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MEDIA STATEMENT

Major power competition and regional stability focus of third day of 35th APR

Kuala Lumpur, 7 July 2022: The third and final day of the 35th Asia-Pacific Roundtable

The fourth session of the 35th APR, titled “Nuclear rearmament – Re-run of the arms race?”, featured a very spirited discussion between panellists Carnegie Endowment for International Peace China Senior Fellow **Dr Tong Zhao**, Centre for Air Power Studies India Distinguished Fellow **Dr Manpreet Sethi**, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia **Andhika Yudha Prawira**.

Tong contends that the major powers are seeing intensifying competition due to competing values, exacerbated by the lack of free flow of information between them.

“The major powers are increasingly talking past each other, and more willing to rely on hard military assets rather than soft norms. Against this backdrop, states are looking at nuclear weapons as an increasingly attractive pacifying or stabilising factor.”

Manpreet, speaking from New Delhi, agrees with this information cocoon between the nuclear powers. “Due to the silence (between the nuclear powers), a new nuclear reality can emerge, causing a breakup of the norms of non-proliferation, or even use. This could lead to states taking ever riskier postures, up to and including floating the option of a ‘limited nuclear war’.”

Andhika brought the discussion back to Asean and the region. “Our role must be to actively promote disarmament. Asean is a nuclear weapon-free zone, and has been so for 27 years. The question we need to ask is, is Asean doing enough?”

While he concedes that the issue is complicated by maritime realities, he calls for Asean member states to be more forthcoming about its criticisms of trilateral and multilateral mechanisms that implicitly or explicitly contain a nuclear dimension.

The fifth and final session, titled “Impact of major power unilateralism on Asean’s multilateralism” featured Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia Founder **Dr Dino Patti Djalal**, Nanyang Technological University Singapore’s **Dr Sarah Teo**, University of The Philippines Diliman’s **Prof Aries A. Arugay**.

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Arugay began the session by outlining how the citizens of Asean member states viewed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and its perceived threat to Asean centrality. “In terms of states in the region, while many citizens see value attached (to the Quad), many are also ambivalent towards these moves.”

Dino concedes the point. “There is nervousness about what all this means for Asean. While Quad is seen as more positive, the attitude in Indonesia is more guarded towards Aukus, the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. It is perceived as an extension of great power meddling in the region.”

Teo looks at the rise of minilateral mechanisms in the region as a continuation of major power competition, driven also by the perception that Asean, rightly or wrongly, cannot address the big strategic questions in the region. “That will push for like-minded countries, countries that share similar outlooks, in the region to band together.”

The Roundtable was officially closed by ISIS Malaysia Senior Director (Research) **Alizan Mahadi** on behalf of Chief Executive Herizal Hazri. In his closing remarks, Alizan makes it clear that that the world now requires a delicate balance between healthy competition and functional cooperation.

“As competition is likely to become more intense in the region and beyond, track II diplomacy is an important space where we can debate openly on both the challenges and the way forward. In this sense, the APR will continue to play a role to encourage frank exchange of ideas.”

Over these five sessions, more than 400 participants actively participated in the discussions, posing probing, thoughtful questions and insightful interventions from the floor, which are the distinctive hallmark of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

On behalf of the ASEAN-ISIS Network, ISIS Malaysia thanks all instigators, speakers and participants for their readiness to share their time, knowledge, and expertise and for their contribution towards enhancing the richness of the discussions during this conference.

ISIS Malaysia also wishes to extend its heartfelt gratitude to 35th APR partners Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Japan in Malaysia and Astro Awani.

The 36th Asia-Pacific Roundtable will reconvene next year.

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About ISIS Malaysia

The Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983 as an autonomous national think-tank. ISIS Malaysia's establishment was inspired by the idea that both the country and government could benefit from the contributions of policy-relevant work undertaken by a body outside the government on issues of national interests.

ISIS Malaysia engages actively in Track Two diplomacy and is a key founding member of several regional networks which promote the exchange of views and collaboration that feed into policymaking.

About the Asia-Pacific Roundtable

The Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) is the signature international conference of the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia and is one of the region's key Track Two strategic conferences.

Hosted on behalf of the Asean-ISIS Network, a network of leading Southeast Asian policy institutes and think-tanks, it regularly attracts more than 300 thinkers of various backgrounds who engage in lively, frank and constructive conversations on issues impacting the security, stability, sustainability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region.

Held annually since 1986, the APR was postponed for the first time in 2020 because of Covid-19. Over the past 33 years, the APR has cemented its position as a premier convention for policymakers, scholars, journalists and opinion leaders to ponder, reflect and debate on strategic issues and challenges relevant to Asia-Pacific.

The 35th APR is themed **sustaining cooperation amid competition**, and reflects the condition of the region that remains in the throes of strategic and major power competition and the importance of stakeholders to continue to find ways of cooperation, to mitigate the damaging aspects of competition.

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