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## Discussion Report Talking ASEAN Webinar

on

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Regional Defence Cooperation amidst  
COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities

Jakarta, June 17<sup>th</sup> 2020



## Introduction

On Wednesday, 17th June 2020, The Habibie Center hosted a Talking ASEAN webinar titled **“Regional Defence Cooperation amidst COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities.”** This Talking ASEAN webinar featured **Frega Wenas Inkiriwang** (PhD Candidate, London School of Economics and Political Science, Lecturer at Indonesia Defence University), **Dr. phil. Yandry Kurniawan** (Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia / Senior Researcher, Abdurrahman Wahid Center for Peace and Humanity, Universitas Indonesia), **Muhamad Arif** (Researcher, ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center), with **A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi** (Head of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center) as the moderator.


The objectives of this online discussion were to: (1) examine how COVID-19 has impacted defence cooperation agenda in the region; (2) examine how militaries are being involved in responding to the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis in different countries in the region; and (3) explore challenges and opportunities for military cooperation in the region in responding to the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

This discussion report summarizes the key points of each resource person, as well as the question and answer session that followed.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Frega Wenas Inkiriwang**  
(Lecturer, Indonesian Defence University / PhD Candidate, London School  
of Economics and Political Science)



First to speak was Mr. Frega Wenas Inkiriwang. Mr. Frega Wenas Inkiriwang presented on defence cooperation and COVID-19 from the perspective of defence diplomacy. He began his presentation by explaining the definition of defence diplomacy in the post-Cold War. In 1998, Edmonds & Mills mentioned “the use of armed forces in operations other than war, building on their trained expertise and disciplined to achieve national and foreign policy objectives abroad”. Over time, there has been a full free definition proposed by Andrew Cottey & Anthony Foster in 2004 as “peace time cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defence ministries) as a tool of foreign and security policy”.

Regarding defence diplomacy, we are familiar with the presence of Defence White Paper since the topic is about regional issues, most countries in the region have crafted or formulated their defence white paper. For example, in the case of Indonesia two white papers were launched in 2008 and 2015 and articulated the urgency of defence diplomacy. The most recent one in 2015 further underlined the role of defence attachés as the facilitator of defence diplomacy. Other countries also have issued their own defence white papers such as Malaysia, Australia, Viet Nam, and Japan. So, defence cooperation is in line with the defence diplomacy and mostly it is articulated in defense white papers.

Mr. Frega continued his presentation by elaborating that there are numerous types of defence diplomacy activities as identified by Cottey and Foster, as follows: (1) bilateral and multilateral contacts between senior military and civilian defence officials; (2) appointment of defence attaches to foreign countries; (3) bilateral defence cooperation agreements; (4) training of foreign military and civilian defence personnel; (5) provision of expertise and advice on the democratic control of armed forces, defence management and military technical areas; (6) contacts and exchanges between military personnel and units, and ship visits; (7) placement of military or civilian personnel in partner countries defence ministries or armed forces; (8) deployment of training teams; (9) provision of military equipment and other material aid; and (10) bilateral or multilateral military exercises for training purposes.

Mr. Frega classified three types of defence diplomacy actors, such as the track 1, track 2, and track 1.5 levels. In the beginning, actors of defence diplomacy were managed by the official actors (primary and supporting actors) known as the track 1. For instance, in the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) forum, the defence ministry, military, and services (Army/Navy, Air Force) take a role as primary actors because of their expertise in the defence and military sector. In addition, there is also a supporting role played by the foreign ministry because they serve as the leading actor in diplomacy. Meanwhile, track 2 is related with the non-official actors namely the Network of ASEAN Defence and Security



**SPEAKERS**

### **Frega Wenas Inkiriwang**

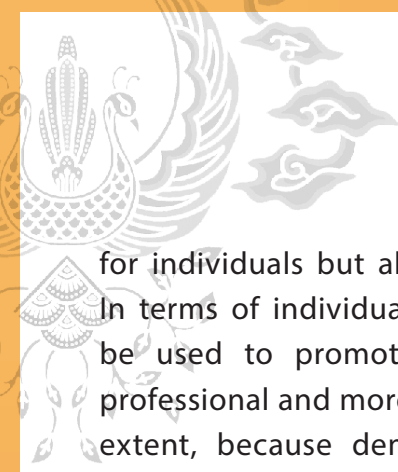
Lecturer, Indonesian Defence University | PhD Candidate, London School of Economics and Political Science



Institutions (NADI), think tanks, research institutes, and NGOs. The last one is track 1.5 which is a combination of the two tracks, for example the Shangri La Dialogue and Jakarta International Defence Dialogue.

Mr. Frega also identified some motives of defence diplomacy. First is strategic engagement. We need to engage with major powers and that is the reason why the ADMM has been extended to include the eight strategic dialogue partners and mostly with major powers countries like the US, China, and Russia. Every country has their own strategic partners both in bilateral and multilateral cooperation that have been used to develop defence cooperation and defence diplomacy. Second, confidence building measures is useful in strengthening the ties for military-to-military and people-to-people connection.

Third, capacity building means that countries organize cooperation with other countries in terms of building and modernizing their military as a common agenda. Especially for the Indonesia case, where the country has previously suffered from embargos for over a decade, it has tried to catch up with the gap and to achieve a minimum essential force. Fourth, ASEAN has a defence industry collaboration network to increase defence industry capabilities of ASEAN member states. Fifth, international reputation for individuals or groups. In ASEAN since 2010, the ADMM has been extended to include the strategic dialogue partners (i.e. ADMM Plus). Due to the prestige, some of the major countries have expressed their interest to join the group such as France and the United Kingdom. It will support the international reputation not only



for individuals but also for regional identity. In terms of individuals, this cooperation can be used to promote the development or professional and more order military. To some extent, because democracy has become a common value, it can be used to promote democratic values as well in terms of civil-military relations.

Furthermore, Mr. Frega touched upon defence cooperation as a tool that is quite similar to defence diplomacy. It aims to achieve foreign policy objectives and it can be done by establishing friendship with partner countries either bilaterally or multilaterally, avoiding conflicts, building a mutual trust between participating countries, and enhancing capacities.


According to Dutta, the definition of defence cooperation is “an ideal tool to advance the national foreign policy objectives by building bridges of friendship, preventing conflicts, building mutual trust and capacities on a global basis.” Defence cooperation is an important aspect of defence diplomacy. It can be used to share operational and doctrinal expertise, to enhance training and capability, to strengthen defence relation or military ties, to share best practices, to build interoperability, and share information.


There are also key considerations of defence cooperation mentioned by Zandee, Drent, and Hendriks such as (1) trust, confidence, and solidarity; (2) sovereignty and autonomy; (3) similarity of strategic cultures; (4) geography

and history; (5) Top-down and bottom up; and (6) standardization and interoperability.

Mr. Frega identified four influencing factors which drive the success of defence cooperation. Firstly, mutual interest; it does not matter whether it is bilateral or multilateral defence cooperation, a country has to identify the mutual interest which will help them to nurture a greater engagement between participating countries. Secondly, domestic factors are critical as well especially for domestic politics because foreign relations are related to the parliament to some extent especially if a country would like to establish new relations with new partners. Thirdly, the role of the military because there will be troops on the ground and will operationalize the defence policy at the operational level. Fourthly, the role of other actors like NGOs will help in nurturing defence cooperation.

Given the current situation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, there are three defence cooperation activities which focus on strategic consultations, joint exercises, and inter-military assignment. For the strategic consultations, there are two platforms such as in bilateral and multilateral platforms. Due to the COVID-19, all these have been converted to virtual. It is a good opportunity because it can be sustained but there are also challenges as well because the interaction is not as good as if we organized a face-to-face interaction and the publication might not be as good as if we organized a real event.






For joint exercises at operational level, it is a more concrete interaction between soldiers, officers, military units. Every year, bilateral and multilateral platform joint exercises between ASEAN countries and non-ASEAN countries have been organized. For instance, the Mutual Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK), Cobra Gold, ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM) organized a tabletop exercise. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the exercises have been cancelled or suspended, but some have tried to approach a virtual mode. Probably in the future a virtual game can be developed in order to connect soldiers or units across regions in two different locations and to simulate the operation.

For inter-military assignments, most of ASEAN countries have been contributing in peacekeeping operations. It is a good opportunity for Southeast Asia countries to contribute, so the defence forces can interact and represent ASEAN at the global level. In terms of peacekeeping, there are numerous added values to support our defence cooperation. Relations between military units, personnel, and contingents in the peacekeeping missions that they establish would be useful for strengthening military and defence ties. Due to COVID-19, the United Nations has set up the new protocols as local procedure, for example the soldiers wear gloves and masks when conducting a patrol as part of the procedures. Moreover, there are various humanitarian assistance carried out among countries. For example, even though

Indonesia received a medical supply, Indonesia sent our air force to facilitate the delivery of medical supplies from China, sent a delegation to Australia to help put out a bushfire, and delivered humanitarian assistance to Fiji to help the impact of Cyclone Halord.

In the next session of his presentation, Mr. Frega also explored the great power rivalry because it is very common challenge especially for Southeast Asia countries. In dealing with this rivalry, there are numerous approaches which have been implemented by Southeast Asia countries, as follows: (1) limited alignment means that a country tends to be close with one great power in one field, and with another great power in different field; (2) omni-enmeshment means that the Southeast Asia countries tries to use ASEAN as a platform regional mechanism; (3) pragmatic equidistance means that every single country will have their national interests and will drive them to have a commitment collectively under ASEAN framework; and (4) no taking aside means that ASEAN as a non-align organization, so a country tries to balance or well-known as a hedging strategy.

To end his presentation, Mr. Frega emphasized the opportunities and challenges to conduct defence cooperation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. For the opportunities, there are still defence attachés who can play a significant role as a facilitator of defence diplomacy and defence cooperation even though some of the activities have been disrupted. In addition, exchanges of military students, colleges and



courses are still being conducted as a good interaction. Strategic consultation, through ADMM Retreat in February 2020, the leaders have committed to share best practices and try to tackle the issue collectively. Amidst the pandemic, virtual engagement can facilitate the people interaction like the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting (ADSOM), and perhaps for the upcoming ADMM/ADMM Plus will use this scheme as well. Humanitarian assistance can be used to engage with other militaries and other defence instruments in the region. Military medicine is also very related with the current health issue, so ACMM has tried to share best practices through the recent tabletop exercise and they have been committed to share more along the way until maybe there is a cure for the COVID-19 disease.

However, the disruption of defence cooperation activities such as for strategic consultation, joint exercises has created a significant impact in terms of quantity and quality as well because there is no vivid life face-to-face interaction. Because of the disruption, there is a limitation on the number of interactions between military units and personnel. The bonding usually will be established if the military personnel meet personally and work together on the ground where they can build a common feeling that will be very useful to maintain personal relations with their peers from other countries.

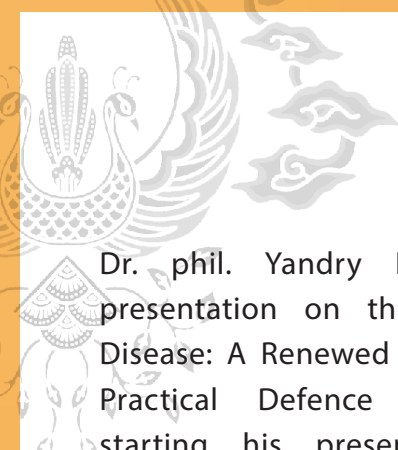
In addition, because most of this interaction has been converted virtually, there is a challenge on the network security. In the

last few weeks, there was an issue about the insecurity of Zoom, so many institutions tried to avoid using Zoom application. In a way, ASEAN needs to secure the connection, for example through a direct interaction network which will be useful in the future. As we know that most countries in the world have suffered and have to reallocate the defense budget to focus on helping the government to deal with COVID-19. So, there will be an impact based on this adjustment of defence budget reduction. As part of ASEAN, for intensifying great powers rivalry, ASEAN member states try to leverage their defence cooperation not only in dealing with the domestic issues, but also regional dynamic issues.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Dr. phil. Yandry Kurniawan**  
(Lecturer, Department of International  
Relations, Universitas Indonesia /  
Senior Researcher, Abdurrahman Wahid Center  
for Peace and Humanity, Universitas Indonesia)



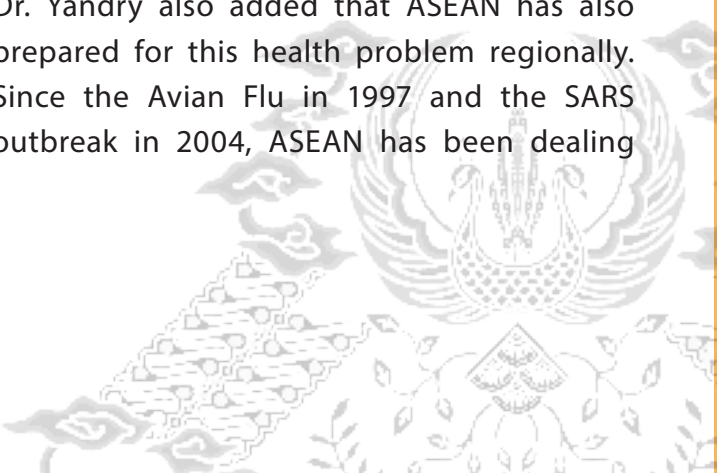
Dr. phil. Yandry Kurniawan shared his presentation on the topic of “Pandemic Disease: A Renewed Opportunity for ASEAN Practical Defence Cooperation?” Before starting his presentation, he described his outline which consists of three parts: pandemic quick look in global and regional; ASEAN existing cooperation on defence, disaster, and health, as well as COVID-19; and possible ASEAN defence cooperation.

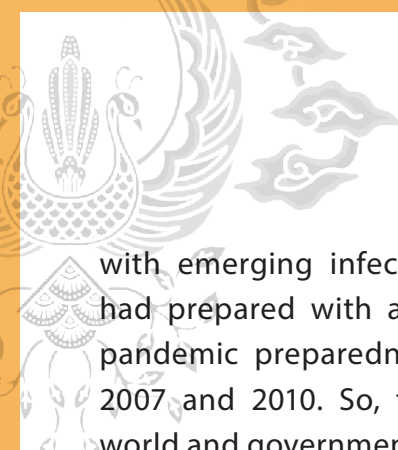
In the first part of his presentation, Dr. Yandry explored the pandemic quick look in the global and regional context. He noted that basically the pandemic is not new to the human kind, that the world had prepared for it, and crucially it had failed. He showed a basic data of pandemic disease that had taken place throughout history such as the black death. For example, around one hundred years ago, we had the Spanish Flu in Europe and the surrounding area. Since the Spanish Flu, there has been a change in how people are concerned about the influenza or pandemic disease. Before the Spanish Flu, pandemic disease was not perceived as a threat or security issue, but as a somewhat unpleasant situation. Then, since the Spanish Flu in 20th century, health problems had been framed as a security threat due to its morbidity and mortality and how it affected economic and social stability. It can be seen from various responses as follows: in 1946, the interim committee charged with overseeing the creation of a new universal health organization (WHO) and created a new influenza research and surveillance center based in London. In the

1950s, medical professionals adopted security-related terminology –threat—to describe the danger posed by pandemic influenza. Since then, research centers & laboratories joined the WHO, and a global influenza surveillance network was created (over 135 public & private research institutions in over 100 countries).

A renewed concern about infectious diseases has been developed because of pandemics such as H5N1 in 1997, SARS in 2003, Avian & Swine Flu in 2000s’. For instance, the US Department of Defense established a military-operated global laboratory-based Influenza Surveillance Programme in 1997, the Global Emerging Infections Surveillance and Response System (DoD-GEIS) in 1998, and the US National Intelligence Council stated that pandemic influenza was one of the ‘most dangerous’ threats to the US national interest in 2000. Therefore, (Western) governments launched initiatives aimed at developing and testing national pandemic influenza contingency measures. Plans were developed using scenarios supported by epidemic modelling and clinical attack rates, often based on the pandemic in 1918, to predict the extent of projected human morbidity and mortality. At the global level, the international community pledged around US\$4.3 billion to enhance global pandemic preparedness from 2005 to 2009.

Dr. Yandry also added that ASEAN has also prepared for this health problem regionally. Since the Avian Flu in 1997 and the SARS outbreak in 2004, ASEAN has been dealing





with emerging infectious diseases and also had prepared with a national multi-sectoral pandemic preparedness and response since 2007 and 2010. So, from those actions, the world and government in general actually had prepared for this situation. However, in fact, as noted by Amitav Acharya, “many countries have been caught grossly unprepared. The quarantine system invented by the sixth Umayyad caliph Al-Walid in early eight-century AD, in Damascus, seems to be the only effective way to combat the spread of the virus, aside from fashionable postmodern terms: social distancing”. So, basically despite practices such as quarantine, social distancing, and lockdown system, nothing has really changed in the last 1,200 years ago.

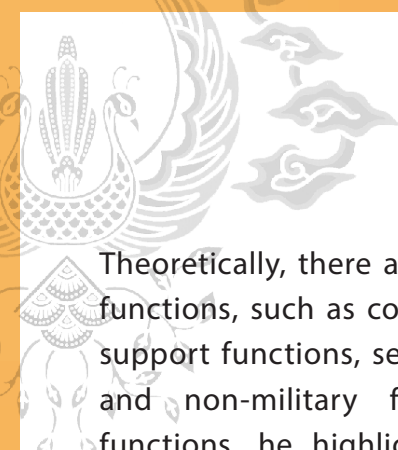
In the second section, Dr. Yandry overviewed ASEAN’s existing cooperation on defence, disaster, and health. He argued that the cooperation across the sectors lacks interaction or communication from one sector to another. He showed the structure of ASEAN defence cooperation under the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC). Under the APSC, ASEAN has the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+). Under ADMM and ADMM+, ASEAN has various cooperation mechanisms as well. There are nine sectors of ASEAN defence cooperation where ASEAN has been cooperating and he highlighted five sectors that could be directly linked to the effort in dealing with the spread of infectious disease, namely ASEAN Military Assets and Capacities in Humanitarian

Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), ADMM Logistics Support Framework (LSF), Direct Communications Link (DCL), ASEAN Militaries Ready Group (AMRG) on HADR, and ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM).

However, it was noted that the structure of ASEAN cooperation on disaster management is under the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community. In addition, ASEAN also has cooperation on the health sector, which is under the umbrella of the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community as well. In 2018, the ASEAN Secretariat published the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda (2016-2020). This agenda explicitly mentioned the word of disaster relief, but interestingly, it did not say anything about the ASEAN Committee Disaster Management and the ASEAN Center for Humanitarian Assistance, military, and diseases.

Dr. Yandry continued his presentation on the realm of ASEAN cooperation on defense, disaster, and health issues. ASEAN defence cooperation explicitly has cooperation on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, like the ACMM in 2015. So, we can have early findings that there are three sectors within ASEAN cooperation that involve in this defence, disaster, and health diseases, namely military officials and professionals, health officials and professionals, as well as humanitarian and disaster officials and professionals.

In the last session, Dr. Yandry emphasized on the COVID-19 and possible ASEAN defense cooperation. He stated that the military could be used to deal with non-military issues.



Theoretically, there are four types of military functions, such as combat functions, combat support functions, service support functions, and non-military functions. From those functions, he highlighted that the military has been planning and preparing to deal with infectious diseases, that the military has been conducting surveillance for influenza and other form of infectious diseases, that military research center in cooperation with civilian, expertise, and professional has been conducting research, and that the military has a capacity to respond to the situation and conduct the mitigation. So, basically the military has many capabilities applicable to global health, ranging from research, surveillance, and medical expertise to rapidly deployable large-scale assets for logistic transportation and security.

The military involvement in health and pandemic disease is not new for international political activities. Dr. Yandry gave some examples from many countries, such as since 1946, the US Army and Navy have operated 20 overseas laboratories at various points in collaboration with agencies of host countries. Since 2006, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has deployed medical units throughout Africa on missions targeting malaria and HIV/AIDS. The French Armed Forces have assisted countries such as Djibouti and French Guyana with real-time early warning and surveillance systems for infectious disease. Since 2008, the US Department of Defense has provided training and conducted exercises with foreign militaries in 16 countries in Africa to enhance

their roles in pandemic preparedness and response. From 2014 to 2016, Thailand and Russia co-chaired the Expert's Working Group on Military Medicine which became ACMM.

Within the ASEAN mechanism, Dr. Yandry proposed potential strategies for ASEAN defense cooperation in pandemic disease, namely: (1) ASEAN could develop a specific forum in which militaries of ASEAN member states and other regional health actors can interface effectively; (2) ASEAN could develop and implement regional military policy and doctrine on humanitarian assistance disaster management, in collaboration with civilian counterparts; (3) support joint exercises and training activities between military and civilian agencies; (4) increase military engagement in planning and implementation efforts related to infectious disease prevention, detection, and response, through the ASEAN health security agenda; and (5) support expanded monitoring, evaluation, research, and publication on militaries' health activities among ASEAN member states.

Dr. Yandry suggested that ASEAN should have a forum where the military of ASEAN member states can work together in collaboration with health professionals and civilians, they could develop some kind of war gaming scenario against the pandemic. In the future, ASEAN militaries can work together to make the scenario of the pandemic spread in the region and have contingency plans, so they know how to mitigate it.

As we know, ASEAN has seven existing



**SPEAKERS**

**Dr. phil. Yandry Kurniawan**

Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia Senior Researcher  
Abdurrahman Wahid Center for Peace and Humanity, Universitas Indonesia



cooperation mechanisms namely ASEAN Military Assets and Capacities in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), ADMM Logistics Support Framework (LSF), Direct Communications Link (DCL), ASEAN Militaries Ready Group (AMRG) on HADR, ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM), ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster management (AHA), ASEAN Health Cooperation Governance and Implementation (AHCGI). Therefore, we should put all of the cooperation mechanisms in one system and under ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM), and ASEAN Health Ministers' Meeting (AHMM).

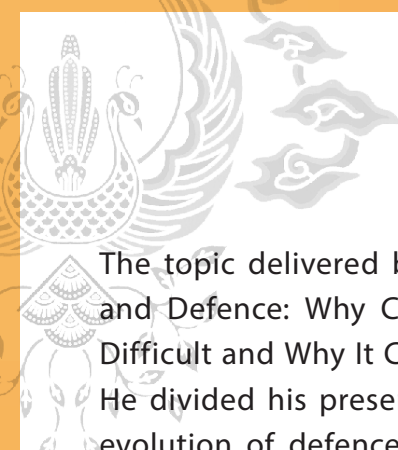
Dr. Yandry also identified three existing international norms such as the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and

Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo Guidelines), Civil–Military Guidelines and Reference for Complex Emergencies (Military and Civil Defence Assets guidelines), and the UN Global Health Cluster paper on civil–military coordination during humanitarian health action. Based on the existing international norms, he proposed possible ASEAN norms namely ASEAN Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets Pandemic Disease, ASEAN Civil–Military Guidelines and Reference for Complex Emergencies, and ASEAN Regional Health Cluster paper on civil–military coordination during humanitarian health action.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Muhamad Arif**  
(Researcher, ASEAN Studies  
Program, The Habibie Center)



The topic delivered by Mr. Arif was “Disease and Defence: Why Cooperation in ASEAN is Difficult and Why It Could be a Good Thing?”. He divided his presentation into three parts: evolution of defence cooperation in ASEAN; securitisation of infectious diseases in ASEAN; as well as challenges and opportunities ahead. He started to share his arguments that ASEAN has never been really comfortable with the idea of a full-scale defence or military cooperation because it is not what it was designed to do. ASEAN defence cooperation is more practical-oriented that aims to increase interaction and build trust and confidence.

Regarding health issues, ASEAN has never securitised health issues including infectious diseases. Health security in ASEAN is not a security issue, it is still a public health concern. Therefore, it has never been on the same page as other transnational security threats such as terrorism or maritime security or even trafficking. Infectious diseases are treated largely as public health concerns, not a security one.

Mr. Arif explored the evolution of defence cooperation in ASEAN since its establishment in 1967. ASEAN is an (aspiring) security community because it is designed to be a “security community”, not only since 2015 but since the very beginning. ASEAN was established when the likelihood of conflict between Southeast Asian countries was real, for example Konfrontasi, disputes between the Philippines and Malaysia, etc. The objective of ASEAN was to be a forum for the

parties to discuss, interact with each other, and eliminate chances for conflict between ASEAN member states. So, the use of force is ruled out as a means to solve disputes and as a promotion of long-term habit of cooperation.

Furthermore, in a particular context, defence cooperation in the traditional sense, like having an alliance or pact against a particular enemy outside, is not really relevant with ASEAN. The concept of defence cooperation is different from a defence community. Defence community, in its most extreme manifestation, a military alliance, requires a common enemy. It is directed outwards rather than inwards. It is not relevant for ASEAN, given the threat perception of its member states since when ASEAN was established its members’ threats have focused on internal security.

There are two types of defence cooperation in ASEAN, intra-ASEAN and extra-ASEAN defence cooperation. Intra-ASEAN defence cooperation aims to build trust and confidence among ASEAN member states. While extra-ASEAN cooperation aims to engage external powers and socialise norms with the hope of changing their behaviour in favour of ASEAN.

Mr. Arif stated that the tendency of ASEAN to be shy about full-fledged defence cooperation is shown by the case of ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus). ADMM, the primary defence forum, is designed to deal primarily with transnational security issues. Interestingly, on the concept paper for establishment of ADMM, ADMM should



**SPEAKERS**

**Muhamad Arif**

Researcher, ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center



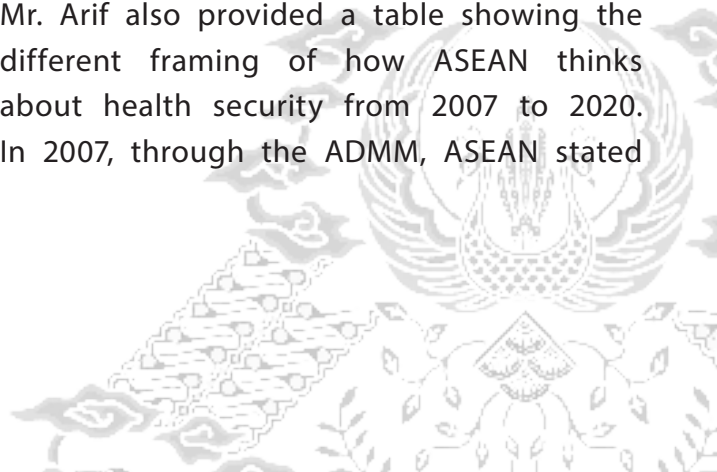
complement existing fora, including ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which is too sluggish. However, ADMM and ADMM Plus have gone further than any other ASEAN-centred security cooperation initiatives owing to its focus on “low-hanging fruits” and practical areas all parties are comfortable to work together on.


Mr. Arif continued with the explanation on securitisation of diseases. Securitisation is the process in which an actor declares a particular issue to be an existential threat to specifically referent object to speech act. There is an elevation of the status of a particular issue from non-security issue into a security issue.

In ASEAN, there is still a narrow view in looking at health and security relations. For instance, how disease can be used as an offensive

weapon, Chemical, Biological, and Radiological (CBR) threat, and how it can be used by non-state actors like terrorists. When it comes to COVID-19, securitisation is only taking place at the individual state level through indicators of securitisation such as more resources are allocated, military involvement, specific legislation, institutionalised responses. However, the “collective securitisation” at the regional level is absent. Communicable and emerging infectious diseases are mostly discussed under the heading of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community through ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management.

Mr. Arif also provided a table showing the different framing of how ASEAN thinks about health security from 2007 to 2020. In 2007, through the ADMM, ASEAN stated





a collective commitment to build bonds of mutual trust and confidence, but no specific mention of disease issues. In 2009, there was a mention of natural disaster, but not really on infectious diseases. We can compare with how ASEAN frames terrorism. In 2014, there was a declaration that the so-called Islamic State was a threat to all regions in the world. Then, in 2018 ASEAN marked terrorism as a severe threat to ASEAN's progress, prosperity, and very way of life. In 2019, ASEAN used the term of transnational crimes to address transnational security issues. In 2020, when the ADMM organized a special meeting to address the issue of COVID-19, the framing of COVID-19 as a threat was absent in that particular meeting.

To end the discussion, Mr. Arif emphasized challenges and opportunities ahead. Given that Southeast Asia will remain a disaster-prone region, regional response capacity is urgently needed. COVID-19 is global in scale, affecting major powers which could in turn provide necessary pressures for securitisation. The practicality of ASEAN defence cooperation means securitisation of diseases would face little resistance because it is an issue that might be in the common interest of all parties involved including the external powers. A regional response to humanitarian crises caused by diseases could leverage ASEAN's relatively robust infrastructure of ASEAN Militaries Ready Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) that is currently being developed. However, in the long-term, the problem of duality of

HADR platforms and missions would be the challenge that ASEAN might face as well.



# QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

## Questions

**Sigit Suryo Nugroho (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University):**

Mr. Sigit asked a question that given that ASEAN has enacted such “robust” cooperation, why did this regional institution seem to under-perform during the early phase of COVID-19? Or do we just fail to notice their performance?

**Abid A. Adonis (Paris School of International Affairs, Sciences Po):**

Mr. Abid delivered a question about what do the speakers think about whether ASEAN’s perceived stuttering in dealing with COVID-19 also stems from the lack of leadership in ASEAN?

**Harry David (Korean Mission to ASEAN):**

Mr. Harry raised a question on what efforts should ASEAN undertake to optimize the ASEAN Centre for Military Medicine in responding to COVID-19? And how do the speakers perceive potential cooperation with ASEAN’s external partners with ACMM?

**Marina Ika Sari (The Habibie Center):**

Ms. Marina asked specifically to Mr. Frega, is there an alternative or innovation in implementing defence cooperation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, especially at the operational level?

**Galby Rifqi Samhudi (Expert Staff in the Indonesian House of Representative):**

Mr. Galby mentioned that historically, ASEAN’s significant initiatives often are the result of one of its members’ efforts. He gave a question for Mr. Yandry, do you think ASEAN could provide sufficient mechanisms dealing with health outbreaks without pioneering effort from one of its members?

**Sarah Teo (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies):**

Ms. Sarah delivered a question, as COVID-19 is likely to persist for a while, how can ASEAN maintain the level of confidence-building activities in defence, in place of face-to-face meetings and joint exercises?

## Responses

**Frega Wenas Inkiriwang (PhD Candidate, London School of Economics and Political Science, Lecturer at Indonesia Defence University):**

Mr. Frega started addressing the question from Mr. Sigit by stating that because most countries

actually are struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic and it creates the tragic surprise even for developed countries and they are struggling as well like European countries, even the US. So, the early face of COVID-19 pandemic, every country in the region tries to focus to deal with their domestic issues. But there have been numerous initiatives taken in terms of defence cooperation especially at the ministerial level, at the chief of defence forces level. Because of the limitation to have face-to-face interaction, personnel connection has been conducted either by virtual or by phone. Even the recent one, we can witness the tabletop exercise and in the last ADMM Retreat, there was still an opportunity to interact face-to-face. So, there was a commitment from the strategic defence leaders to work together.

Responding to the question from Abid about the lack of leadership in ASEAN, this resonated with Mr. Sigit's question. In terms of leadership, most of the ASEAN Leaders have committed through virtual conferences. For example, President Joko Widodo has communicated with other regional leaders as well. So, the commitment is there. It is not only about the defence or security issues because the COVID-19 pandemic is a very multidimensional issue, there are economic impacts, but other non-security issues that should be tackled as well at the same time. Another challenge is having limited resources and different context relation of issues in each ASEAN member state. Regarding leadership at this stage, because of the complexity of the issues, so the focus tends to be more domestic. However, it is urgent that we have to propose a regional approach in order to help our region to take over the issue, especially the commitment to share best practices.

Furthermore, to answer Mr. Harry's question, Mr. Frega emphasized that as we have witnessed commitment from the ASEAN countries and also from the strategic defence leaders, we also been a tabletop exercise, there is a greater opportunity for external partners, especially we have the platform under the ADMM Plus where external partners can chip in. Probably the lesson learned from Korea or other external partners may offer to the table, that would be very good for other ASEAN countries to learn as well. As such, the initiative to merge the approach between ASEAN and external partners would be a good solution to optimize ACMM.

Addressing the question from Marina, indeed, the alternative is a bit limited but we can still optimize the virtual engagement at the strategic level or probably direct communication links that may facilitate a greater interaction either bilaterally or multilaterally between leaders. At the operational level, we witness the tabletop exercise which is currently organized under the ACMM, maybe it can be developed in other aspects in dealing with the civil-military relations. Previously, we have the ASEAN Regional Forum disaster relief exercise which facilitates civil-military relations collaboration in dealing with disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Maybe the scenario at the time was a natural disaster. This could be enhanced by integrating the pandemic scenario. The issue between allocating this kind of discourse under the ADMM, is one of the challenges that we have to cope with as well. The good will and the opportunity is there. It is just how we need to calibrate or synchronize our effort to make a concrete action. Lastly, for Sarah's question,

the virtual tabletop exercise and a good initiative if we can maybe in the future we can develop augmented reality, virtual reality as part of tactical scenario, virtual interaction between military units or military personnel could be an option as well.

**Dr. phil. Yandry Kurniawan (Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia / Senior Researcher, Abdurrahman Wahid Center for Peace and Humanity, Universitas Indonesia):**

Regarding what was asked by Mr. Galby, Dr. Yandry responded that it depends how ASEAN political leaders develop a commitment. Within ASEAN itself, we need to be familiar with the historical trajectory of ASEAN itself. When ASEAN was established in 1967, it was aimed to maintain political dynamics between Southeast Asia countries. Then several years after that, ASEAN tried to coordinate its member states in how to deal with the great power rivalries in the region. We are talking about the Cold War era. When the Cold War ended, ASEAN was not really prepared for the international system after the Cold War era. From the early 90s up to now, ASEAN is still struggling with how to perceive itself in dealing with the new political security dynamic of the international system. So, the initial idea of ASEAN was very simple, how Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines did not have a problem with each other. But it is getting complicated because of the post-Cold War situation. If ASEAN leaders decide to have a leading state in developing this cooperation between defence cooperation to deal with the natural disaster or pandemic disease, it is okay. But, if ASEAN political leaders decide to do this in the very totally different mechanism, it is also totally okay. It depends on the current situation how ASEAN member states can work together conveniently, because the situation today is really different from the Cold War era. Nature and disease do not have sovereignty, territory, ideology. As we know, ASEAN has a mechanism to cooperate in dealing with the South China Sea, defence industry collaboration, peacekeeping operations issues. So, it is a good opportunity to look ASEAN cooperation and defence cooperation from different perspectives. We can start developing a war gaming scenario to deal with the pandemic and national disasters.

**Muhamad Arif (Researcher, ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center):**

Mr. Arif added his comment that when it comes to underperformance of ASEAN, he thought that the start was quite good, such as through the ACMM meeting that was organized in late January and the special meeting at the minister level in February that talked about the COVID-19. However, in the context of defence or security cooperation, the modalities for defence cooperation are not there in ASEAN to really do much to deal with COVID-19. Largely, infectious disease and emerging disease are still under the purview of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. So, there are barriers for cross-sectoral works.

Mr. Arif mentioned that there is a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief infrastructure in ASEAN that security cooperation could leverage in dealing with COVID-19. For example, there is

a working group in HADR in ADMM Plus. But, it mostly deals with natural disasters, it is not really prepared for crises caused by diseases. So, we still have a long way to go, for example to have the early warning system to deal with future emerging diseases.

The COVID-19 is a transnational issue, but the response is very real politic. So, the countries are becoming more exclusive, more selfish, countries who have dealt with their own problems try to gain strategic advantages from this particular condition. In the context of ASEAN, there is no country that is really well prepared to take the leadership role, because every country was very busy dealing with the problems in their own country.

Moreover, the potential impact of COVID-19 is on a confidence building agenda in the region. This is the time when confidence and trust is needed utmost. When you do not have a forum and you cannot meet face-to-face, that would severely damage the agenda to build trust and confidence in the ASEAN and Indo-Pacific at large. It also would negatively impact the military readiness and preparedness of defence forces in the region because some of ASEAN countries still rely on their interaction with their external partners in terms of exercises. Now, they could not conduct exercises, so in the long-term, it could affect the readiness of the defence forces in the region.



### **ABOUT ASEAN STUDIES PROGRAM**

The ASEAN Studies Program was established on February 24, 2010, to become a center of excellence on ASEAN related issues, which can assist in the development of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The Habibie Center through its ASEAN Studies Program, alongside other institutions working towards the same goal, hopes to contribute to the realization of a more people-oriented ASEAN that puts a high value on democracy and human rights.

The objective of the ASEAN Studies Program is not merely only to conduct research and discussion within academic and government circles, but also to strengthen public awareness by forming a strong network of civil society in the region that will be able to help spread the ASEAN message. With the establishment of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center aims to play its part within our capabilities to the ASEAN regional development.

### **ABOUT TALKING ASEAN**

Talking ASEAN is a monthly public dialogue held at The Habibie Center in Jakarta. Covering a wide array of issues related to ASEAN, Talking ASEAN addresses topics of: Economic Integration, Socio-cultural, & Democracy, human rights and regional peace, among others. Featuring local and visiting experts, Talking ASEAN is one of a series of twelve dialogues regularly held each month and open to a target audience consisting of ASEAN officials, foreign ambassadors & diplomats, academics, university students, businesses, and the media.

**PROJECT SUPERVISOR:** Hadi Kuntjara (Executive Director) & Mohammad Hasan Ansori (Director, Program and Research) | **HEAD OF ASEAN STUDIES PROGRAM:** A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi | **RESEARCHERS:** Muhamad Arif, Vierna Tasya Wensatama, Marina Ika Sari | **FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION:** Anissa Dini, M. Sohib | **LAYOUT & DESIGN:** Mayka Risayatul Asnawiyah

### **ASEAN Studies Program - The Habibie Center**

The Habibie Center Building - Jl. Kemang Selatan No.98, Jakarta 12560  
Tel: 62 21 781 7211 | Fax: 62 21 781 7212 | Email: thc@habibiecenter.or.id

 [www.habibiecenter.or.id](http://www.habibiecenter.or.id)

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