



ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

Crisis in an Interregnum

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Prepared by

Anis Rifhan Rostli

Angeline Tan

Farah Nabilah

Hemaapadmaashini Prakash

Izzah Ibrahim

Jaideep Singh

Kieran Li Nair

Maryam Ismail

Zarina Zainuddin



Introduction

The 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (37APR) was convened from 4-6 June 2024 at the Hilton Kuala Lumpur. It was organised by the Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia on behalf of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic & International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) network, an association of Southeast Asia's leading policy-focused think-tanks. The rotating chair of the network for 2024 is held by the Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia.

The APR is ISIS Malaysia's flagship international conference, focused on a Southeast Asian perspective on contemporary strategic, political, security and economic issues in Asia-Pacific. It usually sees a gathering of thought leaders, officials, academics, policymakers, journalists, students and other practitioners who participate in frank and incisive conversations, both in and out of the plenary halls. The roundtable's ability to create a conducive atmosphere for such conversations, unburdened by the strictures of national positions, remains an ongoing priority for the organisers. This year, more than 300 delegates from 31 countries were present.

There was a packed schedule of five plenary sessions, three concurrent sessions, a keynote and four dinner and lunch addresses. Dr Yose Rizal Damuri, executive director of CSIS Indonesia and 2024 chair of the ASEAN-ISIS Network and Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah, chairman of ISIS Malaysia, delivered the opening remarks. Prof Faiz also delivered the closing remarks on 6 June.

The highlight of 37APR was the keynote address by Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia. In his second keynote to the APR, the Prime Minister spoke about Malaysia's resolute emphasis on non-alignment, as well as developments on the Gaza and Myanmar crises. He also touched on Malaysia's role as ASEAN chair in 2025 and the broad principles that will guide it. As per APR tradition, his keynote was followed by a question-and-answer session.

ISIS Malaysia was also privileged to have the participation of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dato' Seri Utama Mohamad Hasan, who spoke at the welcoming dinner. His remarks focused on the priorities of Malaysia's foreign policy and his vision for how the ministry is working with other stakeholders to achieve Malaysia's strategic priorities. Another big-name speaker was HE Dr Kao Kim Hourn, ASEAN secretary-general, who was the main speaker in Plenary 2, which focused on the past and future of the regional organisation in the lead up to its post-2025 vision.

Plenary 1 focused on the prospects and opportunities of mitigation and cooperation when it came to major-power rivalry. This was a deliberate reframing of the 36th APR's first plenary, which focused on whether China and the United States were locked in an inevitable march to conflict. Other plenaries focused on the megatrends shaping the global economy and their impact on the Asia-Pacific, as well as the roles and agencies of regional middle powers. Another hot-button topic was the global ramifications of geopolitical developments in the Middle East.

The concurrent sessions touched on the growing discourse shaping the Global South and evolution of its multilateral mechanisms; importance of reframing the global climate discourse to take into account the priorities of developing countries; and the future of military conflicts influenced by the growing adaptation of artificial intelligence.

The lunch and dinner addresses on 5 and 6 June were delivered by three heads of missions to Malaysia – HE Michalis Rokas, Ambassador of the European Union; HE Ouyang Yujing, Ambassador of China; and HE Danielle Heinecke, High Commissioner of Australia.

Rokas, who will be ending his four-year stint in Malaysia before rotating to the Western Balkans, reflected on a three-decade diplomatic career and how the opportunities (both exploited and wasted) of the past have shaped the issues in the ongoing interregnum. Ouyang spoke on the prospects for bilateral and multilateral cooperation between China and Southeast Asian states, and how the successful development of both parties was mutually tied. Heinecke, in her first address to the APR, highlighted Australia's multicultural heritage in reflecting how it engaged with the region, its self-perception as an Asia-Pacific middle power and the depth of Australia-Malaysia relations.

The texts of the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Dr Yose, Prof Dr Faiz, HE Rokas, HE Ouyang and HE Heinecke are included in this report. Video recordings of the key remarks are available at <https://www.isis.org.my/apr37/>



Keynote address by **The Honourable Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim** **Prime Minister of Malaysia**

I am delighted to be able to speak once again to the delegates of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. We are now entering an era of crisis and uncertainty unseen since the Second World War. Armed conflict and war are becoming commonplace in many parts of the world – Palestine, Ukraine, and Myanmar, but not also forgetting the crises in Sudan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Haiti.

Meanwhile, areas of progress and cooperation so crucial to the developing world, such as trade, investment, and emerging technologies are now increasingly weaponised by competing world powers. For major and small powers alike today, we are confronted with a strategic landscape compounded with greater complexities and an even more treacherous geopolitical terrain to navigate. The geostrategic horizon ahead is overcast with ominous signs of foreboding, foreshadowing the critical risks, hazards and potential catastrophes in our path that we ignore only at our peril.

Last year, when I addressed the APR on this very stage, I spoke about how geopolitical and geostrategic developments have overshadowed some regional mechanisms and multilateral frameworks. Today, a mere 10 months later, I am doubling down on my doubts and misgivings about the world's faith in these mechanisms and the international system. This is a system which was designed in the post-war era to ensure peace and stability, one that held much promise in the rhetoric but proven to be a dismal failure in the delivery.

For instead of peace and stability, around the world, more people are dying on battlefields, being forced from their homes, or in need of life-saving aid than in recent memory. Despite our efforts and various international mechanisms, the pursuit of peace is failing. Indeed, it seems to be no longer about maintaining peace, but about preventing the worst.

Distinguished delegates,

The preponderance of containment strategies and the shaping of alliances, motivated by competing visions, are re-drawing the contours of our regional order. It is cultivating an attitude in utter abandonment of the values of inclusivity, empathy, and compassion, compounding the likelihood of entirely eclipsing the already disrupted peace and prosperity, not just in the Asia-Pacific, but for our global society.

Constant discussion and speculation on choosing sides is not only counter-productive but will only add on to the brewing cauldron of mistrust and suspicion. Of late, Malaysia has been perceived as tilting to one side, in a so-called strategic pivot from the other side. This is not only an oversimplification but a gross misperception of our national interests and character. The truth is Malaysia was, is, and will be, on the side of Malaysia.

We are fiercely independent. That is to say, we refuse to be defined by how major powers see the world, and Malaysia will continue to strive for our national and strategic interests, defined on our own terms. Malaysia stands for peace and progress, fellow-feeling, and above all, abiding adherence to international law and cooperation.

In this vein, Malaysia maintains a strong and fruitful relationship with both China and the United States. At the same time, Malaysia will continue to pursue productive and meaningful relations with our other partners – whether they be our longstanding Strategic and Comprehensive Strategic partners, or friends in the Global South. Malaysia has a proud history of being part of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. In remaining faithful to the principle of non-alignment, we have proven that the pursuit of dynamic neutrality is not only feasible but highly desirable.

Speaking of the United States and China, I would be remiss, if I did not mention that we mark respective milestones with both countries this year. Ten years ago, Malaysia and the US upgraded our bilateral relationship into a Strategic Partnership. I have often reiterated the importance and value of US-based foreign direct investment to Malaysia, especially in high-



tech sectors. The functionality of the relationship is a testament to the enduring nature of our ties. This year too, Malaysia celebrates the 50th anniversary of ties with China – our largest trade partner, a key investor and a close bilateral and multilateral partner. The progress that China has made in the past half-a-decade, especially the vast improvement in the quality of life for hundreds of millions of its people, is nothing short of spectacular. I look forward to the visit of my colleague, Premier Li Qiang, to Kuala Lumpur in a few weeks.

Distinguished delegates,

While maintaining the balance between our relationships with key partners is an important part of Malaysia's approach to the world, there are situations that call for unhesitating and unequivocal intervention. I am speaking here of war crimes, flagrant atrocities committed in the killing fields under the pretext of self-defence, and settler colonialism which is nothing short of a systematic campaign of genocide to displace an entire population of indigenous people.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine is a scourge on our collective histories and the conduct of nations. The Palestinians live oppressed and besieged while we are alive and free, limited in our influence and power, but sovereign and free. Malaysia is no major power, but make no mistake, we will use our freedom to support the Palestinians' fight for theirs.

The humanitarian crisis we see today is not an abstract disaster. We cannot stand idly by and allow this to be yet another chapter of mass killings and displacement that furnishes the historical volume of atrocities that have been committed, recognised, and then tragically but conveniently ignored.

We have consistently voiced our concerns about the reluctance of the US and the West to apply pressure on Israel. However, it's important to acknowledge positive developments. Within the constraints of the US political system in an election year, President Biden has recently expressed growing impatience with his Israeli counterpart. He has also begun to push for an acceptance of a proposal for a ceasefire in exchange for the release of hostages.

We welcome these early signs of change in America's approach towards the conflict. We hope that the US will keep re-evaluating its approach and hasten an end to the killings and carnage.

Distinguished delegates,

The divergences between the Global North and Global South are no longer about "development", but rather, distinctly ideological, experiential, and perceptual. Opposing perspectives on geopolitics, global threats and challenges have created deep-seated friction between the two "poles". In this interregnum, we no longer "agree to disagree". Instead, we disagree, we contradict, and we clash!

These differences have transformed the "Global South" from a mere term to one that defines the developing world, moulding it into a strategic configuration of growing significance. The Global South now represents not just the pursuit of prosperity, but a driver of emerging global prosperity and growth. In the battle for inclusion, it represents the reclaiming of a voice not to be ignored in the international order. We see a reflection of this in the urgent call for restructuring the United Nations.

Malaysia is steadfast in its view that a comprehensive reform and expansion of the United Nations

Security Council is necessary and must ensure equitable and fair regional representation to reflect current realities. While the shortcomings of the United Nations will be “our collective Albatross to carry”, the time is now to push for inclusion and acknowledgement of diverse strategic contexts around the world.

Indeed, there is precedence. Just last year we witnessed the inclusion of the African Union into the G20, pointing to greater Global South mobilisation to come, in a trajectory of transformation, at a pace as yet unprecedented. We are cognisant of how Global South narratives today have introspective and empowered undertones which resonate deeply with Malaysia.

Distinguished delegates,

Nine years into our community, ASEAN is in a position of strength to embrace the future with confidence and vigour. In the political realm, ASEAN has served the region well, being the primary forum for dialogue, diffusing disputes between countries and ensuring regional stability. At the same time, as the region’s default convening hub for diplomacy, ASEAN has become an indispensable part of adjusting to regional institutional fluxes.

In the economic realm, ASEAN has emerged as a dynamic and rapidly evolving economic hub, resilient in the face of daunting challenges. Favourable demographics, industrialisation and urbanisation trends and technological advances, will increasingly make ASEAN an economic powerhouse by 2040. In these times of great uncertainty, it is imperative to redouble our efforts towards further strengthening ASEAN, to be the key platform in managing regional affairs. We need to move from mere rhetoric to concrete action and focus on seeking ways to deliver on its aspirations.

It must start with addressing the underutilisation of ASEAN’s mechanisms, especially those like the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Plus meetings and East Asia Summit, which have been celebrated for its convening power in the past but now appear to plod along by fact of existence. It should also be anchored on the fact that ASEAN’s future development evolves alongside its member states, their national interests, and what we can collectively achieve together.

As Malaysia prepares for the chair in 2025, we will strive to lead with moral character, as stressed upon in the principles of Malaysia MADANI. This entails a civil and inclusive approach that celebrates interconnectivity.

In upholding our enduring principles of non-alignment and cooperation, the MADANI ideals demonstrate that it is possible to act respectfully while being an active player in shaping our region. Indeed, for Malaysia, ASEAN more than a pillar of our foreign policy is also a force multiplier, and a valuable asset to exercise our agency.

Distinguished delegates,

A difficult challenge we must contend with is the crisis in Myanmar, given the scale of death, displacement and fighting. The message ASEAN should convey must come from a unified voice. Failure to act, when there is ample cause to believe that a member state is violating the spirit of the ASEAN charter, is a dereliction of our moral duty.

Of course, ASEAN can only facilitate any efforts when the various parties in Myanmar are ready

to do so. But this does not mean that we should not try multipronged, more creative tracks. The status quo is not static. Among the various stakeholders in Myanmar, there are the nascent beginnings of long and difficult conversations of what the future of their country will look like. This includes the possibility of a federation-like system. While it is not our place to decide on what is best for the people of Myanmar, it is incumbent on us, friends and neighbours, to help facilitate what and where we can.

As a friend and brother Southeast Asian nation of Myanmar, it is in this spirit which I reiterate that Malaysia consistently calls for an end to the ongoing violence, an end to the history of political marginalisation against all the peoples of Myanmar, and the adherence to the five-point consensus, which was jointly reached in Jakarta, in April 2021.

We will work with other ASEAN member states and dialogue partners who have influence on Myanmar, to push for peace, more effective humanitarian mechanisms and the eventual political engagement of all relevant stakeholders in that country.

Distinguished delegates,

The challenges we are confronted with are indeed formidable and won't be easy to overcome. And I won't dial back on the apprehension of dire consequences should we choose to ignore the writing on the wall.

Yet, the challenges are not insurmountable in as much as it is crucial to remind ourselves that Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific is a region that remains resilient despite it all. Our realism, as we approach these challenges and prospective solutions, should not be steeped in pessimism.

As a collective, we have the opportunity and more importantly, the responsibility to seek solutions that can mitigate the risk of conflict, while guiding us to a prosperous, sustainable, and just future. The discussions that you have had and will have in this Asia-Pacific Roundtable can be part of these efforts.

Thank you.





Dinner address by **Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan** **Foreign Affairs Minister**

Let me start by congratulating ISIS Malaysia, and its partners, for their continued dedication to sustaining meaningful Track 2 engagements, in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. In the scheme of Track 2 platforms in this region, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable stands out. The organisers have successfully carved a niche, and an esteemed reputation, for this roundtable, as one of the key conferences of its kind in this region.

Over the past six months or so, I have had the privilege of visiting numerous countries, in the course of my duties as Foreign Minister. Drawing from the three discourses that I have had, a question that is often posed to me and my colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is Malaysia's approach to foreign policy, especially under this unity government.

Our fundamental principles, which have been built on sound values and practical considerations, remain consistent. We are steadfast in our commitment to non-alignment, peaceful resolution of disputes and international law, while advocating for mutually beneficial relations. Malaysia also upholds multilateralism, which plays a crucial part in achieving our foreign policy objectives.

That said, however, it is not all business as usual. As many of you know, this government has introduced the Malaysia MADANI policy framework, which aims to transform Malaysia into not just a modern and advanced society, but one that is value-driven. These MADANI values have fortified our foreign policy approach.

We are fortunate to have a very proactive and globally savvy Prime Minister, who articulates Malaysia's foreign policy positions, and actively seeks to foster meaningful collaborations, with foreign partners. We are also committed to drawing in more investments, particularly in high-value, high-growth industries, to the country.

As a trading nation, Malaysia strives to create a business-friendly environment. The introduction of economy-driven initiatives, such as the MADANI Economy framework, the New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP) 2030 and the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), serves this purpose.

Driven by its economic interest, this aspect of Malaysia's foreign policy has had a significant impact on the way we conduct business in the future. Given the current landscape of intense competition, and the strategic use of trade and investment, I am optimistic that our diplomats, will seize the opportunities that are emerging before us, and actively pursue economic diplomacy initiatives, to support our trade and supply chain advantages.

Another frequent topic is Malaysia's upcoming chairing of ASEAN next year. This is something many of you will be touching on over the next two days. While I won't go into the specifics, one thing is for sure: Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship, will firmly uphold our national and foreign policy values, as well as our commitment to the regional organisation, that we jointly founded, 57 years ago.

ASEAN and Southeast Asia have made remarkable progress on all fronts. Our community is now maturing; processes within the pillars are being streamlined, and long-term goals will soon be in place. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which Malaysia has been entrusted to coordinate as the upcoming chair, will mark another seminal moment for ASEAN.

True, some challenges remain. But ASEAN has never been without challenges. Its very foundation was spurred by a desire to overcome strife and challenges of the time. ASEAN has continued to overcome these challenges, together. We have grown, together. A key factor in enabling this progress, is our emphasis on centrality, and perhaps more importantly, cohesion. Together with our external partners, I believe a central and cohesive ASEAN can exert a positive influence, in mitigating the adverse effects of major power rivalry, in the Asia-Pacific.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My final point for the evening, is on key conflicts in our region and beyond. Two of them stand out: Myanmar and Palestine. Undeniably, the unfolding events beyond our borders have never been more important, for our security and stability.

The civil war in Myanmar remains, one of the most critical and pressing issues for ASEAN to manage. Let me be frank: we can, and should, do better. ASEAN and its member states must get our house in order and strive for a workable consensus. We must enhance the effectiveness, of humanitarian aid distribution, and engage all stakeholders, to prepare for political reconciliation.

We cannot ignore developments in Myanmar, as its internal dynamics have regional consequences. Malaysia, in particular, is facing the effects from displaced peoples, who have been forced to flee, or denied a chance to return. To reiterate a constant point made by Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar, non-interference is not an excuse for indifference.

On Palestine, Malaysia has consistently pointed out, that the root causes of the crisis must be addressed. The events that led to the ongoing destruction of Gaza, did not occur suddenly on 7 October last year, nor did they happen in a vacuum. Palestinians have been subjected to almost eighty years of subjugation. The last few months have shown us that the government in Tel Aviv, left unchecked, has no qualms about committing barbaric and inhuman acts of atrocity.

Israel's friends and allies must persuade its government, to immediately end its aggression in Gaza. Malaysia stands firm in our position, that the Palestinians deserve their own independent and sovereign state, through the two-state solution, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This might seem a small possibility amid current circumstances, but it remains the only viable solution to decades of injustice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The tragedies in Myanmar and Palestine might seem rather gloomy notes to end a dinner address with. There are many others, including the ongoing civil war in Sudan, and the war in Ukraine. Yet these are the difficult realities that we must contend with. Too often, it appears that the international mechanisms, and the international laws and norms that underpin them, continue to crack under the strain of these pressures.

The view is that chaos will continue unabated, that the system is too dysfunctional, or that major powers are too vested in their own rivalries, at the expense of more inclusive and multilateral approaches. That, of course, is the pessimistic viewpoint. But the optimists have a different take: they continue to see hope amid the challenges of this interregnum. It is my strong conviction that there is cause for optimism on a global scale. These difficult circumstances that we find ourselves in, can be overcome, together, collectively.

Decades of multilateralism and cooperation cannot be simply swept aside. It will not benefit anyone – the developed nations of this world, the Global South, even the major powers of China and the United States. We all have too much to lose.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my congratulations to ISIS Malaysia and its partners for convening the 37th edition of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. I wish to thank you for this honour and my best wishes to all of you for a productive roundtable.





Welcoming remarks by **Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah** **Chairman, ISIS Malaysia**

Welcome to the 37th edition of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. ISIS Malaysia convenes this annual strategic-security focused Track 2 roundtable on behalf of the ASEAN-ISIS network.

When we, the organisers, reflect on the essence of this roundtable, at its heart, the APR is a Southeast Asian conference on the Asia-Pacific. We have grown from our humble origins at a literal “roundtable” at ISIS Malaysia’s premises into a globally recognised conference that can be relied on as a platform for thought leaders, policymakers, practitioners and other interested individuals, to vigorously discuss contemporary and forward-looking issues that impact on this region and beyond.

Yesterday, we heard from the Foreign Minister at the welcoming dinner, who spoke on the fundamentals of Malaysia’s foreign policy, its approach to the region and his vision on how the Foreign Ministry could support the national imperatives. Tomorrow morning, the Prime Minister will once again deliver the keynote where he is expected to reflect on key inflection points in our region. In keeping with the APR tradition, I’m sure we can get the Prime Minister to take a few questions from the floor.

Distinguished delegates,

A great deal of thought was put into the theme of the 37th APR. “Crisis in an Interregnum,” quite a mouthful I concede, reflects our assessment of the state of current geostrategic affairs. While crises have always been a constant in the relationships among nation-states and regions, the

various mechanisms put in place after the Second World War to prevent and mitigate outbreaks of chaos have brought a degree of stability.

True, it is not a perfect system, and many have been let down by it. But many have also progressed under broader predictability and normative rules-based architecture this system was designed to maintain. Over the last two decades, however, this order has been crumbling, and is being reshaped. It might be premature to speculate on its eventual structures, but what is clear is that a unipolarity and perhaps even bipolarity is on its way out. Multipolarity with more flexible forms of cooperative and competitive dynamics, appear to be on the way in. And, to my mind, that has to be the way.

In the interim, however, the multilateral mechanisms, rules and norms that are so important to us, have come under tremendous pressure to the point that they are failing to function effectively. These include many ASEAN centred mechanisms, such as the ARF and EAS, with the latter being the only, if not one of the few leaders-led strategic dialogues.

Established rules and norms are being disputed, and not infrequently, disregarded by major powers. But these acts of impudence and impunity are increasingly being questioned by those from the Global South. A very simple query is asked – if such rules and norms are selectively followed and selectively ignored by those who purport to uphold them, then what value is there?. The international order is thus in an interregnum, an interval between instability and stability. What the APR hopes to address is to get a sense of how the norms and mechanisms that have shaped the existing international order are being affected. How will established and emerging middle and major powers operate in this environment? How will they seek common ground and cooperation, if at all? What are the emerging structures and rules which are being shaped?

To address these questions and give shape to the roundtable, we have a mix of issues and contentious matters to be discoursed via the plenary and concurrent sessions this year that are designed to be both contemporary and forward looking. I will not run through these topics; they are listed in the programme. But I am confident that this special blend of issues we elected to touch on this year, are part of the reason why you are here today.



Distinguished delegates,

At this juncture, I would like to express my thanks to all the role-players, instigators and speakers, for their readiness to share their time and expertise with us. Their presence and participation are a crucial contribution to enhancing the richness of the discussions in the APR.

I also extend heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our partners: the Australian High Commission, the Delegation of the European Union to Malaysia, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, the Embassy of the United States, the High Commission of India, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, and the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia. Their generous contributions and assistance are instrumental in the successful convening of the APR.

The continued success of the APR over these many years is also greatly attributed to the support given by successive Malaysian prime ministers and the government, as well as the region's leaders.

I would like to record my sincere appreciation to the Honourable Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia, and the Honourable Foreign Minister, Dato' Seri Utama Mohamad Hasan, for the support and encouragement entrusted on ISIS Malaysia and their confidence in the roundtable.

I also recognise, once again, His Excellency Dr Kao, who will be the main speaker in the second plenary, on ASEAN. Finally, I wish to convey my appreciation to all delegates for their continued support and active participation. Your penetrating questions, insightful observations and spirited interjections will continue to define the character and quality of the APR discourses.

Distinguished delegates,

Last year, after two years of virtual conferencing, we returned with a vengeance in one of our most widely attended and represented APRs. Indeed, having representative, inclusive panels – with a mix of officials, academics, think-tankers, private sector practitioners, established and emerging experts – it is a bar that we hope to exceed this year.

One of the key achievements of the APR, aside from its ability to draw in assorted role-players and delegates, is its role as a central networking node for observers and practitioners. This is why we continue to feature in the calendar of regional conferences. Both ISIS Malaysia and the ASEAN-ISIS network remain committed to encouraging dialogue and understanding among delegates at this conference and beyond.

I wish all role-players and delegates a productive and enjoyable 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

Thank you.



Opening remarks by **Dr Yose Rizal Damuri** **Executive Director Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS); 2024 Chair of ASEAN-ISIS Network**

I am honoured to represent the ASEAN-ISIS network and welcome you to the 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable. ASEAN-ISIS is very grateful to be an integral part of the APR, thanks to the productive collaboration with ISIS Malaysia.

For almost four decades, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable has been leading constructive discussions on various issues affecting the region. This role is particularly significant given current global developments, as reflected in the theme of this year's roundtable, "Crisis in an Interregnum".

According to the dictionary, one explanation of "interregnum" is a period during which the normal functions of government or control are suspended. This highlights the critical juncture of our situation, where the world faces a period of instability between established structures and the emergence of new ones.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have exposed the fragility of global security and the incapacity of global governance to maintain peace and stability. Tensions between the US and China have created an environment of distrust and uncertainty that threatens our region.

Moreover, the Asia-Pacific must now address various emerging and new challenges, such as promoting economic development, dealing with inequality, addressing climate change, preparing for the consequences of artificial intelligence, and many more.

Yet, amid these challenges, the Asia-Pacific boasts the world's fastest-growing economies, fuelled by innovation and a burgeoning middle class. The region is also poised to become the world's largest fintech market, potentially shaping the course of global development.

The Asia-Pacific can become a leader in forging a new world order during this transitional period. The region can champion multilateralism, work towards peaceful conflict resolutions, and promote sustainable development goals that benefit all.

However, as a region, the Asia-Pacific needs a platform and an institution to achieve these aspirations.

This is where ASEAN comes in. As a regional institution, ASEAN holds immense potential to shape the course of history during this interregnum. Despite its modest size, the group is the only organisation with the agency to shape outcomes in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

ASEAN's commitment to regional cooperation offers a model for peaceful conflict resolution on the world stage. Several underutilised ASEAN-led platforms can be leveraged to amplify this message.

The East Asia Summit (EAS), which brings together leaders from East Asian and Pacific countries, can be a starting point. In the economic area, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) should promote a comprehensive concept of economic security and resilience, viewing inclusive economic integration and interdependence as sources of greater prosperity, not weakness.

To fully realise this potential, ASEAN must address critical issues. ASEAN countries need to boost internal cohesion. ASEAN must continue to strengthen economic integration, foster deeper political ties, and present a unified front on many critical issues.

In the face of escalating geopolitical and economic challenges, it is imperative that ASEAN adopts an even more proactive stance. This isn't only about maintaining its role and centrality, it is a call to safeguard the region's stability, peace, prosperity and resilience.

I believe the Asia-Pacific Roundtable is an excellent platform to discuss and promote these initiatives. Over the next two days, we will delve into the complexities of the current geopolitical landscape, brainstorm solutions to regional challenges, and explore how the Asia-Pacific can contribute to a more prosperous and secure future for all.

With that, I wish you all very productive discussions and I eagerly await your valuable insights and contributions in this forum.

Thank you very much.



Lunch address by **HE Michalis Rokas** **Ambassador of the European Union to Malaysia**

This is my final Asia-Pacific Roundtable. After four intense, truly memorable years in Malaysia, I will move to the Western Balkans in September. As I stand here today, I think about my time here in Malaysia, but also about the past 30 years since I started my diplomatic career in 1994. And, I am truly worried about what lies ahead.

I see more conflicts, denial of multilateralism and the UN norms, and less cooperation. Moreover, in all spheres, there is a new sense of contestation. Territorial contestation, as is the case in the South China Sea. Issue-specific contestation, for example with regard to climate justice. Normative contestation, including highly targeted efforts of foreign information manipulation and interference. The current European elections are, unfortunately, a case in point.

I see a world much more fragmented. A world where universally agreed rules such as the UN Charter or International Humanitarian Law are increasingly not being adhered. In parallel, I see much more fragmented societies, the rise of “far right” understanding of nationalism, which has a direct impact on foreign policy making. I see a more multipolar world, but strikingly with multilateralism in decline. I see how dependencies easily become weapons.

And, like everyone in this room, I see two raging wars with uncertain endgame. I see a UNSC member violating any sense of norm that it is supposed to protect and adhere. I see civilians being massacred daily, in Gaza or in Ukraine, in Myanmar or in less captivating the public opinion’s eyesight places.

The post-1945 multilateral world order with the US as its hegemon is losing ground. China is rising to super-power status. What Beijing has done in the last 30 years is unique in the history of humankind. China's share of the world's GDP, at PPP, has gone from 6% to almost 20%, while we, Europeans, went from 21% to 14% and the United States from 20% to 15%. This is a dramatic change of the economic landscape.

Middle powers are emerging. They are becoming important actors. Whether they are BRICS or not BRICS, or so-called Global South, they have few common features, except the desire for getting more status and a stronger voice in the world, as well as greater benefits for their own development. To achieve this, they are maximising their autonomy, hedging one side or the other depending on the moment and the issue.

The motto of this roundtable is "Crisis in an interregnum". We all know from history that an interregnum can last quite long. It creates uncertainty, raising the question of leadership. How long will the current interregnum last then? And how will it end? None of these questions can be answered without taking into account the geopolitical and geo-economic realities of the Indo-Pacific. Because, the future of the international order is largely being shaped here. The APR is a great forum to discuss this. I congratulate ISIS for putting together a truly inspiring agenda with a stellar speaker line-up.

Ladies and gentlemen,

How has the EU positioned itself in this interregnum, in what HRVP Borrell calls "Europe between two wars"? We, Europeans, wanted to create in our neighbourhood a ring of friends. What we have today is a ring of fire from the Sahel to the Middle East, the Caucasus and the battlefields of Ukraine. And now, there are two wars. You know which ones I am referring to. However, of course there is a lot more. In 2022, 56 countries suffered some form of armed conflict. Many of them not making headlines.

When I became a diplomat in 1994, there were also terrible wars, for example in the Western Balkans, where I will be heading in a few months' time, or the genocide in Rwanda. However, the overall outlook was optimistic. Maybe sometimes too optimistic, for example when Francis Fukuyama claimed that the end of the Cold War marked "the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."

In Europe, we were reorganising the EU as our fundamental peace project to make internal borders virtually meaningless. This optimism was not limited to Europe.

At the Asia-Pacific Roundtable in 1994, the keynote speaker was Anwar Ibrahim! He also provided a quite optimistic outlook, stating that the "Asia-Pacific is probably the last region in the world to need confidence building and conflict reduction." On unresolved territorial issues, he added "if they are looked upon as mere irritants, rather than accorded focus and importance totally disproportionate to the reality, then they will cease to haunt us as a potential threat to regional peace and security."

Whether we like it or not, geography has come back to haunt us.

Coming back to "Europe between two wars", there are two major wars in which people are fighting for land. We were told that globalisation had made geography irrelevant, but most of

the conflicts in our neighbourhood are territorial. In the case of Palestine, for a land that has been promised to two people. In the case of Ukraine, for a land at the crossroads of two worlds.

At the same time, we see an acceleration of the global trends. The climate breakdown is already here. The technological transitions – such as artificial intelligence – are bringing changes that we cannot fully grasp.

The EU has to adapt rapidly to these challenges. To some extent, this has always been the case. One of our founding fathers, Jean Monnet, knew it from the start: “Europe will be forged in crisis”, he said. But now both the urgency and the gravity of the challenges leads to voices that the EU as a peace project could die, nothing less.

After decades of enjoying the perceived peace dividend after the end of the Cold War, as HRVP Borrell said: “Europe has to learn to use the language of power” again. Not by choice. Our peace project was driven by the rejection of power politics.

We largely succeeded in avoiding power politics among the states that joined the European project. We believed that partnerships based on trade would bring peace and good relationships around the world. This was the driving force of our foreign policy, which, alas, proved to be optimistic, not to say naïve... Therefore, now, we have to adjust our software. In the face of two major wars, in order to protect our values and interests, we have to look at the world the way it really is and not the way we want it to be.

From a European perspective, what do we have to do? First, I will continue to talk about the wars in our vicinity. We need a clear assessment of the dangers of Russia. Russia is an existential threat for us, and we have to have a clear-eyed assessment of this risk. When I became a diplomat in 1994, things looked very differently. Both Russia and Ukraine signed a “Partnership for Peace” with NATO, paving the way to what later became the NATO-Russia Council and NATO- Ukraine Commission.

1994 was also the year of the Budapest Memorandum, in which Russia signed to guarantee the territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine. Looking again at the proceedings of the 1994 Asia-Pacific Roundtable, I noticed that a panel on human rights under the title of “From confrontation to cooperation” was actually co-chaired by a senior official from the Russian MFA.

Today’s reality is very different. Under Putin’s leadership, Russia has returned to an imperialist understanding of the world. Imperial concepts from Tzarist Russia and Soviet times have been rehabilitated. In Georgia 2008 or the Crimea of 2014, we refused to see the evolution of Russia under Putin’s watch. Even though Putin himself had warned us at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. HRVP Borrell frequently shares the story of his visit to the Donbas in January 2022, some weeks before the invasion started.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal asked Borrell: “When they invade us, because they will invade us – there are 150,000 Russian troops on the other side of the border – what are you going to do? Are you going to support us? I am sure that young Europeans will not go to die for Kyiv. But are you going to provide us with the arms that we need in order to resist the invasion?”

That question, at that time, in the middle of the darkness and the cold of the winter, Borrell could not answer. The European Union had never provided arms to a country at war.

However, when the invasion came, our answer was remarkable and very much united in order to provide Ukraine with the military capacity they need to resist. For as long as it takes. The EU has stepped up and quickly created new instruments, such as the European Peace Facility. Since the beginning of the invasion, the EU has supported Ukraine with at least €96 billion in military aid, arms, equipment, training, as well as economic and humanitarian support.

Then, not long after last year's roundtable, another war came. The horrendous terrorist attack by Hamas of 7 October and Israel's disproportionate response plunged the Middle East into the worst cycle of violence in decades. Just before the 7 October, many believed that the Abraham Accords had diluted the Palestinian issue. Well, they had not! It was a way of making peace between some Arab countries and Israelis, but not between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

My personal memories of 1994 again reflect wasted opportunities. It was actually 1994 when Arafat, Peres and Rabin received the Nobel Peace Prize! With two wars in our vicinity, we need to ask ourselves: do we in Europe understand the gravity of the moment? Sincerely, I have my doubts. The European Union as a way of living and as a peace project is in danger. Nevertheless, like Jean Monnet, I believe in the capability of the EU to adapt, change and develop in front of the multiple crises.

To face these challenges, I think that we have to work on three dimensions: principles, cooperation and strength.

Let us start with the principles. Principles are important because the European Union is a union of values, included in our treaties. From our point of view, they are everything that is good. In principle, it is difficult to disagree with these principles. Then, there are the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, to put a limit to the actions of the stronger. In the simplest possible terms, those principles outlawed "the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

Then, there is international humanitarian law to try to regulate how wars are fought and safeguard the protection of civilians. These principles should be the best safeguard against the normalisation of the use of force that we see all over the world, and painfully today in Gaza.

In Kuala Lumpur or elsewhere in the region, I find myself confronted with the accusation of double standards. What is now happening in Gaza has portrayed Europe in a way that many people simply do not understand. They saw our quick engagement and decisiveness in supporting Ukraine and wonder about the way we approach what is happening in Palestine.

I can try explaining how the European Union's decision-making processes work: unanimity. I can try to explain the different historical experiences of our member states: very divided among them, as openly displayed in UNGA votes. However, the outside perception is that the value of civilian lives in Ukraine is not the same than in Gaza, where more than 34,000 are dead, most others displaced, where children are starving, and the humanitarian support is obstructed.

The perception is that we care less if international law is violated by Israel, as opposed to when it is violated by Russia. The principles that we put in place after the World War II are a pillar of peace. However, this requires that we are coherent in our language. If we call something a "war crime" in one place, we need to call it by the same name when it happens anywhere else.

Hamas has sparked this new cycle of violence with their atrocious attack. Nevertheless, what

has happened in Gaza during the following months is another horror. And one horror can never justify another. Let there be no doubt: the EU is appalled by the unprecedented loss of civilian lives and the critical humanitarian situation and calls for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance.

The EU has urged the Israeli government in the strongest terms not to undertake a ground operation in Rafah. Finally, the EU fully supports the Biden peace plan.

The second line of action is cooperation. Cooperation requires an essential ingredient: trust.

But in a world where dependencies are increasingly weaponised, trust is in short supply. A trust shortage risks decoupling on technology, trade and values. There are more and more transactional relationships, but less rules and less cooperation. However, without increased cooperation, we will not tackle great global challenges: climate change, emerging technologies, demographic changes, inequalities.

For a start, we need to reduce excessive dependencies. During the pandemic, we realised that in Europe, we were not producing a single gramme of paracetamol, or that 93% of our surgical gloves were imported from Malaysia. In the moment of crisis, we painfully, pun intended, realised how urgently, we need to reduce our own excessive dependencies. But also, that we need to diversify our trade links and deepen cooperation with our close friends.

Southeast Asian countries are already primary recipients of the resulting new wave of foreign direct investments and have a lot to gain in this context. However, that is not enough. While we do not share the same values and interests with countries like China, we have to look for ways of cooperating.

Then, we have to have a close look at why parts of the so-called Global South are feeling some resentment about us, especially with regard to our green laws, such as EUDR, and who is going to sustain the massive investment that is needed to address the real and present danger of climate change. Therefore, we need to find common ground and innovative approaches, but it starts with honest conversations and mutual understanding. And a sense of shared priorities, creating opportunities together!

Malaysia is in a great position to facilitate this kind of discussion, especially in the context of the ASEAN chairmanship 2025. The world will come to Malaysia. The EU stands ready to support meaningful debate, honest discussions and contribute to make the best use of this opportunity.

The EU and ASEAN as the world's most successful regional groupings are natural partners. Last year, during his keynote address at the 36th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, the Prime Minister exhorted ASEAN to do better: "ASEAN as a regional mechanism has always stepped up when it matters the most. Rooted in our origins, crisis has always made ASEAN stronger and more resilient." I wish the Malaysian government the best of success in this endeavour.

The last word is about strength. There is nothing that authoritarian regimes admire more, than strength, the power of might. If they perceive you as a weak actor, they will act accordingly. So, let us try to demonstrate strength when talking with authoritarian people.

This is a lesson that we in Europe had forgotten. Maybe because we had been relying on the security umbrella of the United States. But this umbrella may not be open forever, and I believe that we cannot make our security dependent on the US elections every four years. However, we live in an age of geopolitical upheaval. You call it interregnum.

That is why the European Union continues to develop its defence capabilities. Only a week ago, the EU defence ministers decided to strengthen the EU Defence Industrial and Technological Base. In March, the EU decided to deploy a maritime security operation under the name of ASPIDES to secure shipping routes against Houthi attacks.

The contribution to restoring and safeguarding freedom of navigation and securing supply chains is for the benefit of the EU, the region and the wider international community, Malaysia included. The EU's strategic compass from 2022 is bearing fruits. The work of the European Defence Agency is more relevant than ever before. Moreover, it's likely that you will soon hear about an EU commissioner for defence after the elections, for the first time ever.

Now we experience that there is less trust among the main players; less respect for international law and multilateral agreements; force and coercion are on the rise. We are living in times in which anything can be weaponised. It is not law, but force, which is increasingly shaping our world.

Against such backdrop, unsurprisingly, all major players continue to expand their military spending. Nowhere to a larger extent than in the Indo-Pacific. But also in Europe the Russian invasion has led to a sharp increase in military expenditure.

We live in a dangerous and uncertain world. We need new, trusted partnerships, we need solutions, and we need commitment to manage the repercussions of strategic uncertainty. We need to join efforts to fight against the scourge of disinformation and misinformation and the daily cyber threats that we are all subject to.

We need to collectively help our societies fathom that our prosperity is in danger and that we need to overcome past misconceptions to face the challenges that lie ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unlike last year, today I have not spoken about the EU's new instruments and initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. But I want to recall my three conclusions from last year, because I believe they are still relevant.

First, the EU cannot separate economics from security, which are strongly interlinked. Second, we now live in one geostrategic theatre so that the European security and the security of the Indo-Pacific are interwoven, as so is our common prosperity. Third, the EU must continue to reinforce its presence and strengthen its engagement in and with the Indo-Pacific.

Contributing to regional peace and stability as a smart security enabler. Linking these points I made last year with the takeaways from my past four years of experience in Malaysia and my 30 years of diplomatic career, I conclude: There is no "faraway" in a globalised world.

Therefore, we see partnership and inclusive cooperation at the heart of our approach to the Indo-Pacific. It is why our trade agreements, our digital and green partnerships are not merely

sectoral or economic measures, but important means to strengthen stability, security and the rules-based international order.

This forms part of our distinctive role in, and offer to, the Indo-Pacific under the Global Gateway Initiative, launched in December 2021 - our offer to help build diversified and secure supply chains and to unlock sustainable investments in partner countries. The initiative has led to highly relevant flagship activities in ASEAN member states over the past couple of years.

I would like to emphasise that the Indo-Pacific countries can find in the EU a trusted partner willing to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region and its people; a partner with principled and long-term engagement.

The ASEAN chairmanship 2025 will provide a great opportunity to dive deeper into this conversation. This I will leave to my successor, and of course to our future political leaders – actually to be elected this week. I sincerely hope that you will meet them soon here in Malaysia, next year.

For today, let me conclude that it has been a great privilege for me to share a European perspective on Crisis in an Interregnum with you today. Greek philosopher Aristotle said: “friendship is essentially a partnership”.

I am deeply convinced that a stronger and trusted partnership among our nations is fundamental to bring back stability and predictability to the now shuttered world order. And, as Aristotle mentioned that “fine partnership requires trust and duration rather than fitful intensity”, I strongly believe, that EU-Malaysia relations can thrive in this backdrop.

I wish the 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable successful deliberations, and I look forward to ideas and proposals on how to ensure the necessary amount of cooperation in an increasingly contested world. Many thanks for your kind attention and enjoy your lunch!





Dinner address by
HE Ouyang Yujing
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the
People's Republic of China to Malaysia

Good evening!

It is a great pleasure to be invited to the 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable. On behalf of the Chinese Embassy in Malaysia, I give my warm congratulations to the successful convening of this Roundtable. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Datuk Professor Dr Faiz for his kind invitation and his highly capable ISIS team for their professionalism and devotion which has made APR a celebrated event in the region.

Today, we humankind are facing unprecedented challenges in a world full of unpredictable changes and chaotic situations. People eagerly long for more powerful and stable forces to ensure them a promising future.

“Crisis in an Interregnum” as this year’s theme is both relevant and timely, providing a great platform for people to exchange views on issues of regional and global significance and gain wisdom and insight from which we might find better ways out.

In a world of full of uncertainties, “What kind of world we want and how to build it” is a weighty question to all. Taken into consideration the well-being of all countries, China has provided the vision of “building the global community with a shared future for mankind” as its answer.

This vision aims to build a world with lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity, a world that is open, inclusive, clean and beautiful. It advocates global governance based on extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefits. It adopts peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom as the common values of humanity and strives to foster a new type of international relations based on mutual respect, equity and justice, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Its ideas and values are realised by the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilisation Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative. Since put forward 11 years ago, building the global community with a shared future for mankind has grown from an abstract idea to a full-fledged scientific system, from a one-nation proposal to international consensus, from a beautiful vision to practical achievements, which is gaining increasing impact, vitality and attraction today.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

China and ASEAN countries enjoy geographical proximity, cultural intimacy and people-to-people bond. China always gives priority to ASEAN in its neighbourhood diplomacy, unswervingly supports ASEAN centrality, a more united, independent and developed ASEAN, and ASEAN playing a bigger role in regional and international affairs.

Now, China has reached important consensus with Malaysia and other six ASEAN countries on building a community with a shared future on a bilateral basis, enabling China-ASEAN relations an exemplary case in building the “global community with a shared future for mankind”. Standing at a new historical point, China is willing to work with ASEAN countries to further implement the three global initiatives and build a more closely bonded China-ASEAN community with a shared future.

Firstly, we should focus on common development and jointly turn the region into a model of GDI cooperation. Caring for practical needs and long-term goals, GDI aims to foster new momentum for global common development. China is willing to explore better ways of synergizing GDI with the Strategic Plans of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and speed up negotiations on China-ASEAN free trade area version 3.0.

China is ready to work with ASEAN countries in more effectively implementing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), deepening industrial collaboration, stabilising production and supply chains, enhancing regional connectivity, and releasing further the potentials of emerging industries such as digital transformation and green economy. China is also willing to deepen cross-border industrial cooperation with ASEAN countries.

Secondly, we should strive to ensure universal peace and jointly turn the region into a pioneer of GSI cooperation. GSI advocates common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, respecting all countries’ sovereignty and five territorial integrities. It emphasises on abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and taking legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously. It is also committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Being consistent in observing the five principles and the spirit of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), China is willing to work closely with ASEAN countries in coping with

security challenges and threats, through dialogues other than confrontation and by forming partnership other than alliance.

China is willing to work closely with ASEAN countries in more effectively implementing “the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea” (DOC) and speeding up consultations on “the code of conduct” to jointly maintain peace and stability of the region. We should also strengthen cooperation in non-traditional security areas such as combating telecommunication fraud and illegal online gambling.

Thirdly, we should promote understanding between different civilisations and jointly turn the region into a chorus of GCI cooperation. GCI advocates respect for civilizational diversity, common values of humanity, civilizational inheritance and innovation, and people-to-people exchanges. This year marks the 50th anniversary of China and Malaysia establishing diplomatic ties, which is also the “China-ASEAN Year of People-to-people Exchanges” and the “Year of China-Malaysia Friendship”. At such a favourable time, China is willing to work closely with its ASEAN partners in further tightening people-to-people bond by increasing exchanges in culture, media, education, tourism, youth and think tanks and other fields.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

As the world’s second largest economy, China’s economy has always been a hot topic. Recently, some countries accused China for “overcapacity” in the new energy industry and said China’s economy had peaked, which of which are untrue. I would like to share my perspective here. Is there a real China overcapacity? The answer is no.

It is true that China has enhanced productivity in EV and other new energy products. Yet, this “enhanced capacity” other than “overcapacity” is a natural outcome of comparative advantage in market economy. It is common practice for a country to produce and export the product of its own comparative advantage in order to win in the competition, which is a basic principle of modern economics.

The reasons why Chinese EVs have won over are due to China’s favourable policy of continued opening up, industrial transformation, technological upgrading and huge internal market which have collectively enabled China’s EV industry progress fast. Just recently, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in her China trip that “(Chinese) government support is currently leading to production capacity that significantly exceeds China’s domestic demand, as well as what the global market can bear.”

A Bloomberg article directly pointed out her mistake by saying “One of the most distinguished living economists (referring to Yellen) is rejecting what’s been one of the most fundamental principles of economics for more than 200 years, which is the comparative advantage. If a country can manufacture goods at lower costs than you can, you shouldn’t raise tariff barriers. Instead, you should import the goods, and send back something in return where your industry is more efficient.” Arbitrary blaming of others will do no good to US economy. It is detrimental to global economic recovery.

How does China’s economic development look like in the future? My answer is, China’s long-term economic outlook will be positive and continue to enjoy an upward trend. This is not empty optimism but rational calculation based on China’s solid economic merits. China has the unparalleled mega-market with over 400 million middle-income people as its backbone;

all the industrial sectors in the United Nations Industrial Classification (UNIC) system; the world's largest research and development team; and the vast innovation potential ready to be unleashed by the new quality productive forces. All these collectively constitute the solid foundation which ensures China's long-term economic growth.

China is rightly on its way to achieving the second 100-year goal of becoming a great modern socialist country in all respects. With high-level openness and the Chinese-style modernisation carried on firm and steady, China will continue to provide development opportunities to both the region and the world. China advocates an equal and orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalisation. China is the major trading partner of more than 140 countries and regions, whose economy achieved 5.2% growth last year despite global economic downturn, contributing 30% to world economic growth.

According to Bloomberg's recent calculations using International Monetary Fund forecasts, "China will be the top contributor to global growth over the next five years, with its share bigger than all Group of Seven countries combined."

China will develop well only when the world develops well. In return, a better-developed China will bring about a more prosperous world. China is willing and ready to work with ASEAN and other countries in the region to jointly address risks and challenges and co-build this region into our shared home of peace, tranquillity, prosperity, beauty and friendship.

Wish the 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable a big success! Thank you all.





Lunch address by **HE Danielle Heinecke** **High Commissioner of Australia to Malaysia**

Working together and making a difference: Australia and Malaysia as middle powers

Who we are

I'd like to start by discussing Australia – who we are, how we are changing, and how that impacts our engagement with Malaysia and the region. Australia today is a modern, multicultural country – almost half of our population was born overseas or has a parent born overseas. That includes my children who are of South African (Zulu and Xhosa) and Irish heritage.

We are home to more than 7.6 million migrants, including over 172,000 of Malaysian heritage. We are immensely proud of the contributions migrants have made to our society and who shape our identity and culture. Such as that of our own Foreign Minister, The Hon Penny Wong, who was born and lived as a child in Sabah, Malaysia.

We are home to the oldest continuing culture on earth – that of our First Nations people. Australia sees itself as being in and of the region. When we look to the region, we see ourselves reflected in it. And today the region can see itself reflected in Australia. Australia today is vibrant and dynamic. Some of the world's important inventions have Aussie roots – such as Google Maps; Wi-Fi; the bionic ear; electronic pacemakers; penicillin and more.

Six Australian universities rank in the top 100 global institutes with four Australians universities with campuses in Malaysia. And I acknowledge the significant number of our alumni in this

room today. Please raise your hands if you or a family member are Australian alumni?

Our Australian story continues to evolve as we confront our history, adapt, and make changes for the better. As our Assistant Foreign Minister, The Hon Tim Watts, has said “We weren’t perfect at Federation and we aren’t perfect now.”

This Australian story, our national identity, is also our government’s starting point for our evolving foreign policy. We want to – and we are – make a positive contribution regionally and internationally. Because our futures are intertwined.

Australia-Malaysia relationship

Australia and Malaysia are longstanding partners and friends.

Next year we will commemorate the 70th anniversary of Australia’s diplomatic presence in Malaysia. We have deep connections across tourism, education, business, and proud family ties.

In 2021, Australia and Malaysia elevated our bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. During his visit to Australia in March, Prime Minister Anwar described our comprehensive strategic partnership as “the hallmark” of our relationship. He said the partnership was a demonstration of how our bilateral cooperation cuts “across multiple spheres, often stretching beyond the traditional economic, diplomatic, security and cultural ties.”

Our extensive defence and security cooperation is of particular relevance to the Asia-Pacific Roundtable. This cooperation stretches back to World War II, where Australian soldiers fought in defence of Malaya and the subsequent liberation of Sarawak, Sabah and Labuan. Our defence relationship has continued to mature under the auspices of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (1971) and the Malaysia Australia Joint Defence Programme (1992).

In addition to numerous reciprocal secondments, courses and annual exercises, Malaysia hosts an ongoing Australian Defence Force presence at Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth. Today, Malaysia has the largest number of foreign-embedded officers within the Australian Defence Force, and Australia is privileged to have the same honour here in the Malaysian Armed Forces.

Since July last year, 129 Malaysian defence members have attended 81 military courses in Australia and over 800 Australian soldiers, sailors and aviators have trained here in Malaysia over the same period. These deep and practical links are an indicator of our trust and confidence in the partnership.

Australia and Malaysia also cooperate to address security threats facing the region. There are close links between Australian and Malaysian police, security, counter-terrorism, civil maritime security, border and immigration agencies. 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of the Australian Federal Police’s liaison office in Malaysia. Examples of successful police-to-police cooperation include the 2023 arrest of Adrian Katong and the disruption of his international syndicate (Bulletproftlink), which enabled hundreds of cyber-criminals to perpetrate scams targeting victims around the world.

Our ties are strong, but there's still much more we want to do together.

Our economic futures are intertwined

As we look towards the future, Australia has recognised that further economic cooperation, particularly investment, will bring benefits to Australia and the region. And that's why we launched Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040.

The strategy sets out a pathway to significantly increase two-way trade and investment with Southeast Asia. And includes a A\$2 billion Southeast Asia investment financing facility to catalyse Australian trade and investment in the region.

The strategy recognises the complementarities between our economies – complementarities which we want to work with you to take advantage of. As Malaysia heads towards high-income country status and continues to transition to a knowledge-based and high value economy, the strategy envisages more cooperation between Malaysian and Australian businesses in areas like renewable energy transition, the digital economy, food control systems and agribusiness, and education.

More recently, our Prime Minister launched the A\$22.7 billion Future Made in Australia package. Future Made in Australia is about maximising the economic and industrial benefits of the move to net zero.

As our treasurer has said, “made in Australia doesn't mean made alone”. We see this policy as opening opportunities for cooperation on supply chains that can support the region's net zero transformation and increase two-way green trade and investment.

For example, we can see a future in which Malaysia integrates products like green metals and batteries – made in Australia – into your high-end manufacturing, creating products that attract a premium with their clean, green footprint; and where Australia and Malaysia invest more in each other's industries.

In April, Australia's Assistant Trade and Manufacturing Minister Tim Ayres visited Malaysia and Singapore. The minister brought out 23 Australian companies and organisations seeking to work on trade and investment in maritime decarbonisation and renewable energy sectors as part of our new Australia-Southeast Asia Business Exchange programme. The visit was a big step towards leveraging shared opportunities from the energy transition. We want to keep building on those steps.

Australia has the comparative advantage and ambition to become a renewable energy superpower. We have abundant resources of solar and wind power and vast reserves of critical minerals. We are building our green hydrogen industry. While Australia has already undergone rapid renewable energy transition (now at 40% with an aim to reach 82% by 2030), our journey hasn't all been smooth sailing – with challenges, including implementation costs, high cost of capital, policy leadership, winners/losers, and our federal-state system.

We can – and are – supporting the region's transition to low-cost and zero emissions energy. We are happy to share our lessons and technology (all the ups and downs) with Malaysia and the region.

Middle-power agency

Let me now turn to where our national story and our economic futures intersects with foreign policy. As we have discussed for the last few days, we are in a period of profound strategic change, facing the most complex and challenging set of circumstances seen in decades strategic trends are not going in the right direction long-standing rules are being bent, twisted and broken big players are bullying smaller ones, and common ground is harder to find.

How can we, and should we, collectively respond to these challenges? Australia and Malaysia are both middle powers but we are creative and nimble (although I note many Malaysian foreign policy thinkers describe Malaysia as small). We both deploy our statecraft to help shape a region that is peaceful, stable and prosperous.

Since I arrived late last year, I've heard references to Malaysia's "mousedeer diplomacy", drawing on the Malay fable of Sang Kancil – a mousedeer who uses wit to outsmart dangerous crocodiles. Australia also has similar indigenous and children's stories about diplomacy and conflict prevention which seek to describe how smaller or middle-sized entities can use agency to navigate their interests in times of contestation.

The Rainbow Serpent from the Dreamtime in Aboriginal culture represents a great and powerful force. In some indigenous cultures, people approaching a waterhole will sing out to the Rainbow Serpent to reassure it of their safe intentions. This is a story of diplomacy, assurance, and conflict prevention. We are confident we share many similar cultural traditions and approaches with Malaysia. We deploy all our tools of statecraft, working bilaterally, unilaterally, regionally and multilaterally.

We work bilaterally together in practical ways. For example:

1. Under the Australia-Malaysia institutional strengthening programme we are deepening cooperation on institutional reform.
2. This week, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Legal and Institutional Reforms) YB Azalina is leading a delegation to Australia to learn from each other's respective Westminster systems.
3. Through the Australian government's partnerships for infrastructure programme, Australian experts are working with Sarawak to share expertise on solar energy and pumped hydro energy storage.
4. And we are working with Malaysia's Ministry of Transport to support Malaysia's ambition to become a green bunkering hub, supporting the region's maritime decarbonisation imperative.
5. We also work regionally, through ASEAN and in support of ASEAN centrality. At the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in March, Australia announced a package of support worth over A\$500 million. Some highlights of the package include:
 - more than 75 new Aus4ASEAN scholarships and 55 fellowships to support the region's emerging leaders; and
 - A\$64 million for Australia's Southeast Asia Maritime Partnerships Initiative to enhance Australia's practical support for maritime capacity-building, peace and stability in the region.

Our support reinforces Australia's commitment to Southeast Asia and ASEAN. And our commitment to partnering with Malaysia during its upcoming ASEAN chair year. We also work

together in a range of different formats to achieve mutual objectives. For example, Australia was pleased to partner with Malaysia to support trilateral capacity building for Timor-Leste officials to help them practically prepare to join ASEAN. This work has been very impactful – showing how two middle powers can positively contribute to the region.

And we work through minilateral partnerships, including the Quad to offer the region practical support. By pooling resources and leveraging the collective strengths and capabilities of Australia, India, Japan and the United States the Quad makes us a more effective partner for regional countries. As Prime Minister Anwar said at his oration at the Australian National University in March:

“Working on our respective strengths and unique relationships with the major countries of this region, we can achieve something of profound consequence for the Asia Pacific.”

That is, middle-power countries like Australia and Malaysia do have a key role to play in creating the kind of region to which we aspire. A region that is respectful of sovereignty and agreed rules and norms, and where no country dominates and no country is dominated.

Australia, Malaysia, and indeed all middle powers, increasingly need to find creative ways to prosecute their interests in sometimes difficult circumstances. As our own Prime Minister has said: “Our challenge and our great opportunity lies in anticipating change, shaping it and making sure it delivers for our people. And doing this in in our own uniquely Australian way.”

As DG Nushirwan said in Plenary 1 yesterday, national history and identity matters. Australia is drawing on our national identity and being ambitious about our economic potential to contribute to our shared vision for our region.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

Australia and Malaysia have always been active and agile small-middle powers. And we’ve always worked together. We will both continue to play a major role in our region. And we will continue to support each other. We look forward to the next chapter in our story of partnership with Malaysia and the region.





Plenary 1

Wednesday, 5 June 2024
09:30–11:00

Major-power rivalry: between mitigation and cooperation

Tensions between US and China have created an environment of distrust and uncertainty. As major-power rivalry heightens, the growing risk of miscalculation and unintended clashes have sparked a need for greater crisis communication. Are existing mechanisms like APEC, EAS or G20 conducive for promoting dialogue and cooperation? If not, what new platforms are needed? Is there a role for small and medium powers to foster mitigation and cooperation?

Instigator



Hervé Lemahieu
Director of Research
Lowy Institute
Australia

Speakers



Yun Sun
Senior Fellow
Stimson Centre
United States



Victor Zhikai Gao
Vice-President
Centre for China & Globalisation



HE Sujiro Seam
Ambassador of the European
Union to ASEAN



HE Ong Keng Yong
Executive Deputy Chairman
S Rajaratnam School of
International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore



**Raja Dato' Nushirwan
Zainal Abidin**
Director-General
National Security Council
Malaysia

Despite intensifying major-power rivalry which is shaping the region, this session offered an optimistic outlook that tensions can be managed through diplomacy, trust-building, principled actions and active dialogue.

Yun Sun acknowledged the progress in managing the US-China relationship. Bilateral dialogue can generally be characterised as unstable, as it lacks an anchor and can easily be exploited – the balloon incident in January 2023 is an example of interrupting the process of bilateral engagement. Since then, military-to-military dialogue has resumed. Other points of cooperation include joint law enforcement on counter-narcotics and various other dialogues, including on the Gaza crisis and Ukraine. Such engagements play a role with mitigation and cooperation. Nevertheless, Sun is less confident about great powers' ability to overcome their geopolitical instinct due to entrenched interests.

Victor Gao proposed the theory of inevitable peace, particularly between the US and China. Although he foresees bilateral relations deteriorating in the short term, he is optimistic that war is not an option for the medium term and long term. War will be detrimental, not just for the US and China, but also for the wider world. Therefore, in the need to instigate peace, Gao emphasised that we must do the “right thing”, which should be guided by values defined on our own terms, rather than values imposed on us.

Ambassador Sujiro Seam shared that the European recipe towards managing conflict and crisis is made from a combination of principles, interests and institutions. This recipe only works if there is unity, he said. For example, the EU is trying to achieve unity in response to Ukraine, including providing financial, economic, humanitarian assistance, as well as applying sanctions as a deterrent. Economics plays a role in the mitigation agenda. In the face of intensifying rivalry, Seam called for integration over disintegration and the need to engage with awareness, respect, open eyes and honesty.

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong upheld the importance of ASEAN, especially as a mechanism to address regional conflicts. While there is criticism of its effectiveness, Ong argued that the alternative is greater intensification of major-power rivalry without regional stakeholders to keep it in check. He called for attention to the big picture and argued that ASEAN is well positioned to respond to major-power rivalry, not just by virtue of its history but also by its response to the Myanmar crisis. ASEAN managed to come up with the five-point consensus and has been able to contain the conflict from spreading across the region.

Raja Dato' Nushirwan Zainal Abidin spoke about the importance of attitude and diplomacy in managing relations and crises. While structures and institutions are important, we should not overlook the role of context and tone in diplomacy. He highlighted that we are often coloured by our biases, which inform the way we conduct diplomacy or engage with another country. The lack of humility and mutual understanding in dialogue influences processes and might lead to a lack of strategic trust. He argued that good diplomacy is like good intelligence, it is always gradual and rests on a certain kind of gentleness.



Plenary 2

Wednesday, 5 June 2024
11:30–13:00

ASEAN in 2025: reflecting the past, shaping the future

2025 is a pivotal year for ASEAN, as it marks the culmination of the KL Declaration and its multiple visions. It also unveils the Post-2025 Vision that will guide ASEAN over the next two decades. This session aims to encapsulate both a reflection and a way forward. How can ASEAN address effectively internal and external challenges, such as its response to the Myanmar crisis and the centrality of its regional mechanisms amid major-power rivalry? What should be Malaysia's key priorities for the Post-2025 Vision when it assumes the chairmanship next year?

Instigator



Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak
Senior Fellow
Institute of Security & International
Studies (ISIS)
Thailand

Main Speakers



HE Dr Kao Kim Hourn
Secretary-General of ASEAN

Discussants



Prof Dewi Fortuna Anwar
Research Professor
Research Centre for Politics
National Research & Innovation Agency (BRIN)
Indonesia



Dr David Capie
Director of Centre for Strategic Studies
Victoria University of Wellington
New Zealand

Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak as the instigator reframed the theme as crisis “after” the interregnum. ASEAN has experienced a period of robust growth marked by several milestones, including an expansion of membership, establishment of the ARF, EAS and ASEAN charter. However, as the interregnum ends, ASEAN faces emerging crises, including major-power rivalry, the situation in Myanmar and diverging views on South China Seas. How ASEAN deals with these challenges will help shape its future.

Plenary Session 2 featured ASEAN secretary-general, **HE Dr Kao Kim Hourn**, as the main speaker. Dr Kao provided updates on the ASEAN Vision 2025. The political security community and social cultural community are near completion as 99 % of the action line has been addressed while the economic community (AEC) has completed more than half of the 2,527 action lines identified in a blueprint by 2023.

The AEC effort of accelerating integration and building economic community has yielded results as ASEAN emerged as an economic powerhouse in terms of GDP size (US\$3.8 trillion in 2023), a major trade player and preferred investment destination. Navigating major-power rivalry, Myanmar and emergence of natural or manmade disaster are its key challenges.

ASEAN strives to sustain its cordial dialogues and habit of consultations as a strategy to navigate around the US-China rivalry. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo Pacific (AOIP) with its four priority areas of economics, maritime security, connectivity and SDG articulated its view of how it prefers to engage with partners.

The crafting of the ASEAN Vision 2045 reflects its wishes for the future. The aims are to ensure ASEAN’s ability to handle emerging challenges and to transform and harness opportunities. The Digital Economy Framework Agreement, Blue Economy and green and clean energy offer huge opportunities for economic growth and cooperation. ASEAN is accelerating integration and strengthening community building as it undertake new initiatives.

ASEAN must not be reactive but instead visionary, active, agile and resilient.

Prof Dewi Fortuna Anwar echoed the need for ASEAN to navigate and mitigate major-power rivalry and form strategic approaches to set the agenda. ASEAN should establish a modality for cooperation for AOIP and present solidarity on issues, such as SCS. She urged the appointment of a dedicated ASEAN envoy to Myanmar to ensure continuity and familiarity among involved parties and the early admittance of Timur-Leste to minimise developmental gaps.

Dr David Capie argued that unilateralism, such as QUAD, AUKUS, are part of the challenge to ASEAN albeit with limitations. He does not foresee an ASEAN-X happening but urged the consolidation of ASEAN processes. He noted that strategic competition is strongest in the region and commended ASEAN’s push for inclusive regionalism in RCEP and AOIP. Malaysia will likely tackle the Myanmar situation when it takes over the chair next year.



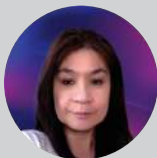
Concurrent Session 1

Wednesday, 5 June 2024
14:30–16:00

Connecting the Global South

Growing discourse on the Global South and outcomes of the 2023 G20 Summit demonstrate the growing interest in creating inclusive cooperation mechanisms that capitalise on regions like Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific Islands, which Southeast Asia has neglected. Heightened diplomatic activity and enhanced multilateralism in those regions and organisations like BRICS and SCO show the importance of connecting the Global South. How can ASEAN better take the lead with its engagement with the Global South? Can it leverage on Dialogue Partners with functional relationships in the Global South to broker deeper ties in the region?

Instigator



Prof Antoinette R Raquiza
Vice-President
Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress
Foundation, Inc (APPPFI)
The Philippines

Speakers



Dr Lina A Alexandra
Head of the Department of International Relations
Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)
Indonesia



Prof Harsh V Pant
Vice-President
Studies & Foreign Policy
Observer Research Foundation
India



Yanitha Meena Louis
Analyst
Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS)
Malaysia

The session assessed the current growing discourse on the Global South amid geopolitical dynamics and political polarisation. Instigator **Prof Antoinette R Raquiza** set the direction of the discussion by posing questions to the speakers on their opinions of the term “Global South”, the relevance of the movement and its significance on the global, regional and country level.

Prof Harsh V Pant postulated that the term Global South has evolved because of the fragmentation in a reordering world. This led the middle-power states and smaller states to search for a platform that allowed their voices to be heard. He emphasised that Global South is a structural response to a structural challenge. India’s G20 presidency allows the country to move beyond the binary politics but the polarisation happens within G20 itself. By amplifying the voices of the Global South, India hopes to address the issues, for example, of food security and fuel crisis. Prof Pant stated that India’s foreign policy with regard to the participation in Global South, BRICS, G20 and Indo Pacific framework is centred on strategic manoeuvrability. This allows India to be part of all conversations but the limitation of this approach will soon be known.

According to **Yanitha Meena Louis**, Global South is a strategic configuration of convenience and acknowledged that the reemergence is because of its mobilising feature. Despite its resurgence, it will not have the same unifying effect as seen in the Bandung conference. ASEAN could play the role as one of the meaningful mobilisers with its own convening power and mechanisms, such as East Asian Summit, which needs its own revitalisation. Hopefully, with Malaysia’s chairmanship in 2025, ASEAN will engage proactively as a bloc with the support of its dialogue partners. ASEAN can possibly engage the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States brokered by the European Union. Meena concluded that the Global South agenda must be based on interests and challenges; and does not need leader(s) but mobilisers.

Dr Lina A Alexandra prompted the audience with few questions – whether to define Global South geographically or economically as the configuration comprises a wide range of regions and countries or does it truly exist in the current situation and whether the term remains relevant in the future. Indonesia is seeking to shape the international order but not necessarily changing the status quo. Indonesia’s current foreign policy separates its engagement with ASEAN and its involvement in South-South cooperation, which has transformed itself from purely recipient country to the emerging donor. She iterated that the aspiration of the Global South needs to be more organic by focusing on real issues. ASEAN should deepen relations with its dialogue partners, improved the ASEAN-SCO relations and revitalised ASEAN+3 rather than limit itself to a vision of the Global South. Each ASEAN member state is being self-reflective too, as to what extent each has the capacity to challenge or criticise the current world order.



Concurrent Session 2

Wednesday, 5 June 2024
14:30–16:00

Reframing the global climate discourse

While awareness and diplomatic efforts on climate action have intensified, the gap between promises and impact continues to widen. Agendas largely shaped by Western narratives have created disproportionate expectations on developing countries despite the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities.’ In what ways do nations exhibit climate hypocrisy through their actions compared with their stated commitments? How are developed and developing countries experiencing climate risks differently? How can we bridge the North-South divide to work towards a more equitable solution? What role should non-state actors, such as activists and lobbies, play in climate negotiations for a more inclusive climate governance?

Instigator



Dr Annabelle Workman
Research Fellow
Melbourne Climate Futures & Melbourne
School of Population and Global Health
University of Melbourne
Australia

Speakers



**Gen (retd) ANM
Muniruzzaman**
President
Bangladesh Institute of Peace & Security Studies



Dr Frederick Kliem
Director of Regional Programme Energy
Security and Climate Change Asia-Pacific
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)
Hong Kong SAR



Prakriti Koirala
Climate Activist
Loss & Damage Youth Coalition
Nepal

The session delved into the current state of global climate discourse – exploring the progress of ongoing commitments and the disproportionate effects of climate impacts across nations – and explore perspectives and avenues crucial to address the climate crisis.

To set the scene, **Dr Frederick Kliem** recounted the facts as presented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) – that the world is currently not on trajectory to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C as outlined within the Paris Agreement. Despite existing climate commitments, anthropogenic-induced greenhouse gas emissions would foresee unprecedented levels of global warming, and worsen climate impacts the world is already unequipped to face, if actions are not further scaled up.

General (retired) ANM Muniruzzaman and **Prakriti Koirala** complemented this by highlighting that these effects are already reality to regions most affected by climate change – wherein least developed nations, such as Bangladesh, as well as mountainous regions like Nepal, are already face rising temperatures, sea-level rise and increased frequency of natural disasters. These are causing issues of food security, water scarcity and health, ultimately impacting on people's economic livelihoods and wellbeing.

Gen Munir examined the climate crisis from a security angle, which many nations have yet to or lack the capacity to consider. When the severity of climate impacts begins to displace populations and compromise resource security, particularly within frontline states, it destabilises not only the host country but also neighbouring ones through cascading effects – for instance, creating climate refugees and shortages across the regional and global supply chain. This showcases climate change as an issue that is not confined by national boundaries.

Prakriti delved into the issue of loss and damage, which describes disasters that are climate-induced and beyond the capacity of adaptation measures to address. These incidents are especially prevalent in developing nations, which do not have sufficient resources to prevent them. Being the first youth panellist in APR, she also emphasised the need for intergenerational equity and engage youth as agents of change rather than simply beneficiaries to facilitate meaningful representation in global climate discourse.

Dr Kliem addressed the broader steps required in decarbonisation efforts as well as meaningful achievement of net-zero targets – including but not limited to the electrification of the economy, implementation of nature-based solutions (e.g. carbon sinks), green energy and finance, and carbon-credit mechanisms while utilising carbon capture methods for hard-to-abate sectors.

From the perspective of developing nations, scaled-up adaptation efforts are required to prevent the worsening of climate impacts on vulnerable regions. This includes the provision of funding and technological transfers from developed nations. While all parties should work towards long-term decarbonisation, developing nations should not be forced to choose between addressing national development and mitigating the climate crisis, an existing global inequity which the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” aims to address.

Ultimately, the session emphasised the multifaceted nature of the climate crisis – spanning across scientific, economic, humanitarian, securitisation and more – with disproportionate effects faced by the world's most vulnerable and least represented populations.



Concurrent Session 3

Wednesday, 5 June 2024
14:30–16:00

AIMing for errors: future battlefields and the challenge of AI

The incorporation of AI in the military is inevitable, be it to sift through images or as part of autonomous weapon systems. Nations with advanced AI capabilities will dictate the rules for responsible AI in the military. Meanwhile, pledges, such as those between the US and China banning the use of AI in autonomous weapons and nuclear warheads, need to be normalised and upheld by middle powers. Is the region prepared for military transformation and adoption of AI? How will AI impact on state responsibility in conflict and peacetime? Can ASEAN build safer practices with military modernisations of AI?

Instigator



Farlina Said
Fellow
Institute of Strategic & International
Studies (ISIS)
Malaysia

Speakers



Lt Gen (Dr) RS Panwar
Distinguished Fellow
United Service Institution of India



Dr Michael Raska
Assistant Professor
Institute for Defence & Strategic Studies
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore



Dr Su Wai Mon
Senior Lecturer
Universiti Malaya
Malaysia

This session explores key points concerning the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in military contexts, including the varying success rate, risks of deploying AI in military scenarios and mitigation, geopolitical implications, ethical and legal considerations, and international cooperation.

Dr Michael Raska noted that while the geopolitical landscape is changing, emerging technologies, such as AI, are not merely a strategic competition for military innovations, but also bolsters national and international power. Interestingly, in shaping its trajectories, this competition is not exclusive to major powers. He emphasised the changing human-machine dynamics in warfare that are increasingly transitioning from augmenting to replacing humans on the battlefield. Meanwhile, there are still various areas that remain unchanging, such as the quest for innovation, strategies and capabilities, which expand the unfading fog of war. The issue of prioritisation of limited resources, while a challenge, is no longer bound to military and governments but also the commercial and private technology sectors that drive the innovation, making it impossible to not realign the state's strategy with the private sector. In addition, he underlined how strategic culture between different states would have different implications and require a balance on decisions between humans and machines.

Lt Gen (Dr) RS Panwar highlighted AI risks that are unique to the military, its mitigations, and the challenges of international consensus. He underscored primary characteristics of AI that are distinct from the conventional software leading to risks of unintended and unpredictable behaviours, brittleness, coupled with automation bias, dependency, accountability and reliability in the military battlefield where human lives and violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) are in peril. He called attention to moving from principles to practices in risk mitigation, using the risk-hierarchy approach to test and classify AI-enabled military weapons with the outlined parameters as the foundation of differentiation for mitigation mechanisms. To reach international consensus, he considered the state's self-regulation as a basis for a consensus on what international regulation should be. He also stressed the importance of having clarity in terminology used to ensure a cogent discussion of the matter.

Dr Su Wai Mon intersected the adoption of emerging technologies with the international legal framework. She stated that the autonomous weapon system as being the most concerning area as its definition, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, is not specifically regulated by any treaty. States must develop and deploy any weapon in accordance with the IHL and ethics as outlined in Martens Clause. Full accountability on the legal obligation of ensuring the distinctions, proportionality and precautions in attack must remain with humans. The predictability and reliability of weapons must be tested and verified for all foreseeable scenarios of use, while the principles of humanity and public conscience must be the universal reference point to prevent the assumption that anything not explicitly prohibited is permitted, in which a fully autonomous weapon would fail this test on both counts. She opined that ASEAN is a great platform for cooperation and coordination for dialogues and agreement of state responsible behaviour to reach global peace and security.



Plenary 3

Wednesday, 5 June 2024
16:20–17:50

Geopolitics in the Middle East: regional developments, global ramifications

Strategic and conflict reconfigurations in the Middle East continue to draw in global powers, and impact on global commodities and trade. At the same time, reinvigorated Gulf Arab states are pursuing ambitious socio-economic policies, potentially reshaping traditional alliances to hedge against major-power rivalry. How will geopolitical developments in the Middle East impact on the Asia-Pacific? What are the trajectories which observers should look out for? How have recent developments impacted perceptions of the rules-based order and global norms?

Instigator



Shahriman Lockman
Director of Special Projects
Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Speakers



Dr Ebtessam Al-Ketbi
President
Emirates Policy Centre
United Arab Emirates



Dr James M Dorsey
Adjunct Senior Fellow
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore



Dr Dino Patti Djalal
Founder
Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia



Dr Khalil Shirgholami
Vice-President
Institute for Political & International Studies (IPIS)
Iran

This session was dominated by how Israel's assault on Gaza following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack has affected the politics and security alliances in the Middle East and reinvigorated international engagement with the region. The speakers concurred that this conflict exposed the undermining of international laws and the double standards that have been applied to rogue states and their victims.

Dr Ebtesam Al-Ketbi demonstrated the impasse between Israel and Hamas, neither of which are guaranteed security over their territory post-ceasefire. She highlighted the necessity of thinking out of the box to solve the Israel-Palestine issue and emphasised that the UAE signed the Abraham Accords, not to sideline the Palestinians, but to facilitate their participation at the negotiation table besides convincing Israel to make concessions. The UAE's normalisation with Israel has enabled initiatives like the 2022 Negev Summit, which included plans to provide opportunities and funding for Palestinians.

Dr James Dorsey furnished the discussion with on-the-ground realities of a peace negotiation on top of the dynamics between the key players, namely the United States, Israel, Hamas and the Jewish diaspora. Dorsey contended that the two-state solution is still possible if we focus on the fact that 80% of the Israeli settlements lie along the Green Line and could conceivably be moved into Israel, while the remaining 20% can be given the ultimatum to move into Israeli territory or live under Palestinian government. He disagrees with Al-Ketbi on the cost of support for Israel on the international standing of the US, which has not lost much beyond moral clout.

Dr Dino Patti Djalal remarked on the emerging relationship between ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which can be expected to spotlight the commonalities and compatibility between the two regions besides paving the way for a higher support for multilateralism. Dr Dino also stated that the genocide in Gaza has awakened the long-dormant commitment to the two-state solution by countries in the Global North and South, including Indonesia. This presents the international community with the strategic opportunity to reignite pathways to the two-state solution but no country so far is willing to mediate between the parties right up to the finishing line.

Dr Khalil Shirgholami highlighted the decades-long competition between the peace narrative – exemplified by the two-state solution – and resistance narrative in the Middle East and how the latter narrative will prevail because no other options are viable. Two-state solution initiatives failed because they are at odds with the goals of Zionism, which requires the removal of all fundamental elements of a Palestinian state: land, population, and sovereignty. Shirgholami also underscored the fluidity of regional alliances in the Persian Gulf, as evidenced by unilateralism based on new priorities. This trend is also empowered by the new mindset of sourcing security domestically and regionally in lieu of depending on external powers and technology. Finally, he noted the evolution of political legitimacy in the region – which is still recovering from political destabilisation – from traditional authority to good governance and the politics of happiness.



Plenary 4

Thursday, 6 June 2024
11:40–13:10

Megatrends shaping the global economy: implications for Asia-Pacific

Escalating US-China economic rivalry will have far-reaching implications across the Asia-Pacific region, presenting both opportunities and geoeconomic fragmentation. This session aims to explore the megatrends shaping economic, investment and trade prospects in both China and the US, with a focus on the implications for Asia-Pacific. How are economic bifurcation, friend-shoring and de-risking strategies affecting global supply chain resilience? Are they sustainable in the long term? How is the region preparing for future challenges through strategies, such as geoeconomic hedging and currency diversification (i.e., de-dollarisation)?

Instigator



Eduardo Pedrosa
Secretary-General
Pacific Economic Cooperation
Council (PECC)
Singapore

Speakers



Hosuk Lee-Makiyama
Director
European Centre for International
Political Economy
Belgium



Trinh Nguyen
Senior Economist
Natixis
Hong Kong SAR



Dr Yose Rizal Damuri
Executive Director
Centre for Strategic &
International Studies (CSIS);
2024 Chair of the ASEAN-ISIS
Network
Indonesia



Dr Yang Yao
Liberal Arts Chair Professor
Peking University
China



HE Chung Keeyong
Special Representative for Indo-Pacific
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
South Korea

Against the backdrop of rising protectionism and geoeconomic fragmentation, this session focused on the megatrends shaping Asia-Pacific's position in the global economic landscape.

Trinh Nguyen outlined three key megatrends that she believed were characteristic of the increasingly complex world of the 2020s: climate change, the US-China rivalry and economic security. According to her, these developments may create fragility in the global economy but growth opportunities lie ahead for Asia-Pacific in emerging areas, such as renewable energy and semiconductors.

Dr Yang Yao provided a Chinese perspective on the US-China geopolitical rivalry, identifying its intended and unintended consequences. He opined that Asia-Pacific had adjusted to the tariff war through the "China Plus One" principle, solidifying ASEAN's role as a manufacturing base for China and the US. To him, China's market size and capabilities across a wide range of industries provide a fertile ground for diversification into Southeast Asia, as evidenced by the growing ecosystem for electric vehicle production in countries like Malaysia and Thailand.

Dr Yose Rizal Damuri highlighted the rise of regionalism as another megatrend, given the impasse in multilateral mechanisms for cooperation. Countries were increasingly using free trade agreements (FTA) and regional frameworks to set standards in areas traditionally considered domestic legislation, such as labour and environmental policy. To ensure Asia-Pacific nations, especially smaller economies, have a say in shaping the rules of the game, he suggested that the pursuit of regional consensus building through plurilateral dialogue, mutual understanding and an articulation of common interests.

HE Chung Keeyong stressed that South Korea's recent Indo-Pacific Strategy exemplified Seoul's growing appetite for deeper engagement with Southeast Asia and South Asia. He drew on a few examples to reinforce the narrative of Southeast Asia's renewed appeal, including the resumption of negotiations on a new Malaysia-Korea FTA and the prospective upgrading of the ASEAN-Korea FTA to cover digital trade and green technology.

Hosuk Lee-Makiyama expressed scepticism about megatrends, arguing that this lens could blind policymakers to less evident but equally pertinent developments taking place on a smaller scale. He argued that the perceived US-China rivalry was a contemporary iteration of the typical perennial battle between countries for finite resources and market share, dismissing its novelty as a megatrend. What was more interesting for him was, for example, the rise in the pursuit of internal growth using domestic industrial policy at the expense of export-led growth. Such complex nuances could not be captured by thinking through the framework of megatrends alone.

Subsequent discussions revealed varying levels of optimism among the panellists about Asia-Pacific's prospects, with disagreements over the utility of a plurilateral, region-specific response to policymaking. Nevertheless, the panellists largely agreed that proposed mechanisms like the Asian Monetary Fund should not necessarily be first on the agenda.

Rather than selectively responding to specific perceived trends, such as currency weakness, Asia-Pacific countries should be proactive in implementing holistic measures that help create certainty, bolster confidence and fill the leadership vacuum. As far as the panellists are concerned, the best way to do this is through tried and tested buffers, including domestic or ASEAN-wide reforms upholding the rule of law and investment protection. The result would then be an Asia-Pacific that has overall resilience against a much broader set of future risks.



Plenary 5

Thursday, 6 June 2024
14:30–16:00

The rise of regional powers: a struggle for agency?

The emergence of a new regional order, distinctly accelerated by major-power competition, has increased the role of regional powers. These powers have played a unique role in shaping geopolitical dynamics, such as by responding to potent changes in their strategic environment. However, they are limited by capacity and influence, and struggle to enforce agency. How can these small and middle powers exert their interests and agency in international geopolitics today? What can we learn from the trajectory of emerging regional powers? Are existing multilateral mechanisms still a viable way to exercise agency?

Instigator



Dr Hoo Chiew-Ping
Co-Founder & Senior Fellow
East Asian International
Relations Caucus
Malaysia

Speakers



Prof C Raja Mohan
Visiting Professor
Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore



Dr Akiko Fukushima
Senior Fellow
The Tokyo Foundation for Policy
Research
Japan



Helen Mitchell
Sir Roland Wilson Scholar
(Economic Security & Statecraft)
Crawford School of Public Policy
Australian National University



Dr Frank Umbach
Head of Research
University of Bonn
Germany



Dr Vu Le Thai Hoang
Director-General
Institute for Foreign Policy & Strategic Studies
Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV)

The session discussed the varying approaches to asserting agency among emerging regional powers. Through the experiences of their respective countries, the discussants shared the lessons learned, urging the floor to consider nuances and alternatives when faced with potential constraints.

Prof C Raja Mohan opened with the argument that the current geopolitical environment presents more than just concerns of great-power rivalry. These dynamics presented opportunities for states, including small and medium ones, to gain more leverage in asserting their agency. However, it was prefaced that states required coherent national strategies, lest they become victim to the influences and interests of others. Through experiences of India's pursuit in reclaiming its agency through the Look East Policy, Prof Mohan recognised that India still depends on regional institutions like ASEAN. Thus, encouraging similar multilateral or bilateral engagements for productive relationships and fostering stability.

Dr Akiko Fukushima discussed the contributing factors that can support a regional power's agency. She highlighted the role of domestic politics, economic strength, peace and stability, and global and regional engagement as key components affecting a state's overall capacity to behave autonomously in pursuit of its interests and vision. Drawing from Japan's experience, Dr Fukushima argued that regional and global collaboration with likeminded states gave them better opportunities to pursue their national interests. She echoed concerns towards the perceived ineffectiveness of multilateral institutions but stressed that multilateral cooperation should be reformed and reassessed instead of being ultimately disregarded.

Helen Mitchell presented an alternative argument through the lens of statecraft. She reminded that not all states are equipped with the same toolkits, nor do they share the same domestic constraints. Therefore, it is important that decision-makers are clear with their goals so they can select the best tools for greater agility and responsiveness to the international environment. However, Mitchell also recognised the potentially undermining effects statecraft tools might have on each other. She drew examples from Australia's efforts in enhancing productivity amid growing economic challenges, while keeping up with the ambitions of a wider green power agenda.

Dr Frank Umbach discussed the impact of history on shaping the perceptions of agency and the way they are exercised. He also noted that supranational groups, such as the EU and ASEAN, face difficulties exercising their collective agency vis-à-vis individual state agency, especially when matters of sovereignty are involved. With examples from the EU and Germany's energy and climate policies following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he outlined how the region is course correcting from its dependency on Russia through diversification. Dr Umbach reiterated that despite times of conflict and crises, multilateral cooperation is vital to mitigate negative effects.

Dr Vu Le Thai Hoang opined that the struggle of agency, being free from external interference and the ability to shape actively the environment, is a defining and unavoidable feature of the current regional order. He also noted the role of strategic narratives to provide compelling stories of a given regional power's identity, interests and role regionally and globally. When discussing ASEAN's own strategic narrative, he noted that the institution amplifies its members' agency by allowing them a space to shape the regional order to align with its interest. Dr Vu agreed that while ASEAN still struggles with shaping a common narrative, it is becoming increasingly urgent to do so.




**INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
(ISIS) MALAYSIA**

Address 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin,
50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Phone 603 2693 9366
E-mail info@isis.org.my

 www.isis.org.my |  [ISIS_MY](#)

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