain, our engagement is practical, focused on supporting regional states' priorities.

For instance, Prime Minister Morrison announced at the Asean leaders' meetings last year that Australia will support key Southeast Asian partners on their marine resource management through a new four-year programme.

We are also rolling out a new program to help foster regional responses to combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Within Asean, we have co-chaired with Vietnam and the EU the Asean Regional Forum's maritime security work stream over the last three years.

And we are pleased to have worked closely with Malaysia in the EAS and ARF, co chairing important seminars on dispute settlement and international law in the maritime domain.

Bilaterally, our cooperation with Malaysia is extensive, whether that is through the close and long-standing relationships between our defence forces and civil maritime law enforcement agencies or collaboration on things like law of the sea, maritime domain awareness, academic exchanges and marine plastics.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I said earlier, given the extent of the challenges we're facing, international cooperation is more important than ever.

We need to continue partnering through disruption.



From Australia's perspective, whether it is in the maritime domain or in responding to the pandemic, our partnership with Southeast Asia has never been stronger and we look forward to continuing this close cooperation.

Once again, I am very grateful for the opportunity to support this conference and for the opportunity to be able to speak today and engage with you all.

Closing Remarks

Mr Herizal Hazri

Chief Executive
 Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
 Malaysia



Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I hope you have had a productive and insightful two days of the APR this year. Personally, taking a step back to listen and discuss at the APR has always been one of the highlights of my year. The speakers never fail to impress and questions from the floor always widen my perspectives. We began yesterday as we usually do – with a big picture session. Titled "The Pandemic and Global Realignment", this session was aimed at sparking a discussion on how the Covid-19 pandemic has reshaped international order. There was some expectation that it would be dominated by issues such as vaccine supply and the different speeds with which countries were reopening their economies. Instead, this session was pretty much defined by questions surrounding the rise of China and the "Quad". Therefore, the pandemic continues to be seen as an accelerant of pre-existing trends – a catalyst of global realignments that were already taking place – rather than producing new alignments of its own.

We then narrowed our analytical aperture in Session 2 and examined the social and political costs of the pandemic in Southeast Asia. Obviously, the efforts, effects and outcomes in these countries have been as diverse as the region itself. Whether it concerns the supply of food, vaccines or PPEs, the impact on Southeast Asian countries has been magnified by protectionist and nationalistic responses – both by themselves and by the world at large.

Our penultimate session yesterday morning was a fascinating exploration of the idea of "digital

sovereignty". In a world marked by great-power rivalry, there is understandably a little less enthusiasm for letting your data be handled and stored in other countries, especially those whose interests do not align entirely with your own. A key insight from this discussion is how the private sector needs to play a prominent role in the deliberations on the relevant global rules and norms. This is not going to be quite like the way the world crafted international rules on other domains, where states dominated the negotiations.

We began this morning with a much-anticipated session on the South China Sea, a topic that hasn't been featured in the APR for some years now. Despite the obvious disagreements between the speakers, there is a common theme in their diagnosis of the South China Sea dispute: We are running out of time. We are running out of time before fisheries in the area are depleted, we are running out of time before relations between China and certain Southeast Asian countries deteriorate. The diplomatic processes on the South China Sea, on the other hand, are proceeding at a slow pace. It is, therefore, clear that we need to accelerate efforts to limit the damage that has already been done in and by the South China Sea dispute.

I am particularly glad that we convened a session titled "Recovery Disrupted: The Challenge of Vaccine Distribution and Diplomacy". The issue that was brought to stark relief in this session was the sheer disparity in access to Covid-19 vaccines. While some countries are practically awash with vaccines, others are finding it hard to even vaccinate a tiny proportion of their populations. Despite repeated calls for global solidarity,

I fear that the developed nations will continue to have a disproportionate control of the production capacity of vaccines. This is a lesson that the developing nations of Asia will need to internalise for future pandemics.

Allow me to reiterate our appreciation for His Excellency Ouyang Yujing, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Malaysia and His Excellency Dr Justin Lee, Australian high commissioner in Malaysia for their insights – we certainly look forward towards engaging them in our future events.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is time we close the curtain for the 34th session of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. Indeed, we have a lot on our hands to work on. The region is abundant of opportunities, however, at the same time there's much to do to address its challenges. Beyond and as much as in the region, the global community is also face growing uncertainties, and, in some parts, we have regressed, in our efforts to build a just, fair and resilient economic and political system. The recent developments in Myanmar and Afghanistan top my list. We heard the speakers' perspectives on how Asean and other countries could move forward to address the Myanmar issue, something that we all agree on its urgency.

On Afghanistan, in recent weeks, pundits across the world have been repeating that tiring trope about the country being the "graveyard of empires".

Now I'm not saying that that's not the case. Some of us are old enough to remember watching television footage of Soviet tanks withdrawing into what is now Uzbekistan on that frigid morning on 15 February 1989. Over the past few days, we have seen American planes struggling to take off from Kabul airport as Afghans, terrified for the lives, tried to grab hold of what could be their last chance, their last hope, for survival. And that points to the problem with calling Afghanistan the "graveyard of empires": it simply shifts attentions away from the victims of the great games that big nations play.

That country has witnessed not just the capitulation of many a great power, but the senseless deaths of Afghans themselves – too numerous for us to even

begin contemplating a count.

So, allow me to put this on the table: We, the foreign and strategic policy community, need to take more responsibility and demonstrate greater humility in the application of our expertise.

Countries are not places for projects and experiments. The consequences of getting things wrong can be catastrophic. What we do next will speak volumes about us as a global community. What we do next will demonstrate whether we are mature enough to have learned the lessons of the past.

Moving forward and on behalf of ISIS Malaysia and the chair of Asean-ISIS, I would like to again thank the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Malaysia, the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, the New Zealand High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, Google, and the Embassy of Japan in Kuala Lumpur for supporting the 34th APR. Looking forward to the 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable next year.

Good bye, take care and we shall reconvene sooner that it seems.



ASIA-PACIFIC
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DISRUPTION REDUX