



**35th ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE “Sustaining Cooperation Amid
Competition ”**

Closing Remarks by Alizan Mahadi, Senior Director (Research)

on behalf of Herizal Hazri, Chief Executive

Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

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Excellencies, distinguished guests, colleagues from the Asean-ISIS Network, ladies and gentlemen,

1. After three days of conferencing, we have come to the end of the 35th APR. I hope that the time you have spent in the sessions and by following the discussions and exchange of thoughts have been as beneficial to you as it has been for me. With the theme “sustaining cooperation amidst competition”, despite the broad topics covered, I believe the distinguished speakers have impressively articulated and enforced the importance and relevance of the topic at hand.
2. We started the roundtable on Tuesday with an examination of China’s Dual Circulation strategy and its implications for both China and the wider region. As we discussed China’s new geo-economics, we saw a trend of the increasing securitisation of economics. However, we also heard that due to the interdependence of our economies, we currently see a great resilience in exports. In the future, the boundaries of politics, national security and trade will blend into each other as major trade nations resort to protectionism and decoupling. The challenge lies for those of us who are smaller powers, to be able to respond cooperatively, to avoid being entrapped in great-power rivalry.
3. On the second day, we heard from panellists on the impacts of climate change to the Asia Pacific and whether the outcomes of COP26 would represent a catalyst point for climate action in the region. While there was a general appreciation for the fact that some countries may be more vulnerable to climate disasters than others, the hard reality is that the threat of climate change affects us all, and hence is a quintessential challenge that requires international cooperation. We heard that the multilateral process, especially the COP26 has raised climate ambition and that it is incontrovertible that climate and biodiversity will remain strategic priorities at least until 2030. The challenge however is in implementing the pledges and commitments made at the international level, where

tough choices ahead include investments and technology which requires international and global cooperation including for climate financing.

4. In keeping to the theme of Sustaining Cooperation Amid Competition, we also discussed the European Union's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, within the broader framework of Europe's engagement with the region. It is increasingly clear, that Europe's engagement in the Indo-Pacific/Asia-Pacific region requires reassessment and reprioritisation. To work towards goals of shared prosperity and stability, Europe must operate on its key strengths and interests of the relevant parties involved. There must be greater leveraging on advocacy of norms in human rights, the rules based international order and ongoing efforts in areas such as trade, non-traditional security and people-to-people interactions.
5. Earlier today, our fourth session explored a somewhat familiar topic, but one with a more ominous twist. In the early years of the APR, conversation around nuclear weapons and major power relations were framed around incentives for disarmament. Today however, many of those agreements have expired, and nuclear powers, including those in the Asia Pacific, continue to modernise delivery systems, and in some cases, expand them. Where there is a tendency to militarise, we must not underestimate the importance of dialogue and diplomacy. Non-nuclear states especially, such as Asean members, must not shy away from the role we can play to promote disarmament. We should work together to improve existing initiatives and build new ones that further the non-proliferation agenda, to ensure the peace and security of our region and beyond.
6. In the last session on the impact of emerging minilateral networks led by major powers on Asean's convening role on existing multilateral mechanisms, we were privileged to hear from a range of expert speakers. There was a general consensus of ambivalence in how Southeast Asia views these new mechanisms. While there is deep concern on whether the Quad or Aukus could undermine Asean-led mechanisms, there is also an appreciation that these new networks in our backyard could contribute to regional security. It was, in my opinion, refreshing to hear from the panel that Asean must not take its "centrality" for granted, and that Asean centrality must be earned.

While I could not cover all the rich discussions that were held, for those of you that would like to review the sessions, the recording of each session will be available on the APR event website from tomorrow till noon of 15 July 2022.

Distinguished delegates,

7. In all the sessions, it is clear that the world we live in now requires a delicate balance between healthy competition and functional cooperation. Intense competition, whether

within the region, or across major power rivalries, dominates the geopolitical landscape. However, it is also clear that the world is interdependent, whether it be in terms of politically, security, economically or environmentally. From a comprehensive security perspective, we have little option but to cooperate, including to address immediate challenges, such as the global supply chain disruptions and curbing inflation, as well as longer term challenges such as climate change. Failure to cooperate can threaten our very existence.

8. Moving forward, there are many platforms for sustaining cooperation, and some were deliberated within the APR. 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, especially those relevant to the region and I thank you all once again for your support and encourage further participation in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. As we bring the 35th APR to an end, I would like to reiterate our appreciation for their Excellencies Mr Ouyang Yujing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Malaysia, Dr Justin Lee, Australia's High Commissioner in Malaysia and Dr Norbert Lammert, Chairman of the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung, for their insights – we certainly look forward towards engaging them in our future events. I would also like to thank His Excellency Stuart Calman, New Zealand's Ambassador to Asean, for his remarks yesterday.
10. Allow me to also extend our deepest appreciation to our partners who have made it possible for us to convene the 35th APR – 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, the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia and Astro Awani. We look forward to a productive working relationship with them, as we plan for the next APR.
11. Last but not least, I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues at ISIS Malaysia and ASEAN ISIS who have worked tirelessly, and with limited means, to ensure that the APR could be successfully held this year.

Distinguished guests,

12. In an effort to continue exchange of ideas, and as a leading Malaysian think tank, a key focus of what we do at ISIS Malaysia is to focus on national socio-economic policies, as we seek to build a better nation. Like many countries around the world, the last couple of years have been tough ones. As Malaysia shifts towards endemicity the crosswinds of

geopolitical frictions, climate and energy crises, and the pandemic's legacy of inequality represent crucial challenges to Malaysia's development in the coming decade.

13. From 3rd to 4th October this year, ISIS Malaysia will convene the 4th PRAXIS conference to bring together policymakers, researchers, civil society and the private sector to examine how to build upon the Covid-19 recovery and pave the way towards a more sustainable, resilient and better Malaysia. This event will be held physically in Kuala Lumpur. More details are available on our website.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

14. To draw the 35th APR to a close, I would like to look forward to the 36th edition of this Roundtable, where ISIS Malaysia and its partners will reconvene physically or in person, in Kuala Lumpur, next year. We hope to see all of you back in KL in either in late May or early June 2023 – specific dates to be announced before the end of the year.
15. We look forward to not just your support and participation, but your ideas on how we can further push the boundaries in the lead up to the next roundtable. Ultimately, it is you, the delegates of the APR, that contribute to making the Roundtable the success and among the platforms of preference in the regional circuit.

Thank you and I adjourn the 35th Asia Pacific Roundtable.