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## Discussion Report Talking ASEAN Webinar

on

### Post-COVID ASEAN: Shifting Political-Security Paradigms?

Jakarta, November 24<sup>th</sup> 2020



## Introduction

On Wednesday, 24 November 2020, The Habibie Center convened the Talking ASEAN Webinar entitled “**Post-COVID ASEAN: Shifting Political-Security Paradigms?**”. The webinar featured **Aristyo Rizka Darmawan** (Lecturer at International Law Department and Researcher at Center for Sustainable Ocean Policy, Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia), **Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad** (Lecturer at International Relations Department and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center, University of Indonesia), **Mira Permatasari** (Director of The Yudhoyono Institute), with **A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi** (Head of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center) acted as the moderator.

The objectives of this webinar were to: (a) analyse how the concept of security, both in terms of national and international, has changed during this pandemic; (b) explore how COVID-19 has affected the political and security discourse across the globe, especially for major powers; and (c) discuss how ASEAN should respond to such shifts in paradigms and what kind of cooperation mechanisms will be built by ASEAN countries in the post-COVID world.

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



**Aristyo Rizka Darmawan**  
(Lecturer at International Law  
Department and Researcher at  
Center for Sustainable Ocean Policy,  
Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia)



Mr. Aristyo Rizka Darmawan began his presentation by briefly discussing a security challenge that happened during COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 in general terms, and whether or not there will be a huge or dramatic political security paradigm in the region. In about a year, COVID-19 has spread to all countries, including those in the region. Most of ASEAN countries are still struggling to contain the outbreak. The pandemic has hit ASEAN economy particularly hard. As an example, in the second quarter, Indonesia's GDP fell into a deeper plunge than expected. The Philippines economy also shrank by 16,5% in the first quarter of 2020. Therefore, we have to admit that the impact of COVID-19 crisis has been multidimensional. The remaining question is about the immediate and longer term effect in security and geopolitics in the region as the absence of global response has been striking.

During the pandemic, major powers have been offering pandemic assistance to consolidate influence in the region. Beijing and Washington have increased a significant number of humanitarian aid for some countries in the region, posing a dilemma how to accept the assistance and yet maintain ASEAN neutrality and centrality. Among ASEAN leaders, the pandemic has caused a big pressure as the rivalry between US and China has also been rising up in recent years. Those two powers have been pursuing their respective strategy to strengthen the relationship in the region.

China has its Belt and Road Initiative, and the United States with its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is also an emerging issue in the region.

The emergence of the pandemic has landed new urgency in terms of international aid. For example, China includes ASEAN in its 2 billion USD COVID-19 international aid program and donated protective equipment and other medical supplies for ASEAN countries and organizations, such as ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, for the distribution. China also dispatched testing kits, surgical masks, and other items to the Philippines and Indonesia and sent a team of medical experts to Cambodia. We can also see that ASEAN and China Foreign Ministers meeting in Vientiane issued a statement to strengthen cooperation, information exchange and mutual assistance to combat COVID-19. A further statement in May, those leaders called for joint efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on regional and global trade and investment. It could restore confidence in the economy and also pursue opportunities to achieve sustainable long term growth of international trade and investment.

On the other hand, the United States also made its own diplomatic moves in the region. In May, the US Department released a statement on the Indo-Pacific cooperations on COVID-19 that underscores the importance of cooperation in information sharing with the partners in the regions. The United States also contributed



SPEAKERS

### Aristyo Rizka Darmawan

Lecturer at International Law Department and Researcher at Center for Sustainable Ocean Policy, Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia




significant humanitarian aid to the ASEAN Member States. By early May, Washington had released 57,5 million USD to help Southeast Asian countries to fight the pandemic, with around 7,3 millions USD allocated to Indonesia alone. Those aid programs included support for the case detection and tracing.

Mr. Aristyo continued with the second security threat in the context of more on the security challenge in the South China Sea. Even though it is regarded as a traditional challenge, he thought that it has also been the highlight during the pandemic. We have seen that the intensified tensions between the United States and China over the South China Sea have put stress on ASEAN neutral stance. In the recent months during the pandemic, China had increased its presence in the disputed area, possibly motivated by

an assessment that the United States defense posture in the regions had been weakened by the coronavirus. Therefore, the United States has alleged that China is using the pandemic, when most of the claimant states are preoccupied with dealing with the crisis, to take forward strategic ambitions.

Since the pandemic started, most of ASEAN countries have had to divert funds to coronavirus response. For example, Indonesia has announced its reallocation for nearly around 588 millions from its defense budget in order to secure COVID-19 assistance. Thailand also reduced its defense spending by around 555 million USD, allocating money for public health. Other ASEAN countries also share similar circumstances thus limiting their capacity to maintain regular military patrol and law enforcement.

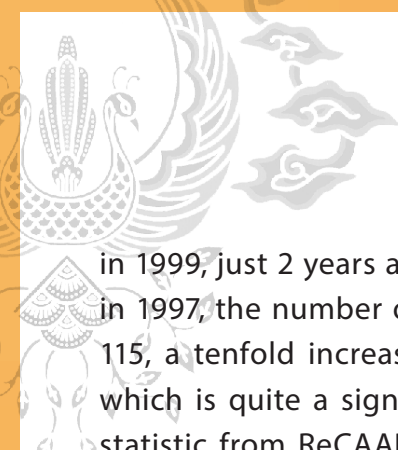


China's moves in the South China Sea have prompted the United States to step up its presence in the area. After Malaysia issued a strong criticism of China's nine-dash-lines claim, the United States Secretary, Mike Pompeo, recently called Indonesia and Singapore's foreign ministers to reiterate the United States' support for Southeast Asian States. Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, said that the pandemic is Indonesia's priority and thanked the United States for its assistance with ventilators and the promise of vaccines. As we might be aware that on July 13, Pompeo articulated much sharper United States positions, denouncing that the Beijing claims in the South China Sea were completely unlawful. He gave full support to the department and court of arbitration, supporting the Philippines case of China's illegal claims under international law of the sea. That support against China highlighted how the Philippines has become the prime example of ASEAN countries being torn apart in the midst of the United States-China competition. The growing intensity of the rivalry has made neutrality a more difficult position for ASEAN to maintain. Therefore, with the push and pull of the major power, the question of ASEAN neutrality has become more relevant. Some might say that this is a Cold War. China's presence in the region is likely to grow and the United States is expected to expand its engagement as a way to challenge Beijing's influence in the region. ASEAN Member States may struggle to maintain its centrality or appearance to be

impartial in this clash.

In a meeting convened last August, China and Indonesia's foreign minister agreed that the ASEAN and China should work and conclude the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea immediately. Vietnam, the current ASEAN Chair, had been expected to push for agreement on the CoC as soon as next year, but the pandemic has hindered the progress. The task of the moving negotiations will now fall to Brunei as ASEAN chair. While the newly elected United States president, Joe Biden, might have his own foreign policy, these competitions and rivalry are likely to remain in the regions. Some countries may openly lean on one another, as for instance, Cambodia has recently developed a dependency relationship with China. But ASEAN centrality still should be a priority in the regions.

Mr. Aristyo continued the third traditional security issue about the potential increasing number of piracy in the region. Indonesia and Malaysia have long been regarded as one of the most dangerous zones of piracy. More than 60% of all maritime piracy incidents between 1993 to 2015 occurred in Southeast Asia with more than 20% of those taking place in Indonesian waters alone. Economic downturn caused by the pandemic would not only impact the budget for military and maritime law enforcement agencies to combat piracy, but may actually trigger an increase in piracy incidents. For instance, as Robert McCabe observed in 1993, there were only 10 incidents of piracy in Indonesia's water. While

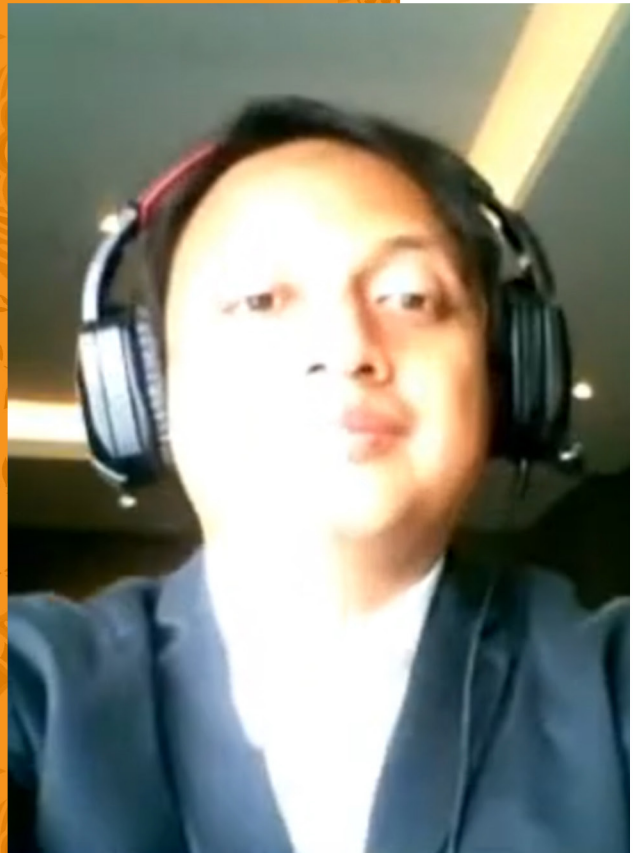


in 1999, just 2 years after Asian financial crisis in 1997, the number of incidents increased to 115, a tenfold increase in less than 10 years, which is quite a significant number. Another statistic from ReCAAP (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery) shows that in 2010, just two years after the 2008 financial crisis, piracy incidents had increased by 25%. This increase likely stems from a combination of strength and economic motives to commit piracy and reduce law enforcement capacity at sea due to the budget cut. Maritime cooperation initiatives, such as the joint piracy patrols will also be affected by those cuts. As Indonesia makes a necessary budget adjustment due to economic impacts of COVID-19, it should carefully consider the effect of those reallocations as well as the challenge most likely to materialize in the current environment. In the realm of security, Indonesia should pay special attention to threats that stand both during and post COVID-19. If Indonesia can decide which capabilities to prioritize, it can mitigate the toll that these cuts will take on security both its own water and in the region at large.

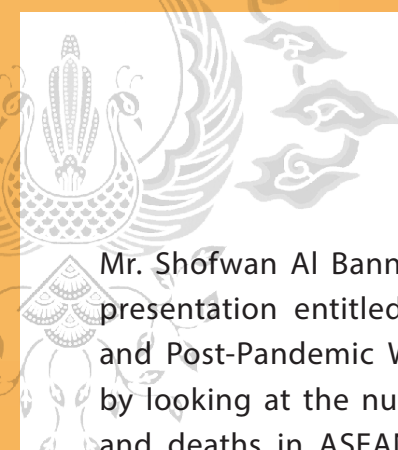
Taking the considerations that traditional security or threat in the regions during and post pandemic is still will be increasing, the realm or the discourse of security during and post the pandemic is still very much difficult. Indeed, there will be a lot of security elements that increase after the pandemic--human security, health crisis issues, etc--but also the traditional security that will rise after

the pandemic will also still be in the major discourse. The security challenges after post-COVID-19 will be more difficult as there will be a lot of security issues. ASEAN does not have the privilege or luxuries to choose which security issues, either traditional or non-traditional security, to be focused on. With more complex security challenge situations, ASEAN cooperations should be more enhanced in many forms.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad**  
(Lecturer at International Relations Department  
and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center,  
University of Indonesia)




Mr. Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad began his presentation entitled “Security in Pandemic and Post-Pandemic World: What to Expect?” by looking at the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in ASEAN. ASEAN is not spared from this pandemic and affects the lives of not only at individual level but also national and international levels. Not only does it have a tremendous direct public health effect, it also has a secondary impact in the economy—people are already talking about how we are likely to enter another Great Depression. If we talk about the Great Depression, we could not move from our historical experience with the Great Depression which was coming together as a major great hegemonic war that created disruptions in the international order. So, what to expect? The arrival of this pandemic and our inability to escape the pandemic effectively makes talking about post-COVID-19 is a little bit optimistic now, especially in Indonesia, where the numbers are still rising--we don't see any second wave because we are still in the first wave. Let's assume that there will be some post-pandemic world. What is going to happen?

The question asked is how the COVID-19 will change the conceptualization of security in ASEAN and beyond. This is interesting because this treats the concept of human security not as something that is given, it acknowledges that the conceptualization of security is contested. I think this is the correct way to understand security. If we look at the history, for example, the introduction of the collective security concept is connected to the

establishment of the League of Nations and it is very much connected with the disruptions of the long peace order. It is supported by the balance of power in Europe and people were looking for a new way to prevent wars to occur again. People were introducing this concept of collective security, which is a threat from one country against another country is a threat to all countries. We also see how changes in international politics at the end of the Cold War created the rise of the concept of human security in which the object of security is shifted, or at least expanded, from the state to the individual. This could not be seen only as a natural evolution of the concept but also something that occurs because of the changing context. We should understand the position that conceptualization of security is always contextual. It is political and historical.

Thus with that assumption in place, Mr. Shofwan tried to answer how the pandemic will affect our understanding or our conceptualization of security. And at least, there are two ideal scenarios. The first scenario is where pandemic stimulates awareness from the states that non-traditional security, such as health, is as important. There would be more acceptance toward a more inclusive concept of security which includes the prioritization of non-traditional security threats, such as health. Because of the nature of this non-traditional security is centered at individuals and the threats are not managed and arranged in following borders. If a more inclusive concept of security is to be more widely accepted, we will witness that international or even



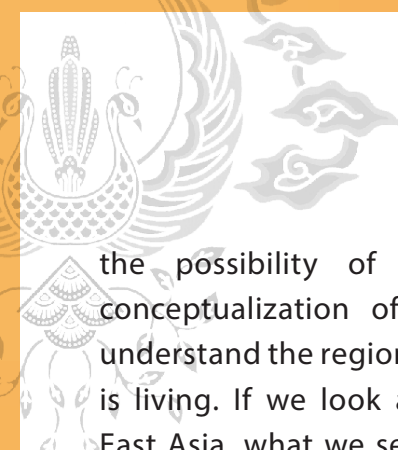
transnational cooperation will be expanding even more. However, we also have the second scenario, in which rather than opening the door for a more inclusive concept of security, the pandemic heightened the security among states. This will not only increase the tensions, but also recreates and hardens the traditional notion of state centric security concept. Of course these two scenarios are ideal models. Not only the reality might mirror those scenarios, but also combine both of them. Mr. Shofwan elaborated on the compatibility of the scenario, particularly in the context of ASEAN. Since conceptualization of security is historical and political, maybe it is good to look at the history like the Plague of Athens. From that story, there are several lessons, the first is that the pandemic accelerates the shift in the balance of power quickly. On Thucydides' notes, he showed that the impact of the pandemic has cost Athens its superiority over the seas--since Athens was strong on the seas while Spartans were strong on land. The disease spread from the sea, which affected Athens worse than Spartans. This accelerated Athens' downfall. The second is people still don't know how the pandemic can be effectively contained. Powers, such as numbers of army, capital, do not matter much in this context. Even the large wealth of Athens actually created these problems because the wealth generated through international trade is what actually made Athens more susceptible to this plague.

Mr. Shofwan continued to reflect that phenomenon to the current international

order. He quoted Andrew Phillip in defining the international order as a systemic structure that cohere within culturally and historically specific social imaginaries. It is composed of two component; order producing normative complex and fundamental institutions.

Mr. Shofwan explored the post-World War international order. In general, there are several features that are continuously being in this particular international order. First, if we look at the order-enabling material foundation, we see that the basis is double monopoly. The first monopoly is the monopoly of authorities by state, with the totalitarian capability of the state to monopoly finance, control over taxation, data, etc. Second is that among the states there is also a monopoly. There is a monopoly of capability among states. Based on this order-enabling material foundation, there is a normative complex which animates the interaction between units in the international system at this particular time--the idea of free trade and democracy. Recent trade war stagnation in a multilateral organization are symptoms that this order-producing normative complex is no longer effectively holding the behaviour of its members. The third is fundamental institutions, which is marked by multilateralism alliance, the Bretton Woods Institution which evolved contextually. What is interesting is that these fundamental institutions manifested differently in different regions which then created different regional architectures in Europe and in East Asia.

Mr. Shofwan emphasized that to understand




the possibility of concept shift in the conceptualization of security, we need to understand the regional order in which ASEAN is living. If we look at the regional order in East Asia, what we see now is quite different from Europe because the different strategic choices by the United States, the hegemony in the post-World War situation, give a different shape of the region. That does not mean that other actors are just responding. However, the choice of the United States provides a context in which these actors will be able to offer their own alternatives.

In the post-World War era, the regional security system in East Asia, which was developed by the United States, is called the hub-and-spokes system. In the economic dimension, there is a development of the Triangular Trade System, where the United States attempts to contain both China's communism and Uni Soviet, while at the same time also tries to contain Japan. That is why the United States supports Japan economically but also somehow directs its economic expansion not to China, but to Southeast Asia. This creates the trigger and the direction for regional integration in Southeast Asia. China entered this arrangement in the late 1980s. Now, China has become integrated into the economic architecture and benefiting from it, but excluded from the hub-and-spokes system.

There is a separation of spheres here in East Asia, where security and economic realms are separated as two different realms. The existence of two different realms was also

accommodated if we look at the concept of ASEAN itself. That is why Mr. Shofwan proposes to call ASEAN as a “compartmentalized regionalism”, a regionalism in which actually different regional projects are commencing. ASEAN is a political project which actually consists of multiple and compartmentalized patterns of arrangements of the regional spaces but combined and identified in a single project. There is a 1967 ASEAN which focuses on political security and responding to the idea of the United States' hub-and-spokes and was established to contain communism. There is also the 1990s ASEAN, whose economic integration is driven by market forces. It is interesting to note that two different arrangements, one is inclusive of China and one is exclusive, can go together and these are held together by ASEAN Centrality. ASEAN Centrality provides the ability to connect with two different rooms and at the same time keeping the compartmentalization independent of each other.

Mr. Shofwan argued that ASEAN Centrality rests in this compartmentalization. If we look at ASEAN Centrality, many observers argue that it is temporary. ASEAN Centrality put ASEAN's position in the node of networks which places it as a central hub in the regional architecture. There are also understanding that great powers are accepting ASEAN because ASEAN is not threatening. It is less threatening than its rifle counterpart and thus making ASEAN acceptable to be the central actor in the region.



However, this centrality of ASEAN in the regional order, which holds together the contradiction between the economic and the political spheres and architecture in the region, may change. The future is less certain because there are changes in the order-enabling material foundation. Non-state actors are becoming more influential especially amidst this pandemic because non-state actors control vaccines. Of course, industrial policy matters, investment of the state is crucial to provide support for the industry, but private initiative is also strong in this. Another aspect, which is also becoming very prominent during the pandemic, is the big data. Everything is going online and this part of our life is contained in the cyberspace and those who control the monopoly over this cyberspace will be influential actors. In this sense, many states are unable to keep their monopoly because companies such as Facebook, and Twitter and other big companies, are having their hands on this big data. There is an indeed shift in the monopoly of authority by the state because it is gradually diminishing. The monopoly among the states is also decreasing because of the rise of China and the relative decline of the United States. On the aspect of fundamental institutions, the consensus of ASEAN Centrality is not fixed. In the norm order-producing normative complex there are other alternative models which also emerge.

Mr. Shofwan stated that the symptoms of international disorder can already be seen as in the “WHO saga” and also in the Trade War,

in which the tensions between the United States and China already emerged even before the pandemic. So, where are we heading? He quoted what Mr. Aristyo has mentioned, which is that the pandemic accelerates the breakdown of international and regional order. It is hopeful that this is not happening in such a rapid manner. But the state-centered concept of security has already strengthened. On the other side, realizing that we can not survive on weapons and on state alone, states start to securitize health which opens the door for inclusive conceptualization of security which allows for more cooperation.

Mr. Shofwan identified that there is also the extension of transitional security logic on non-traditional security issues, which makes the field become broader and expanding. There is also a shift in the monopoly of authority and capacity. States can not neglect non-state entities, especially with this race on vaccines that really shows. States are racing to cooperate with companies. Recently, Indonesian representatives went to the United States to make a deal with Pfizer. A bit controversial move as Indonesia already has deals with other vaccine producers like Sinovac previously. It creates a lot of confusion but this could be understood in the terms of the securitization of non-traditional security. There is an expansion of the state-centric logic on the on-traditional security fields. Rather than creating a more inclusive understanding of security, there is an exclusive and more state-centric understanding of security. this combination is definitely going to be



**SPEAKERS**

**Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad**

Lecturer at International Relations Department and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center, University of Indonesia




continuously negotiated and Mr. Shofwan thinks that the commitment and consensus to ASEAN Centrality would strongly influence how the combination will play out.

# PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



**Mira Permatasari**  
(Director, The Yudhoyono Institute)



Ms. Mira shed light on post-COVID-19 political-security possible scenarios and presented the discussion in several parts such as background, broader concept of security, three post-COVID-19 possible scenarios, as well as ways forward. As the background, she highlighted recent COVID-19 updates on global and regional situations today. As of 23 November 2020, globally, there have been 58,425,681 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 1,385,218 deaths, reported to WHO. In Shanghai, the government has to shut down the airport again because of other confirmed cases in the airport and they want to prevent more spread. Yesterday, in Japan, more than 2,000 new confirmed cases were reported and a couple days ago, in Mexico, hundred thousands of deaths by COVID-19 were also reported. Mexico is in the fourth with the highest rate of mortality by COVID-19 in the world after the United States, Brazil, and India.

In fact, this pandemic produces more complexities not only to the health sector but also to other sectors, the decrease of world economic growth, and the increase of poverty widened in inequality and many others. Before the pandemic spread, many countries in the world have struggled to reduce inequality and the pandemic is expected to make inequality even worse than before. COVID-19 was likely to push between 88 and 115 million into extreme poverty, those living under two dollars a day around the globe in 2020.

In ASEAN, as of 5 October 2020, COVID-19 has infected more than 700,800 people in the

region. It has claimed more than 17,100 lives, with Indonesia recording the region's highest mortality rate at 4.1 percent. At the same time, COVID-19 has caused more than 30 million people in ASEAN to become unemployed, pushing about 18 million people into poverty, of which 3 million are in extreme poverty. What worries us most is that, if we fail to make corrections, rising unemployment and poverty may persist for a long time. Economy in ASEAN region is expected to contract for the first time in 23 years.

Having such facts, we can conclude that this global pandemic is an actual strategic shock, very rapid. We never imagine that a global pandemic would hit us this severely. We might say that the war against COVID-19 is even harder than the war on terror right now. The enemy is intangible, they do not have face and they are not human at all. It is even more level because the world now is entering into a volatile and unstable new phase. It shows the concept of security has changed tremendously from traditional to non-traditional. We are still at the very early stages of imagining what the post-COVID-19 world will look like.

Ms. Mira continued that amidst the ongoing health crisis, this pandemic has undoubtedly shown that security is undeniably a far more complex notion than terrorism, nuclear threats and military build-ups. A non-state threat, such as an intangible virus, can very much imperil and risk a nation's sense of security. The world just might have become alert that its default security paradigm needs to change



## SPEAKERS

### Mira Permatasari

Director of The Yudhoyono Institute



and focus more on human beings rather than states and institutions. This global pandemic has forced states to fight a different kind of enemy. As a wake up call, human security is relevant more than ever.

Ms. Mira shared her thoughts on three post-COVID-19 political-security possible scenarios. First, if vaccine development is successful and if it is a failure. It is very interesting to see the trends. If vaccine development is successful, how the supply and demand on the global scale will play out. We know that all countries are anxious to get the vaccine. Indonesia has a MoU with Sinovac, with the United Arab Emirates, and many others. The production would be overwhelmed by billions of demands and having the so-called vaccine does not mean this will solve the problem

easily. The question will be: who gets the initial vaccine? How would the distribution go? Who can guarantee? How we ensure that it will not imperil our security.

Referring to Bollyky and Bown (2020), vaccine allocation and distribution reminds us to the theory of “the prisoner’s dilemma.” Hypothesis about betraying a partner offers a greater reward than cooperating with them. Because competition is likely to be awkward rather than cooperation. If the cooperation is there on the surface, but the underlying situation will be based on vaccine nationalism. For example, the United States has Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines right now and they want to produce globally. Yet it is important that they make sure that their stocks are sufficient for their people. Thus, they would prioritize their



own security.

Countries may bid against one another, driving up the price of vaccines and related materials. Some governments may also desperately strike short-term deals for vaccines with adverse consequences for their long-term economic, diplomatic, and strategic interests. The bottleneck would be during the period when global supplies of COVID-19 vaccines remain limited, driving a foreseeable delay in access for some people. The ugly truth is none of the 48 ongoing vaccines developed by ASEAN countries.

We also need to see the other side of the coin, what if the vaccine fails? There is still limited discussion and discourse of this pessimistic view of vaccine development. It is not a fascinating topic to discuss because we are trying to be optimistic. It will definitely affect the global economy, increasing more poverty, recession, increasing tensions of politics and security. It will be a global conflict or global clash of resources and scarcities. In short, it will be a mega disruption in all mankind.

Ms. Mira elaborated the second scenario about Post-Trump United States – China relations and its impacts to Southeast Asian region's peace and stability. She argued that the pandemic has caused irreversible changes, such as the geopolitical environment which has seen rising tensions among major powers (United States and China over ASEAN). But, economically speaking, both the United States and China are suffering severely from the pandemic. Whichever country bounces back stronger

and faster from the economic crises will be in a major position to assert global leadership and shape the post-pandemic world.

Ms. Mira emphasized that the United States and China are involved in a battle for soft power and influence. The United States and China have both made significant efforts to assist ASEAN countries dealing with the pandemic. While the United States has offered a variety of medical expertise and funding, most recently in a dialogue with ASEAN health ministers. China has flown in medical equipment and personnel to almost all ASEAN countries. The pandemic gives China an opportunity to attempt to showcase its model of authoritarian state capitalism. But, a lot of ASEAN elites perceive the rise of China as a revisionist power for ASEAN countries. In short, perhaps ASEAN countries need more of the United States in the region to balance China.

In the regard of Chinese vaccine-mask diplomacy, will it be a "free lunch"? Of course, there is no "free lunch". ASEAN should not forget what is happening in the South China Sea. We often find this issue difficult times with too little progress, even during the pandemic. There were several assertive actions carried out by China such as in April 2020, China officially named 80 islands and other geographical features in the disputed waters. Chinese coast guards have sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat in the region. During the 36th ASEAN Summit in June 2020, ASEAN Leaders stressed the importance of 1982 UNCLOS in settling the

South China Sea dispute. Further, in July 2020, China conducted naval drills in Woody Island, the largest natural Chinese-held feature in the South China Sea and host to major military facilities in the Paracel Islands. As a result, two United States Navy Aircraft entered the area to challenge China's maneuvers. Indonesia's military also conducted a naval exercise in the North Natuna Sea, widely seen as a response against China's claims in that area.

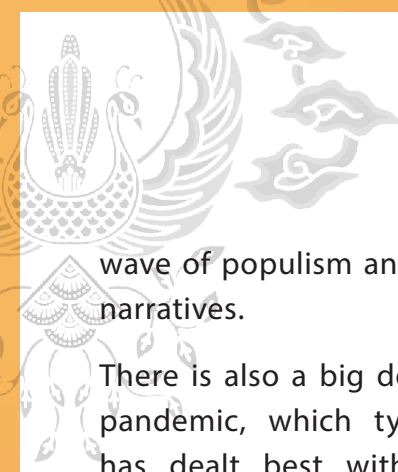
Ms. Mira stressed that dealing with 'major power' like China, one country alone would not be enough. Instead of taking a bilateral path, ASEAN Member States should reunite and deal with China. Collaboration and cooperation between ASEAN Member States should be strengthened to prevent any kind of domination from major power in the region.

The third possible scenario is democratic regression and the rise of populism narrative. In recent years, there has been a global trend toward authoritarianism. In every region of the world, democracy is under attack by populist leaders and groups that reject pluralism. Democracy has been in regression for over a decade and many fear that COVID-19 will accelerate this trend. On every continent, there is a tendency that authoritarian leaders may use the virus as an opportunity to enact authoritarianism or strengthen their grip on power.

Ms. Mira stated that it is a total decline of global democracy. Learning from the hard way, our world perceives the greatest challenges to democracy. In Russia, Putin is bolstering

the country's surveillance capabilities and employing advanced facial recognition software while using the virus as a cover. The United States is wrestling with internal turmoil born out of racial tensions and protests against police brutality, damaging United States credibility to effectively defend the rules-based global order against authoritarian challengers. In Hungary, parliament gave Prime Minister Viktor Orbán the power to rule by decree and banned elections indefinitely. In Africa and Asia, several leaders are using the crisis as an opportunity to move toward authoritarianism or solidify their hold on power. Some leaders put off elections in order to prevent challenges to their own incumbency. Some world's leaders have used COVID-19 as a pretext for curtailing parliamentary oversight and tightening the pressure on political opposition.

Computational propaganda meaning that it is presumed that the states are using big data and advanced technology massively and systematically to shape public opinion. In the case of pandemic, autocratic governments may be falsifying their COVID-19 statistics for the sake of their own interest. Another challenge is the enactment of emergency powers that bypass accountability and oversight procedures will potentially increase the risks of corruption and mismanagement. Countries will face different kinds of problems in tackling their domestic problems. It is predictable that they will tend to be more nationalistic and this could pose further challenges to democracy. The world need to be prepared for another



wave of populism and spread of nationalistic narratives.

There is also a big debate during this global pandemic, which type of political system has dealt best with the COVID-19 health emergency? Is it the democratic government or the autocratic government? Some might say that China is one example of the best practices in dealing with pandemic but countries like New Zealand and Australia have also shown us that democracy could be better in dealing with pandemic. According to the figure made by the Economist stated that in the past 60 years, epidemics have been less deadly in democracies. So, in this case, the type of political system per se does not necessarily determine the effectiveness of handling this pandemic. We often fail to recall the other important factors, which is effective leadership and governance itself.

To end the discussion, Ms. Mira emphasized ways forward that the world does not organize itself, so the world that we aspire must be constructed by the states. COVID-19 produced major and important ramifications for international security and democracy. We should find ways to achieve and balance the two. Competition may occur in the short term, but cooperation is mandatory for the survival of the whole population in the longer term. Global cooperation on vaccine allocation would be the most efficient way to disrupt the spread of the virus.

In the context of ASEAN, given the unprecedented nature of post-COVID-19, it is

important for ASEAN to build and strengthen communication, diplomacy and multilateral partnership. ASEAN needs a crystal-clear post-COVID-19 strategy and direction that places health and human security as the top agenda. Welcoming the United States to balance China in the region, bringing ASEAN Members closer together, and maintaining ASEAN centrality, would be put forward for ASEAN to steer clear of major power interference in the region. In regards to democracy, we need to revisit the quest for a full-fledged democracy into ASEAN's discourse. Moving forward, ASEAN states must acknowledge the need for cooperative and collaborative efforts. She reiterated that ASEAN problems need ASEAN solutions, this will make ASEAN be prepared for any challenges and any kind of possible scenarios that will occur in the political security agenda of the post-COVID-19 era.



# QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

## Questions

### Question 1: Sri Lanka Embassy, Jakarta

In your opinion, will the Post-COVID-19 make Indonesia more dependent on other countries for political security and stability?

## Responses

### Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad (Lecturer at International Relations Department and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center, University of Indonesia):

Mr. Shofwan said that it depends. It is indeed that the pandemic has created the structural condition which enlarges the possibility of a more dependence of not only Indonesia but also any other countries since the way out from the pandemic for now is only seen in the vaccine production. There are very few countries that are able to produce such vaccines and have the ability to distribute it. This situation has definitely created the material condition, the structural condition, or constraint, which further created the possibilities for increasing dependence. Yes, indeed the structural constraint provides incentive to that direction. However, it is also important to always note that states are not passive actors whose action was only dictated by this structural imperative. The key is on how we can diversify our interaction with great powers amidst this pandemic. I think the effort by the Indonesian government to diversify its sources of vaccine shows this understanding that we should not rely on one source of vaccine, we should also try to get other sources of vaccine. If managed well, it could be a way out to minimize the possibility or the constraint of the structure which created the condition for dependence.

Mr. Shofwan also mentioned that the political security aspect is not a multi-dimensional situation. There are different issues and aspects even within this particular dimension. There is a tendency of enlargement of the sector included within the logic of state security, not the acceptance of non-traditional security in the mainstream security issue, but the enlargement of the sector arranged through the traditional security logic. Thus, this will also animate the relationship between Indonesia and others not only in purely or hard security and political sectors, but also in others as seen in the vaccine issue. This, as a consequence, will be efforts to develop industrial policies, as we see vaccine development needs state intervention or resources. Efforts to combat impacts of COVID and also future pandemics will also need a lot of interventions of the state.

Can we escape from the fate of dependency? It depends on the structural constraints. It limits our options, it creates a potential for more dependency, but there are open possibilities in which different policies will create different pathways, and one important aspect is how to ensure that we increase our capacity. We diversify our patterns of relationship in the first place, then we must

ensure that we have enough capacity in strategic aspects of our people's life. It is not really decided whether the structural constraint is going in that direction, but definitely, there are possibilities to mitigate the effect. This is connected to the second question on whether this COVID-19 has been securitized.

**Aristyo Rizka Darmawan (Lecturer at International Law Department and Researcher at Center for Sustainable Ocean Policy, Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia):**

Mr. Aristyo said that it is undeniable that COVID-19 will make every country dependent on one another. Who can imagine the viruses that happened in the food market in Wuhan would make a more significant impact that we could imagine? We are indeed living in a world that is more connected than ever before, more connected beyond our imagination. Mr. Aristyo quoted Professor Kishore in his book *The Great Convergence* that gave an analogy that in the 18th century, each and every state is living in different separated boats and international law therefore exists to maintain those small boats not to clash with one another. Now, in the 21st century, all countries are living in one big boat because we are facing a lot of common challenges together. Pandemics, economics, everything is very connected to one another.

In Mr. Aristyo's perspective, this pandemic will make Indonesia and other states to be more dependent on one another, for instance in terms of economic recovery and the vaccine. It is undeniable that countries, especially developing countries, will become more dependent on others. However, he does not think that it is necessarily a negative sign. In a more positive term, it means that there should be more opportunities for international cooperations between states in order to tackle the challenges together.

## Questions

### Question 2: Noto Suoneto

To all speakers, do you think that the COVID-19 has been securitized? If the answer is yes, does it bring more harm or benefit to international cooperation?

## Responses

**Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad (Lecturer at International Relations Department and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center, University of Indonesia):**

According to Mr. Shofwan, to some extent, yes. Even though we are not seeing military rhetoric in multilateral organizations, there is some degree of securitization in which states see the way their ability to deal with COVID-19 will decide their faith in international relations. That is why

there is a vaccine race. That is why the United States feels very insecure because the situation in the United States is worsening while China is already recovering. Yes, there are some degrees of securitization. Does it bring more harm or benefit to international cooperation? It depends. It is natural that when international order breaks, there is a tendency of rising in insecurity and it creates tensions. The point is how to manage such insecurity and return some degree of order to the situation. There are some potential harms in the form of increasing tensions. If uncontrolled, it can accelerate the breakdown of the international order as illustrated in the conflict between the United States and China in the WHO. But at the same time, it can also accelerate the efforts because by securitization, countries mobilize resources more effectively and we can get vaccines faster. This is better than desecuritizing it and putting it in the hands of the companies because the state sees this as an existential threat and challenge. The point is how to manage good and bad aspects effectively.

**Aristyo Rizka Darmawan (Lecturer at International Law Department and Researcher at Center for Sustainable Ocean Policy, Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia):**

Mr. Aristyo emphasized that he is not an International Relations scholar, so he views this not from the really theoretical aspect of defining security. But to some extent, yes. COVID-19 has a very huge impact on security both to traditional security, in a sense that states might use the pandemic to enforce or to assert their military claim, like China to the South China Sea, when the other countries are perceived weaker during the pandemic. So in terms of traditional security implications of pandemic, yes, it is very relevant. I think the response to security challenges is different to the issues.

**Mira Permatasari (Director of The Yudhoyono Institute):**

Ms. Mira emphasized that this pandemic is a wake up call for everyone and an opportunity to leverage cooperation in a global world. But how the world could cooperate is another question. In realist perspective, this would not be easy to see more cooperation. She quoted from the Foreign Affairs that it depends on how the world would like to take this chance to cooperate one to another. Ms. Mira said that she is trying to be optimistic even though we know that it is hard to cooperate on a global scale. But everyone wants to have safety first for better cooperation.

## Questions

**Question 3: Anne Quenot (French Embassy)**

Can the development of minilateralism undermine ASEAN Centrality in the security area?

## Responses

**Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad (Lecturer at International Relations Department and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center, University of Indonesia):**

Mr. Shofwan said that it depends. In the economic realm, we understand the idea of ASEAN Minus X and that is an interesting idea to try in the security aspect, only with the agreement between ASEAN countries and the understanding that this minilateralism would not be the sign that ASEAN Centrality is weakening. If minilateralism is useful to provide ways out from stagnation and to ensure that ASEAN can still be working, then that will be good.

**Mira Permatasari (Director of The Yudhoyono Institute):**

Ms. Mira emphasized that the character of minilateralism is quite appealing since it has only functional cooperation and quite loose regionalism which is quite different from multilateralism. But when it comes to dealing with major powers, for example China, it is going to be a potential risk that the major power will lead the discussion for their own interest/agenda. Will it undermine ASEAN centrality? We have a very unique characteristic in ASEAN Member States. We have to acknowledge that some of the states are quite close to China rather than the others. Some of our member states have problems in the South China Sea. It depends on how we perceive this ASEAN centrality.

## Questions

**Question 4: Sri Lanka Embassy, Jakarta**

To all speakers, how will the recent signing of RCEP between ASEAN and several other countries impact the political security in the region?

## Responses

**Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad (Lecturer at International Relations Department and Executive Secretary at ASEAN Study Center, University of Indonesia):**

Mr. Shofwan stated that RCEP will be an interesting development. It is interesting to wait for Biden's response to this. Whether or not the United States will return to TPP and what kind of arrangement within the TPP will provide to answer the RCEP will be an interesting development.

**Aristyo Rizka Darmawan (Lecturer at International Law Department and Researcher at Center for Sustainable Ocean Policy, Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia):**

Mr. Aristyo stated that it might create more stability in a sense that when states have more economic cooperations, people will demand a peaceful and stable region. With RCEP, as one of the biggest economic cooperations, there will be more stability and states will demand more stability and security in the region.

**Mira Permatasari (Director of The Yudhoyono Institute):**

Ms. Mira said that the implementation of RCEP actually signaled the enhancement of ASEAN-China relations. Even though it is initiated by ASEAN, it will be dominated by China in this case. Unfortunately, we don't know yet whether in the Biden administration the United States will be back in the region as we are trying to get more influence in the region. But in this case, it depends on how China actually plays its roles and giving influence in the RCEP because China dominated the ASEAN countries markets.



### **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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