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## Discussion Report Talking ASEAN Webinar

on

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Analysing ASEAN's Centrality and Its Commitment  
to Regional Peace and Stability

Jakarta, November 11<sup>st</sup> 2020



## Introduction

On Wednesday, 11 November 2020, The Habibie Center held its Talking ASEAN Webinar entitled **“Analysing ASEAN’s Centrality and Its Commitment to Regional Peace and Stability”**. This particular Talking ASEAN featured **Moch. Faisal Karim** (Assistant Professor in Department of International Relations, Bina Nusantara University) and **Lina Alexandra** (Senior Researcher at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)), with **A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi** (Head of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center) as the moderator.

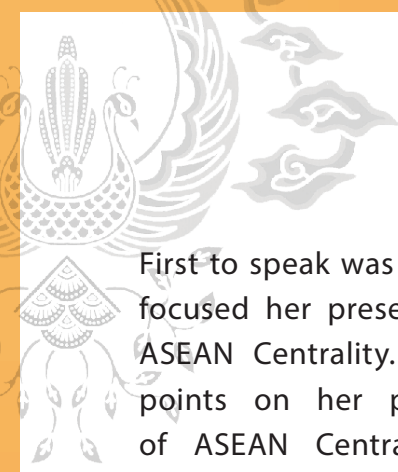
The objectives of this webinar were to: (a) analyse the current position of ASEAN as an institution as well of its member states in responding to the U.S and China rivalry; and (b) discuss the role of ASEAN centrality for the institution in adhering to its commitment in maintaining regional peace and security.

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



**Lina Alexandra**  
(Senior Researcher, Department of  
Politics and International Relations,  
Centre of Strategic and International  
Studies (CSIS))



First to speak was Ms. Lina Alexandra. She focused her presentation on questioning ASEAN Centrality. She introduced 5 key points on her presentation; (1) origin of ASEAN Centrality, (2) the meaning of centrality, (3) she emphasized that ASEAN Centrality is not given, (4) what should ASEAN do on this issue, and (5) recommendation on what can visibly be done in order to revive ASEAN Centrality.

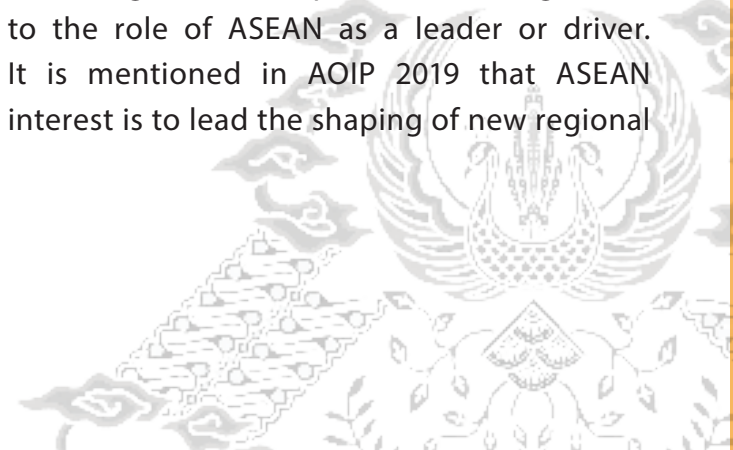
She started on the first point, which was the origin of ASEAN centrality. In 1967, ASEAN was established to protect the region from the great power competition during the Cold War and prevent the region from being divided or to engage great powers. For around decades, ASEAN has managed itself well in terms of intra-regional issues. However, with the current changing global orders and emerging tensions from great powers, particularly between the United States and China. ASEAN needs to restate its position and interest vis-a-vis global and major powers by exporting its norms or values—which could be called as an ‘ASEAN Way’.

The concept of ASEAN centrality was then formalized in the ASEAN Charter which was established in 2007, ratified by member states in 2008, and later in APSC blueprint in 2010 and 2025. To some extent, centrality was also mentioned in Bali Concord III which was launched during Indonesia’s chairmanship in ASEAN in 2011. In the ASEAN Charter, it was mentioned as

one of the purposes of ASEAN is to maintain the centrality as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners in a regional architecture which was transparent, open, and inclusive. Then in the APSC Blueprint 2025, there is an emphasis on the importance of strengthening ASEAN unity, cohesiveness, and centrality in shaping the evolving regional architecture built upon ASEAN-led mechanisms, as well as deepening the cooperation with dialogue partners and other external partners including the new potential ones.

To a certain extent, it seems that the idea of ASEAN centrality has come from within or the aspiration of ASEAN itself. However, it might not be the case. Acharya (2008) argues that it is mainly the deliberate design or the intention of the external major powers which are seeking to assert that influence and project power in the region without being perceived as intervention in the region. On the other hand, ASEAN has no choice but to accept the concept as it seems to be inevitable for ASEAN to engage with great and major powers in order to remain relevant.

Then she continued to the second point, which was questioning and elaborating the actual meaning of centrality. There is a kind of agreement among scholars that the term is actually problematic because it is an ambiguous concept. The meaning refers to the role of ASEAN as a leader or driver. It is mentioned in AOIP 2019 that ASEAN interest is to lead the shaping of new regional





SPEAKERS

**Lina Alexandra**

Senior Researcher, Department of Politics and International Relations, CSIS




architecture. She emphasized her question on: does ASEAN truly lead or drive? What has ASEAN done or is actually doing?

On one hand, we can claim that ASEAN led mechanisms such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM), ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), and East Asia Summit (EAS), are the evidence of the so-called "ASEAN sitting at the driver's seat". However, on the other hand, we have to be honest and question whether ASEAN is truly acting as a driver, driving this mechanism? While various meetings were continued to be organized, can this mechanism truly mitigate great powers tensions and rivalries, particularly between the United States and China? Can those great powers actually build confidence and trust through their engagement with ASEAN—

which we expect could lead the resolutions of this tension?

Unfortunately, what we are seeing now is the opposite. The United States, especially under the Trump administration, is obviously deprived or abandoned multilateralism. The United States is focusing on developing the Quad, a rigid alliance with like-minded supporters such as Australia, Japan and India. We hope that the newly elected United States President, Joe Biden, would change the course to multilateralism. But we still need to wait and see. On the other hand, China, while still participating ASEAN-led mechanism, has developed its own direction through Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI).



Ms. Lina Alexandra continued to quote Tan in 2017 regarding the five interpretations of centrality, which are (1) leader/driver, (2) convener/facilitator, (3) hub/node (attempts to connect major powers), (4) agent progress (5) tool or pragmatic device to prevent marginalization from the great powers. Which one is the role ASEAN?


In the past we have to acknowledge or admit that ASEAN had displayed its role as a convener or facilitator. For example, when it rejected Vietnam's intervention to Cambodia in the 1970s, as well as how ASEAN played a facilitating role in Cambodian peace process in late 1980-1990, when Indonesia particularly played a significant role there. However, it is hard to see ASEAN playing this particular role to mitigate the tension between the United States and China. Then as the agent of progress, we can't deny that ASEAN is still largely criticized as only playing the role as event organizer rather than actually investing in process leads to concrete progress in the region. Nevertheless, Ms. Lina Alexandra tends to agree with a Caballero Anthony's argument saying that ASEAN centrality can be portrayed by its function as a hub or node that connects great and major powers through the existing mechanism mentioned earlier, where mostly non-traditional security issues are discussed. But Ms. Lina Alexandra underlined that this particular function as event organizer, organizing extensive meetings is certainly enough for ASEAN if ASEAN really wants to achieve so-called ASEAN Centrality. ASEAN

must work further to act collectively in dealing with great powers and walk the talk—meaning that it must pursue the commitments made or produced from those various meetings. In a nutshell there's still a large gap between what ASEAN envisions with ASEAN Centrality and what it is actually doing. For what ASEAN is envisioning itself as a leader or driver or facilitator, or even agent of progress, what it has done and is doing is very limited. At the most, as mentioned earlier, it plays a role as a hub or node that attempts to connect major powers. Even the interpretation of ASEAN Centrality as a pragmatic device is simply to avoid being sidelined or marginalized in the great power rivalries—without necessarily having a clear direction of where it should be going, let alone steering or shaping the new regional architecture.

Ms. Lina Alexandra emphasized the importance to recall what the late ASEAN Secretary General, Mr. Surin Pitsuwan, mentioned after the creation of ASEAN Charter. Mr. Surin Pitsuwan strongly emphasized that ASEAN Centrality is not given, but it must be earned. Ms Lina also quoted Indonesian former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marty Natalegawa in his latest book "Does ASEAN Matter?" that said:

*"For Indonesia, ASEAN must not only be 'reactive' or 'responsive' to changing dynamics; rather, it should 'shape' and 'form' them." (p. 87).*

*"ASEAN must instead actively earn its centrality and leadership in the region's*



*architecture-building. Should ASEAN stand still, then at best its claimed centrality will increasingly ring hollow and ASEAN will be rendered redundant; or worse, it will be swept aside by dynamics beyond its control.” (p. 140).*

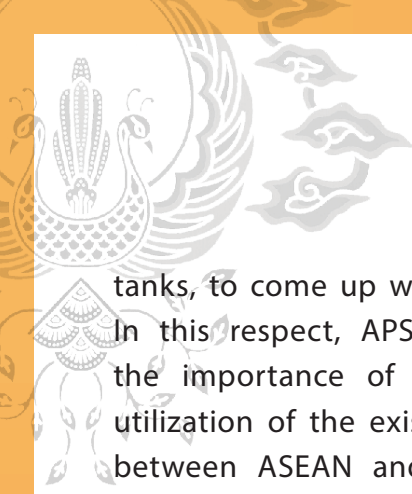
Ms. Lina Alexandra continued with the question of what should ASEAN do in this situation. She argued that the biggest responsibility of creating ASEAN Centrality lies within ASEAN itself and its member states. The steps have actually been elaborated well in APSC Blueprint. One central issue mentioned in the blueprint—which ASEAN is still far from achieving—is the ability to formulate ASEAN common vision for the regional architecture to respond collectively, let alone constructively to global developments, and to identify ASEAN’s own common interests and priorities vis-a-vis the dialogue partners. The most important homework to do for ASEAN is to be able to define its common interest, come up with a common outlook for goals and work collectively toward them. However, what we are currently seeing is member states pursuing their own calls, as we can see clearly in the South China Sea and the Rohingya issues. The key problem lies within ASEAN itself, rather than the external powers.

There are two challenges that Ms. Lina Alexandra sees ASEAN is facing. The first one is that there is rather still an “incorrect” interpretation of non-intervention principle that prevents member states to solve regional problems, which mainly the problems that

are rising from the internal problems. Those problems prevent ASEAN to create their own common goal and interest as well as pulling resources together to deal with the common challenges. The second one is the fact that some member states are allies of/ having a tendency toward certain great powers. However, there should be a certain balance because being central means to be impartial and not taking sides, nor be drifted by any of the great powers’ interests. ASEAN Centrality can be achieved among others by ASEAN playing a role as an honest broker and guardian of international law and norms. These are of course not an easy job to be done by ASEAN. However, without achieving unity and neutrality, ASEAN Centrality is rather a myth than reality.

Ms. Lina Alexandra finished her presentation by proposing 2 recommendations regarding this matter, which she thinks is quite visible for ASEAN. The first one is rejuvenating ASEAN Plus Three, as it is the most visible one compared to the other ASEAN-led mechanisms. ASEAN Plus Three is more focused in terms of external powers to engage with, not like the Expanded East Asia Summit. Also, the ASEAN Plus Three partners are middle powers that have a strong commitment to engage with ASEAN especially because these states don’t have a common platform in the region that unite them together.

The second recommendation is for ASEAN to take advantage and to interact or engage with secondary institutions, like think-



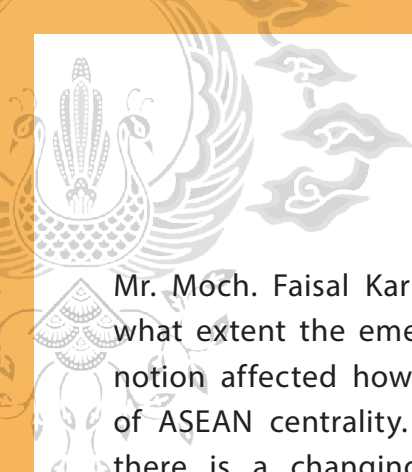
tanks, to come up with novel creative ideas. In this respect, APSC Blueprint mentioned the importance of pursuing the effective utilization of the existing cooperation funds between ASEAN and dialogue partners to conduct research. This is the room where ASEAN could actually collaborate with think tanks and academics, in this case probably

ASEAN Secretariat. This could help the national agencies, as well as the secretary, in designing projects on how to improve the effectiveness of ASEAN-led mechanisms and even to formulate recommendations of how ASEAN can truly become the driver in the regional setting.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Moch. Faisal Karim**  
(Assistant Professor, Department  
of International Relations,  
Bina Nusantara University)




Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim focused more on to what extent the emergence of Indo-Pacific's notion affected how we perceived the idea of ASEAN centrality. After the past 5 years there is a changing in how we perceive regional integrations and regionalism in Asia, especially in East Asia with the notion of Indo-Pacific has become more prevalent within the policy makers realm as well as the academic realm. In order to understand that kind of emergence I would like to trace back the notions of Indo-Pacific through the lens of what he called a "regional imagination". It is built upon the idea of imagined community, in which he argued that even regionalism and regional architecture is basically a "game of imagination". To some extent, people can imagine the way regionalism is performed, then that kind of imagination would be much more prevalent than the previous one.

At least for the past 5-10 years there is a competing regional imagination when it comes to regional integration or regionalism in East Asia. In the 20th century, Indian ocean seems to be outside of East Asia's sphere of concern because we were more concerned about the Pacific. Even both Asia Plus Three and APEC excluded India. Somehow, this kind of imagination has changed a little bit because for the past 7 years, since 2013, China has an ambitious agenda through the Belt and Road Initiative in which it aims to connect Indian Ocean and the Pacific where China would be in the center. This is also changing the way we see regional imagination.

In order to respond to that, Japan—under Prime Minister Abe—has a vision of "confluence of the two seas", in which Japan tried to envision a free and open Indo Pacific strategy—which is basically a strategy to contain China. Through this vision Japan wanted to create a new cooperation within the region by looking at India as the potential partner. Lastly, this kind of vision has not yet become a new agenda in the second terms of President Joko Widodo's foreign policy. Since 2014, this vision of global maritime fulcrum has been a response from Indonesia toward the changing of regional imagination. This background is why we should ask two important questions here: (1) how will the importance of the Indian Ocean in the foreign policy of East Asian countries affect ASEAN that has been central in East Asia regional architecture? And (2) to what extent the Indo-Pacific as a new regional imagination might affect the notion of ASEAN centrality? Those 2 questions have become more prevalent within policy makers and academic communities and how they are basically linked to the notion of ASEAN Centrality.

Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim then explained the evolution of East Asia regional architecture and linked it with ASEAN Centrality. He mentioned that ASEAN Centrality emerged due to the competing regional vision of East Asia. The first one is Mahathir's vision of East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) which is an exclusive vision. Two major powers back then—Japan and US—did not really like this vision because this is so exclusive. Instead, they created or supported




Australian's vision of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). It is more inclusive and based on mutual interest. These competing regional visions make APEC prevail compared to EAEG. Somehow, Mahathir's vision has been transformed into East Asia Economic Caucus, a loose consultative within APEC. But after the 1998 financial crisis, APEC lost its centrality and there is a new imagination of East Asian regionalism where it built upon three platforms; ASEAN Regional Forum 1993, ASEAN Plus Three 1997, and East Asia Summit 2005. Those platforms basically become the backbone of reimagination of East Asia and this is where ASEAN Centrality comes into place.

Mr. Moch. Faisal emphasized on understanding of ASEAN Centrality. There is an academic debate because ASEAN Centrality is a very unclear and contested notion. According to ASEAN Charter, centrality actually focused on ASEAN as the center when it comes to external political, economic, socio, and cultural relations while remaining actively engaged, outward looking, inclusive and non-discriminatory. He emphasized that it is just a statement without any definition. It gives room for people to interpret what is ASEAN Centrality.

From the academic point of view, one scholar, Melly Caballero-Anthony defines ASEAN Centrality through the prisms of structural position of ASEAN as a major node in attempts to get itself widely connected to and embedded in a density network with many

actors. The bottom line is ASEAN Centrality is just a concept that defines how ASEAN should basically become the driving force, driving the agenda, creating platforms for key players, and organizing common positions in the regional multilateral process.

Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim identified how the rise of Indian Ocean forced us to reimagine East Asia regionalism. He traced the imagination of East Asia through the lens of 4 major powers in Asia. The first one is how China imagines the Indian Ocean and how it incorporates their visions of East Asia regional architecture. Historically, Indian Ocean is always outside China's imagination. Now, there is a new interest in Indian Ocean as a strategic trade route due to China's economic boom. China has a blue water strategy which increases its presence in Indian Ocean. China is presently the observer member in the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and working towards enhancing its role as "dialogue partner" to obtain full membership. China's presence in India changes the way China sees the Indian Ocean. Many said that China is trying to do "strings of pearls strategy", where China is actively developing a network of infrastructure. This worries India a lot because China is not only playing in the Pacific but also going on to Indian Ocean—where India is still constrained in Indian Ocean and not really trying to expand to the Pacific. This changed the way the rest of other major powers see Indian Ocean.



Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim also showed a timeline of Japan and the rise of the Indo-Pacific region. Starting from 1945, when Japan focused on East Asia, and somehow neglected India within its big picture of foreign policy. After the cold war there was an improvement of India-Japan relation, but it was weakened due to India's nuclear test in 1998. It was becoming more normalized after 2000-2006 with the renewal of partnership to a global partnership phase. In 2012, Prime Minister Abe introduced the notion of Democratic Security Diamond—a Quads that involved Japan, India, Australia, and the United States. This concept became the driving force for Japan to introduce the notions of free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, after the enactment of peace and security act in 2015. We can see that Japan's vision of Indo-Pacific is pretty much value-based; based on the value of democracy and liberal minded order. This vision was a response by Japan toward China's growing interest in Indian Ocean through BRI.

Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim then continued with Indonesia as a global maritime fulcrum where according to President Joko Widodo, "the Indian ocean is the ocean of the future, the future of the world's economy lies in the region". There was a shifting because back in the day Indian Ocean can be seen as the backyard for Indonesia foreign policy, but now given the changing constellations, Indonesia is eager to see Indian Ocean as its playing field—as in 2015, Indonesia renewed its interest in IORA, where Indonesia become the chairman of the IORA in 2015-2017. Indonesia

wanted to revitalize IORA and its members and create a sustainable regional architecture. This is the response of Indonesia to the changing constellations of Indian Ocean.

For the United States, there was a shifting from rebalancing strategy through pivot to Asia under Obama's presidency to more selectively deterring China. It resonates within the notions of Indo-Pacific where Indo-Pacific can be interpreted as a new way of revitalizing the Quad.

What is ASEAN response to the changing of this constellation and reimagination of Indian Ocean as a part of East Asia? In the economic realm, ASEAN supports many initiatives from great powers because it sees resonance with ASEAN needs, especially when it comes to ASEAN connectivity. ASEAN also welcomes Japan's expanded partnership for high-quality infrastructure. But probably the weakest link is in terms of security of ASEAN Centrality. Some of ASEAN members are concerned about China's growing assertiveness, but some are not. It creates tensions within ASEAN which led to ASEAN's lack of cohesiveness when it comes to China's assertiveness. This is a problem because Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim argued that ASEAN cohesiveness is actually a backbone of ASEAN Centrality. Without cohesiveness among ASEAN members, it is less likely for ASEAN to perform its centrality.

Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim asked a question; what is next? How is the notion of Indo-Pacific might change the way how ASEAN centrality is being performed? At least there are 3 scenarios or



SPEAKERS

**Moch. Faisal Karim**

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Bina Nusantara University



outcomes that we could foresee based on 3 factors. First, when it comes to ASEAN's cohesiveness, ASEAN has less cohesion as majority of the countries do not feel that ASEAN should be in one voice. ASEAN will be less relevant to Indo-Pacific region as the idea of ASEAN being relevant is because we have a cohesion among each other. Second, if the pattern of power rivalry becomes more competitive, a lot of competition and less cooperation, will also make ASEAN less relevant in Indo-Pacific region. Lastly, Indo-Pacific initiative by great powers has been received and responded which will either put ASEAN in the center or less relevant in Indo-Pacific region. If ASEAN wants to be in the center of Indo-Pacific region, ASEAN needs to be more cohesive and make sure that the pattern of great power rivalry is more cooperative than

competitive. Indonesia also needs to be more creative and be a primo center to drive the pattern of great power rivalry. We basically want the second scenario where we still keep centrality within the changing imagination of Indo-Pacific region.

According to Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim, Indonesia has done quite well so far because Indonesia enabled ASEAN to create ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific—which emphasized on common interest rather than shared values. Indonesia also hopes to be the fulcrum for both norm-setting and concrete cooperation. Indonesia is not only playing in a norm or normative agenda but also a concrete cooperation—economic or security cooperation. Even until now, no single platform has established and substantiated the Indo-Pacific outlook. Some people say that there is no need to create a



new platform and Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim thought that the East Asia Summit could be the platform for advancing the Indo-Pacific discourse and cooperation. It could make the agenda of the East Asia Summit more inclusive toward the agenda discussed in Indo-Pacific region. Last but not least, Indonesia should be more creative in convincing the need for ASEAN-based platform that can include Indo-

Pacific countries like India, Australia, and Japan. Those countries have their own visions of Indo-Pacific and they could achieve their interest with the platform initiated by ASEAN. That is how ASEAN should balance the notions of new reimaginings of Indo-Pacific as a part of East Asia regional architectures and its centrality.



# QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

## Questions

### **A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi (Head of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center):**

Mr. Ibrahim noticed that Ms. Lina mentioned her recommendation to rejuvenate ASEAN Plus Three, focusing more on China, Japan and South Korea. While it is good to have inclusivity, sometimes it might be more effective to focus on these 3 countries. Mr. Ibrahim noticed a difference with Mr. Faisal's statement on the importance of Indian Ocean and even India as an emerging power. Mr. Ibrahim asked a further comment on that point.

Mr. Ibrahim also asked the second question to both speakers about the security aspect—which was considered to be the weakest link. There are some countries that are leaning more towards a certain power which made ASEAN less cohesive. He also mentioned a statement from a former Singapore diplomat who suggested countries such as Cambodia or Lao PDR to be expelled from ASEAN because they were too close to China. Mr. Ibrahim asked for the speakers' opinion regarding that matter and whether or not that would be recommended for ASEAN.

## Responses

### **Lina Alexandra (Senior Researcher at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)):**

Answering Mr. Ibrahim's question, Ms. Lina Alexandra doesn't think that her argument was contesting ASEAN Plus Three and Indo-Pacific. Mr. Faisal's argument is how this existing ASEAN-led mechanism can complement each other with the newer idea about Indo-Pacific. Her argument is basically how ASEAN could start among so many existing mechanisms. ASEAN Plus Three is the most realistic and visible mechanism to start with because it has existing tools. Indo-Pacific is such a grand idea which needs a lot of work to be done. Indo-Pacific still needs to be established but ASEAN Plus Three is already there and ASEAN leaders just need to walk the talk. The biggest homework for ASEAN is to make dialogue partners—especially the Plus Three countries—to have interest again in ASEAN.

Answering the second question, Ms. Lina Alexandra argued that kicking Lao PDR and Cambodia out of ASEAN is not useful. She doesn't think that expelling both countries would be beneficial. It is rather challenging for ASEAN to include these countries. If ASEAN expels those countries, they will fall into the sphere of China's influence and that will really create instability in the region—which is not something that ASEAN would want in the region. There would be a lot of challenges for ASEAN but including them in regional mechanisms/organizations is more beneficial for ASEAN rather than excluding them.

**Moch. Faisal Karim (Assistant Professor in Department of International Relations, Bina Nusantara University):**

If we look at ASEAN centrality, the question is how ASEAN can overcome the competition of interest within East Asia? The notion of Indo-Pacific emerges because it is a way to reject or balance China's growing interest. The reason why it happened is because the existing regional mechanisms or regional institutions don't really provide that. We have ASEAN Plus Three, East Asia Summit, and other external powers might see that these so-called institutions have not met their interest. For example, we see India pulled out from RCEP negotiation. Many don't see RCEP as a platform that can enhance its economic cooperation with ASEAN. We need a more powerful narrative to make sure that ASEAN is still in the center. Rejuvenating ASEAN Plus Three or East Asia Summit would be good and would strengthen the cooperation. But in the end of the day, it is a matter of how this narrative resonates with external powers in the region.

For the second question, Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim said that in terms of security, some countries, especially small powers like Lao PDR and Cambodia don't seem to adhere to the importance of ASEAN Centrality. In this case, ASEAN, especially Indonesia, needs to remind the narrative of ASEAN Centrality not only to the external powers but also within ASEAN. Countries' creativity is important to ASEAN Centrality. Tracing back to what Ms. Lina Alexandra has said, it is a long way to go to have a result from Indo-Pacific, but Indo-Pacific is one of Indonesia's creativity that could maintain the relevance of ASEAN.

**Lina Alexandra (Senior Researcher at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)):**

Ms. Lina Alexandra added that ASEAN needs leadership to say something to those "rebellious" countries. Indonesia also needs to show leadership in ASEAN.

## Questions

**Vierna Tasya Wensatama (Researcher, The Habibie Center):**

Ms. Vierna Tasya asked 2 questions. The first one was how far would the dynamics in ASEAN shift in the coming year, following the US election results? And the second one was in relation to the previous question; how would ASEAN centrality play a role in ensuring that the institution and its member states do not get caught up in the middle of 'great powers'?

## Responses

### **Moch. Faisal Karim (Assistant Professor in Department of International Relations, Bina Nusantara University):**

Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim answered that policy makers have to think about that matter. As we already know, under 4 years of Trump's administration it seems that ASEAN has been pretty much neglected. Trump has been wanting a high-profile case when it comes to United States' foreign policy. It seems that ASEAN needs to attract the interest of the United States back to Southeast Asia, rather than their rivalry with China. Mr. Faisal said in 1-2 years of Joe Biden's presidency, the United States will focus more on restoring leadership or presence in many international organizations. It aims to fix what the Trump presidency has done. Mr. Faisal doesn't think that ASEAN will be the priority in the first years of Biden's presidency because there are so many foreign policy agendas that need to be fixed in Biden's table.

Regarding the second question, Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim thinks that ASEAN should show its relevance and leadership in the global community or global order. In 2012, ASEAN wanted to be a global actor, not only in a regional community with the scope of Asia, but it wanted to be a global actor that played a great role in the world. That vision should be there as well, especially in terms of the United States and China great rivalry, because it is not only a regional issue but also a global phenomenon. ASEAN could provide a solution to de-escalate the tensions.

### **Lina Alexandra (Senior Researcher at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)):**

Ms. Lina Alexandra said that this feels like a déjà-vu to Obama's euphoria when the United States wanted to refocus itself and pay attention to the region again. In this case, ASEAN, or at least Indonesia, has to take advantage of this issue. Although we are not sure whether the United States will pay attention to Southeast Asia, at least it will do to China rivalry. Southeast Asia has gained some benefit because this region is a theater of this rivalry between great powers. ASEAN needs to take advantage of this.

The visit of Mike Pompeo to Indonesia proves, to some extent, that there is still some idea of the region's importance for the United States. Ms. Lina thought that the United States government will be occupied with internal problems, at least for the first 1-2 years, with COVID-19 and other issues. After that, they will do something and Ms. Lina doesn't think that Southeast Asia will be neglected, particularly because of the United States and China rivalry, where Southeast Asia is one of the theaters where they play their rivalry.

Answering the second question, Ms. Lina emphasized that in order for ASEAN not to get caught up in the middle of this rivalries, ASEAN needs to do its homework—which is to be united and creative. Unfortunately, the leadership of ASEAN and especially Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN,

are not seen.

## Questions

**Hanifa Zama Dinnata (Communication Officer, The Habibie Center):**

Nowadays there are 2 challenges in ASEAN: domestic (the pandemic) and regional dynamics (the strategic rivalry). With COVID-19, most countries' priorities are to survive and save their own national interest. It is reflected in ASEAN's lack of response during this pandemic. What do you think ASEAN should do to maintain its centrality and to keep its member states committed to the centrality during this pandemic?

## Responses

**Lina Alexandra (Senior Researcher at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)):**

Ms. Lina Alexandra has seen some initiatives regarding COVID-19, but what ASEAN has done to deal with this pandemic is very limited. We see some countries that are quite successful in dealing with the pandemic, but there is not so much cooperation among ASEAN member states, let alone putting forward the common effort to deal with the pandemic—which is a pity and unfortunate to see. Ms. Lina thought that there should be a clear lesson learned from this pandemic. We are learning from the way ASEAN constructs its disaster management mechanism with AHA Centre. It is very important for ASEAN to develop another mechanism to deal with global pandemic in the future. Especially because some countries are successful in dealing with the pandemic.

**Moch. Faisal Karim (Assistant Professor in Department of International Relations, Bina Nusantara University):**

The pandemic really puzzled us, as scholars. Arguably when it comes to transnational issues—low politics—many scholars tend to agree that cooperation is more likely in this issue. Apparently, Mr. Faisal found that ASEAN has many initiatives or regional platforms, but it is still far from what we have to actually do. ASEAN as a regional organization, to some extent, is under performing in terms of mitigating this issue within ASEAN platform or mechanism. Many ASEAN countries have a great record, while others are not. The difference in mitigating the pandemic shows that it is about individual countries' response, rather than the regional response to the pandemic.

## Questions

### **A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi (Head of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center):**

Given that the ASEAN Summit will take place later this week, what do you hope to see in the next ASEAN summit?

## Responses

### **Lina Alexandra (Senior Researcher at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)):**

Ms. Lina Alexandra said that she is very pragmatic regarding the expectation for ASEAN Summit. ASEAN needs to show leadership. Indonesia also should come up with strong ideas, especially about ASEAN centrality. What does Indonesia envision? In Bali Concord 2011, 9 years ago, we talked about ASEAN Community in a global community of nations. Is that the reality that we are seeing now? In terms of presence, yes. But in terms of vision of being the driver or a leader, no. ASEAN is not really doing anything or driving.

### **Moch. Faisal Karim (Assistant Professor in Department of International Relations, Bina Nusantara University):**

Mr. Moch. Faisal Karim emphasized that there are so many issues on the table—about economic recovery, ASEAN Way, or what cooperation can be done to achieve resilience within the domestic economy. Mr. Faisal guessed that maybe ASEAN tourism corridor and the strategy to increase economic cooperation also will be discussed. Other than that, Mr. Faisal thought that it is important to talk about RCEP, especially how RCEP can be seen as an important cooperation in light of the pandemic because there will be a lot of protectionist policies.



### **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.

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