



34th ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE
“Disruption Redux”

**Closing Remarks by Mr Herizal Hazri,
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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. 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.
2. 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.

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. I am particularly glad that we convened a session titled “Recovery Disrupted: The Challenge of Vaccine Distribution and Diplomacy”. The thing 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.

6. 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,

7. 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 systems. 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.
8. On Afghanistan, in recent weeks, pundits across the world have been repeating that tiring trope about the country being the "graveyard of empires".
9. 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.
10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. Moving forward and on behalf of ISIS Malaysia and the chair of Asean-ISIS, I would like to again thank the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 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 than it seems.