



Discussion Report Talking ASEAN

on

Reinforcement of the US Alliance Networks
in the Indo-Pacific:
What Should be Anticipated?

Jakarta, August 22nd 2023



Introduction

On Tuesday, 22 August 2023, The Habibie Center (THC) convened the Talking ASEAN seminar entitled **“Reinforcement of the US Alliance Networks in the Indo-Pacific: What Should be Anticipated?”** The seminar featured **Dr. Richard J. Heydarian** (Senior Lecturer, the Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman), **Major General Dr. Rer. Pol. Rodon Pedrason, M.A.** (Vice Rector, the Republic of Indonesia Defense University (RIDU)), **Dr. Edy Prasetyono** (Professional Staff of International Relations and Diplomacy, National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas)) – and was moderated by **Mabda Haerunnisa Fajrilla Sidiq** (Researcher of ASEAN Studies Program, THC).

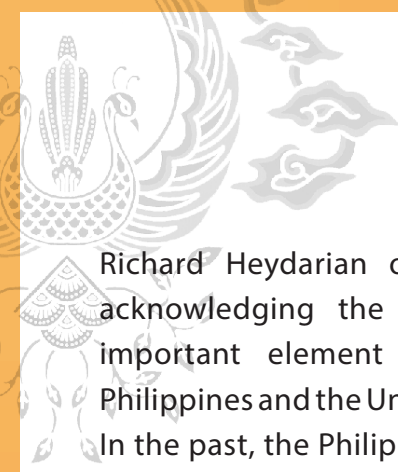
The objectives of this seminar were to: (a) comprehend the US strategy in reinforcing defense cooperation with its alliance networks in the region; (b) analyze potential implications of robust US defense cooperation with its allies on regional security dynamics; and (c) explore ASEAN's strategy of maintaining the region as a peace, freedom, and neutrality zone amidst geopolitical competition between the US and China.

This discussion report summarized the key points of each speaker as well as the following questions and answers session.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Richard Heydarian
(Senior Lecturer, the Asian Center,
University of the Philippines Diliman)



Richard Heydarian opened the session by acknowledging the China question as an important element in understanding the Philippines and the United States (US) relations. In the past, the Philippines was known to be a dismissed deputy sheriff of the US in Southeast Asia. However, Heydarian argued that with the current foreign policy under President Marcos Jr., the Philippines is currently in the state of implementing the hedging strategy.

Elaborating more on the concept of hedging strategy, Heydarian took a reference from Prof. Kuik Cheng-Chwee's scholarly work. According to the literature, hedging strategy is understood as a combination of instinctive and conscious commitments to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects under a situation of uncertainties and high stakes. Heydarian then argued that the Philippines is indeed facing uncertainties, especially in the South China Sea dispute. Moreover, as he took into account the Philippines' strategic position as both China's neighbor and the US' ally, he also reinstated the Philippines' circumstance to be in a high-stake situation due to the emerging "cold war" between the US and China. With the fact that the Philippines, along with many developing countries in the world, is implementing a hedging strategy, the Philippines is carrying out a proactive approach, looking for opportunities to balance power and not reversibly taking sides between the US and China. Amidst this strategy the country had carried out, President Marcos Jr. also made

sure that it would not prevent the Philippines from developing robust and healthy relations with China as much as possible.

Heydarian further contended that multi-vector foreign policy was no stranger to the region's political chessboard and was rooted in the great power competition. Prior to touching upon the Philippines' situation, he drew two other examples of multi-vector foreign policy implementation from India and Vietnam. India, despite being a part of the Quad, is also known to be a part of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) grouping and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As for Vietnam, the country also tried to balance its relations with great powers by approaching China and the US lately.

Seeing the Philippines' multi-vector foreign policy in retrospect, the country had once implemented such a policy during the Iraq War in the mid-2000s. As a US ally, the Philippines joined the US-led force in Iraq and in 2004, the US pressured the Philippines troops to stay at the same time when a Filipino was taken hostage by Al-Qaeda and threatened to behead the hostage if the Philippines did not withdraw its troops. This eventually brought Former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the Philippines' leader at that time, to reach out to China and it had just marked the beginning of the Philippines-China relations golden era for the next five years.

The multi-vector foreign policy of the Philippines regained its spotlight following the Scarborough Shoal crisis in 2012. Heydarian

highlighted the term as a turning point for the Philippines for two important reasons; (1) the US' refusal to intervene militarily on behalf of the Philippines and leaving the Philippines on its feet to survive, and (2) China's aggressiveness in pushing its claim way into the Philippines's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which eventually culminated in China's occupation and administrative control over the reefs that very year.

Heydarian pointed out that the Scarborough Shoal crisis had further led to a strategic soul-searching situation for the Philippines. For instance, Former President Benigno Aquino III embraced Former US President Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia approach and strengthened the alliance through inking the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2014. He also noted that the latter was critical for the Philippines to guarantee the US' proactive response to assist the Philippines in achieving credible defense capability to prevent China's maneuver in the Scarborough Shoal and other land features in the South China Sea.

Heydarian continued to elaborate on one, if not the most drastic dynamic in the Philippines-US-China relations following Rodrigo Duterte's leadership. He initially explained Former President Rodrigo Duterte's unique perspective on the Philippines' over-reliance on the US, when the country needed to grow more of its relations with China for economic benefits. This perspective eventually brought the former president to carry out a policy that was seen as more similar to some of the

Philippines' Southeast Asian counterparts – approaching China – and even to threaten to end the country's alliance with the US.

Current Philippine President Marcos Jr. has turned the table following the end of Duterte's presidential reign. Heydarian brought up that President Marcos Jr., and other elected Filipino presidents in a 20-year span, always managed to make some kind of effort to reach out to China in order to make a reasonable accommodation to the country – at least during the first years of their presidency. Yet, President Marcos Jr.'s visit to China had somehow left him with the impression that China would not offer the Philippines much, given China's underwhelming investment realization, the absence of both prospective mega infrastructure projects, and lack of compromise in the South China Sea for the Philippines.

Following the disappointing visit to China, President Marcos Jr.'s visit to Japan was deemed to be another turning point for his diplomatic maneuver. Apart from this, the visit had allowed the EDCA to be fully implemented after the stagnation during President Marcos Jr.'s predecessor. Heydarian emphasized the visit as a mark for the Philippines' increased search for a new trilateral security alliance – or the JAPHUS (Japan, the Philippines, and the US) security alliance. He later suggested that recently President Marcos Jr. had been moving even closer toward the US and hedging against China.



The Philippines' maneuver was visible in the war games between the country and the US during April and May 2023. For instance, the EDCA had been expanded to include four new bases in the Philippines – three bases in the Philippines' northern part of Luzon near Taiwan. Heydarian saw that this maneuver had made China become extremely worried because not only the EDCA provided the US access to the South China Sea but also Taiwan's southern

maritime region. In addition, the US access to the Philippines' closest marine detachment to Taiwan in Mavulis might also be open under the condition of war happening over Taiwan in the near future – making the Philippines an important part of US policy in Southeast Asia and its calculus on Taiwan strategy and emerging cold war against China.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Major General Rodon Pedrason
(Vice Rector, The Republic of
Indonesia Defense University (RIDU))









Implication to ASEAN Principles

- weaken ASEAN members commitments in upholding “ASEAN Unity and Centrality
- breach ASEAN from inside but also will fragment it
- ready for any possible conflicts between its people and with China
- the US will proceed to approach other ASEAN member states



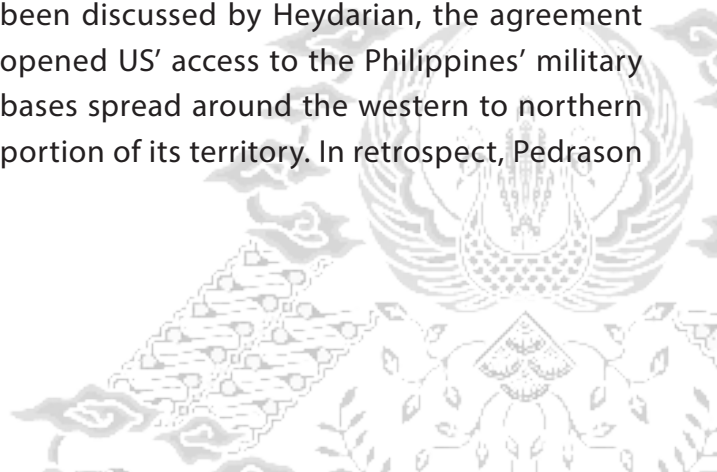
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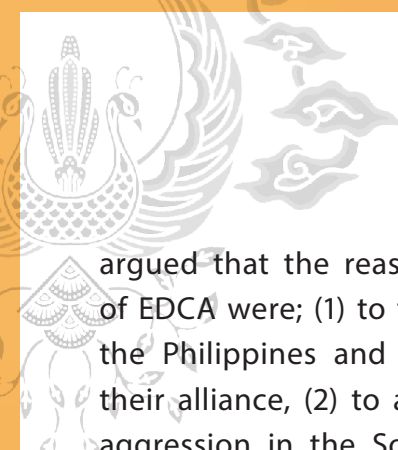
Rodon Pedrason started his remarks by arguing that the China-US rivalry was a timeless topic. He further argued that the US' concern toward China could be based on two important reasons; (1) ideological incompatibility with China and, most importantly, (2) the US' hegemonic status, given the US' prominent national interest in the global political chessboard. Moreover, China reaching superpower status due to its economic growth would only be a matter of time. Pedrason also contended that China's ideological orientation would not only threaten the US' hegemony but also the global order.

In preventing the hypotheses from actualizing, the US would reinforce its alliance networks in the relevant region. In that matter, the Philippines is one of the US' most important allies in the region where China could possibly

dominate and topple US power. Apart from being its important ally, the Philippines is important for the US as the countries have been going through a number of ups and downs for decades. Amidst these ups and downs, what Pedrason called a 'special relationship' has managed to endure. Furthermore, he also argued that, amidst the current geopolitical landscape, the Philippines has been in a dilemma of choosing either standing with a traditional ally (the US) or a newfound respect for friendship based on security and economic priorities (China).

Pedrason further discussed the EDCA between the Philippines and the US. As had been discussed by Heydarian, the agreement opened US' access to the Philippines' military bases spread around the western to northern portion of its territory. In retrospect, Pedrason





argued that the reasons behind the signing of EDCA were; (1) to function as a vehicle for the Philippines and the US in modernizing their alliance, (2) to address growing China's aggression in the South China Sea, and (3) to respond better on the possible natural disasters in the Philippines.

In elaborating his arguments on the reason for the signing of EDCA, Pedrason first highlighted how the South China Sea is a critical flashpoint in the region. The disputing parties, including the Philippines, Vietnam, and even Indonesia had tried to change the name of the maritime area – for instance, Vietnam tried to change it to the East Vietnam Sea. As for the Philippines, the dispute became more critical than ever, especially in 2012. In that specific year, China managed to seize control of the Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines and it had led Manila to take action to file its complaint against Beijing's action in the arbitration tribunal in The Hague.

Pedrason also reminded that, in the same year, Typhoon Yolanda also struck the central part of the Philippine Archipelago. In responding to this disaster, the US military showed a critical response in delivering supplies, kits, and especially performed evacuation in the region stricken by the typhoon. This response exhibited by the US reminded both governments of the benefits that the alliance could offer.

For both of the countries, the EDCA could provide rooms for the construction of facilities in those military bases to be utilized by both

countries, especially for prepositioning the equipment and rotating forces. Echoing what Heydarian previously discussed, Pedrason explained that the signing of EDCA was also meant to facilitate the long-term modernization of the Philippine Armed Forces. Both governments of the Philippines and the US had initially agreed to the lease of five military bases. However, the implementation of EDCA was delayed on the grounds of legal challenges. These challenges were, however, resolved in early 2016 when the Philippine Supreme Court approved the pact.

As had also been mentioned by Heydarian during his remarks, the reign of Former President Rodrigo Duterte became a challenge in the full utilization of the Philippines – the US alliance. However, the current President Marcos Jr. has brought the relations to an even closer distance than before. Pedrason noted that among the milestones made in both countries' relations during President Marcos Jr. include the enhancement of EDCA. The effort to leverage the alliance was reflected in the addition of four new bases within the EDCA, which were added this year.

Not only the enhancement of EDCA marked the renewal of commitment of the Philippines and the US but also both countries' common concern toward potential flashpoints in the region. Through his perspective, Pedrason saw granting the US access to four new locations, especially in Palawan and Northern parts of Luzon, reflect the contingencies that concern the Philippines and the US. These concerns



were especially directed toward possible clashes in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Pedrason also acknowledged the Philippines' strategic location in the region. For the US, the Philippine Archipelago could guarantee the US' strike capability that its bases in Okinawa and Thailand could not provide such capability in an emergency situation. The waterways in the region could provide the US with flexibility and multiple opportunities to engage with actors in both Northeast and Southeast Asia. Although the Philippines – the US agreement would be seen as provoking and endangering regional peace and stability in China's optics, in Pedrason's own perspective, the armed conflict over the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait could possibly be prevented in the near future if the parties make the efforts to avoid the conflict.

Pedrason stated that China-US competition has become a precedent in the Indo-Pacific region. This could be rooted in the fact that China, whose economy has been on the rise in the last decade, and the US are competing within a single global economic arrangement with different physical systems. Last year, with a goal to face the Chinese threat in the Indo-Pacific, the US released its Indo-Pacific Strategy. Pedrason argued that the strategy indicated the US' continuous interest and the effort to dispel the uncertainties that its allies are facing in the region. Among the strategies that constitute the US' Indo-Pacific Strategy include enhancing the free and open

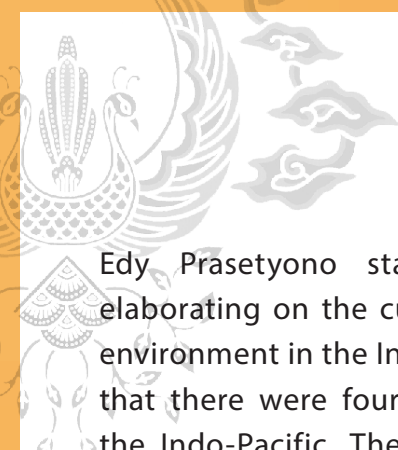
Indo-Pacific, driving Indo-Pacific prosperity, boosting Indo-Pacific security, and building regional resilience against transnational threats.

As Pedrason concluded his remarks, he expressed his concerns on some possible implications to ASEAN from the Philippines–US alliance. First, the alliance could possibly weaken the ASEAN Member States' (AMS) commitment to upholding ASEAN centrality and unity. Second, the alliance could also possibly breach the ASEAN Charter on absenteeism of external power in the territory. Moreover, by offering access to its military bases, Pedrason perceived that the Philippines allowed the emergence of possible conflict between the US and China. Lastly, the defense cooperation with the Philippines could open the door for the US to proceed with its approach to other AMS.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Edy Prasetyono
(Professional Staff, International Relations
and Diplomacy, National Resilience
Institute (Lemhannas))



Edy Prasetyono started his remarks by elaborating on the current regional strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific. He explained that there were four main characteristics of the Indo-Pacific. The first characteristic was the presence of regional geopolitical and geo-economic rivalries, which Prasetyono saw to be more intensified these days. These rivalries are visible in the current intensified and full-scale competition between China and the US, as well as its allies, at many levels and fields – such as technology and economy.

As he tapped into the issue of China–US rivalry, Prasetyono argued that several aspects in the region could potentially serve as the hotspots of the said major power rivalry. Among these aspects would include strategic issues and the proxy wars, which involved cyber competition, Taiwan, and the South China Sea. In terms of security arrangements, Indo-Pacific grand strategy, Australia-UK-US (AUKUS), Quad, and bilateral alliances could also serve as potential hotspots. Not only in the fields of regional security and stability, the rivalry could also potentially emerge from the different economic arrangements initiated by both China and the US, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).

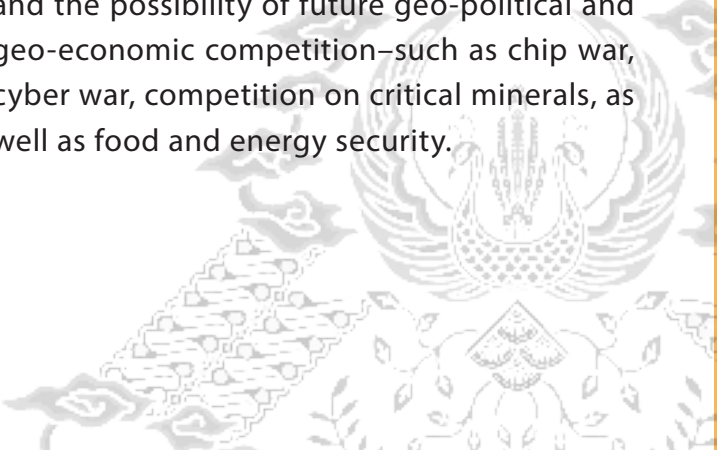
Prasetyono also viewed the Indo-Pacific as a heavily militarized region. The calculation of combined defense spending for procurement of the actors in the Indo-Pacific reached up to US\$ 400 billion in air and naval forces, which was projected beyond the national border. In

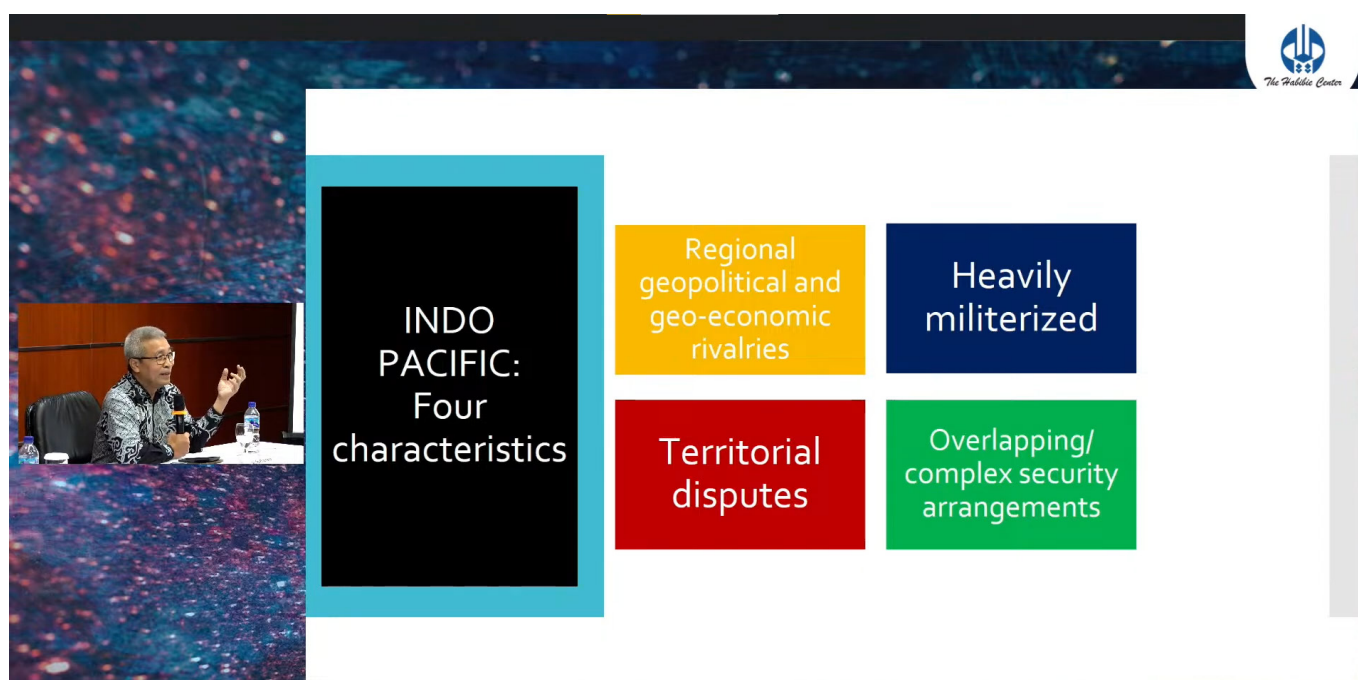
fact, the combined number of procurement spending in the Indo-Pacific has been twice larger compared to those in Europe.

The third characteristic that Prasetyono put forward was the presence of territorial disputes. Aside from the South China Sea dispute, the region had previously witnessed a number of other disputes, including those between Indonesia and Malaysia, the Philippines and Malaysia, Japan and South Korea, and Japan and China. From his perspective, territorial dispute is among the most complex issues in the Indo-Pacific as it would often involve national identity, history, and pride.

The fourth characteristic was the presence of complex or overlapping security arrangements. As Prasetyono took ASEAN as an example, he argued that ASEAN had a number of security platforms under its belt, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM). Beyond ASEAN, this characteristic was also visible in the presence of AUKUS defense technological collaboration.

Prasetyono later discussed the risks and steps for ASEAN to anticipate these possible risks in the region. On this matter, he foresighted a number of risks in the region which included the emergence of a new cold war, potential arms race, proxy and hybrid war, the regional division, the pressures burdened upon ASEAN, and the possibility of future geo-political and geo-economic competition—such as chip war, cyber war, competition on critical minerals, as well as food and energy security.



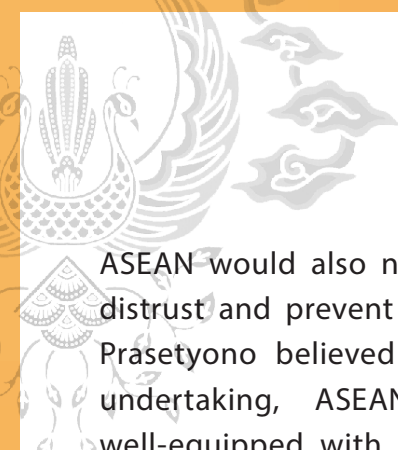


Aside from the ongoing China-US rivalry which could potentially bring the world into a cold war, Prasetyono emphasized several regional and global developments on said risks. For instance, a potential arms race. As it marked the world's departure from the traditional approach to defense and security, Japan has recently developed a new policy that allows the country to have striking capability and signed an agreement with Australia, the US, the UK, and France which would provide room for Japan to co-utilize the military facilities.

As Prasetyono touched upon the regional division, ASEAN emerged as a proper example to visualize such a risk. It is visible that particular AMS like Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar seem to exhibit a pro-China gesture, while some others like Singapore and the Philippines exhibit a pro-US gesture, and

the others seem to keep their neutral stance towards major power rivalry in the region. This division has put ASEAN in such a pressure and complex situation to reach what ASEAN called consensus and, thus, a decision.

In order to anticipate the aforementioned possible risks, Prasetyono perceived that it would be necessary for ASEAN to undertake a number of important undertakings. Firstly, ASEAN would need to strengthen its shared commitment to not be involved in strategic rivalry and proxy war. This shared commitment was reiterated by the ASEAN leaders, including Indonesia's President Joko Widodo during his visit to Australia a few months ago.



ASEAN would also need to reduce strategic distrust and prevent war. In his perspective, Prasetyono believed that to carry out this undertaking, ASEAN has actually been well-equipped with the presence of ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The future endeavor for ASEAN would be to maximize the utilization of AOIP to reduce strategic distrust, thus maximizing ASEAN's engagement with other regional actors and institutions and maintaining its relevance and position in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Extending to those undertakings mentioned by Prasetyono, he also provided some other options for ASEAN in preventing the region from being dragged into the rivalries and ramifications resulting from the alliances with external actors. Despite the voices underestimating the ASEAN centrality and mechanisms for being slow-paced, ASEAN's external partners and the arrangements beyond the groupings often still called out the importance of ASEAN centrality. With such respect given to this mechanism, Prasetyono conveyed that ASEAN would still need to maintain its centrality and utilize its own mechanism.

Secondly, ASEAN would also need to employ the multi-alignment strategy with a high degree of confidence. In this sense, Prasetyono explained that ASEAN should exhibit its flexibility in developing initiatives and arrangements with other actors. As for the third option, ASEAN should exhibit pragmatism in the sense that ASEAN should see opportunities in taking advantage of the rivalries in the region. Fourthly, ASEAN should have its agenda set on strategic issues of common concern. In this matter, Prasetyono saw the importance for ASEAN in discussing more on the hard security issues and following the development of the pressing issues in the region. Therefore, it could adjust its initiatives on these issues, such as the South China Sea issue and the development in military building in the Indo-Pacific. Lastly, ASEAN should explore traditional approaches—namely balance of power, security regime, and the security community to handle pressing issues in the region.



QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Questions

Hanif (University of Indonesia):

In the following months, Indonesia will have a general election. Based on the last two general elections, there were many internal clashes between the candidates or their supporters. Would either China or the US use this situation to achieve their interest in ASEAN? Especially for the security matter, how would it affect ASEAN? Also, how would ASEAN anticipate the possible impact?

Responses

Edy Prasetyono (Professional Staff of International Relations and Diplomacy, National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas)):

In touching upon the issue of the upcoming general election in Indonesia, Prasetyono showed his optimism that the election would be intervention-free. Taking into account Indonesia's importance in the region, he asserted that it would only be natural if these great powers maintained their relations with Indonesia, thus upholding an interest to establish good relations with the country. Moreover, maintaining good relations with Indonesia would also influence the course of the regional dynamics.

Questions

NN (Captain of Sri Lanka Navy, RIDU):

As Indonesia is the 2023 ASEAN's Chair, what would your recommendations be to help Indonesia maintain the ASEAN Way, especially ASEAN Centrality, in this kind of environment?

Responses

Edy Prasetyono (Professional Staff of International Relations and Diplomacy, National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas)):

Prasetyono first expressed his thoughts on ASEAN Centrality using an academic lens. He explained that there are three perspectives of the so-called centrality. First of all, ASEAN would be central as it is geographically located at such a strategic location – between Asia and Australia, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Secondly, ASEAN would be central as it is caught in the middle of China–US rivalry. Ultimately, ASEAN would be central because ASEAN is a driving force in a broader

regionalism in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, Prasetyono conveyed that it would be necessary to see and choose in which light the ASEAN Centrality would be defined as.

He suggested that if ASEAN centrality were to be defined in broader regionalism optics, it would be important to look back at the reasons for its establishment. Instead of economic grounds, ASEAN was first established based on conflict prevention and conflict management grounds. Hence, AMS could not afford to be divided to maintain its centrality. Unlike politics, Prasetyono argued that economic relations could be developed even by two conflicting parties – for instance, China and Taiwan – as these two aspects exist in two different dimensions.

Aside from unity, Prasetyono also saw two other factors as important to maintain ASEAN centrality – decision-making process and leadership. As he tapped into the decision-making process, Prasetyono reminded us that ASEAN has been strongly criticized for its slow-paced mechanism in responding to many issues. Furthermore, he saw this as a part of the reasons for ASEAN centrality being undermined.

Prasetyono then tapped into the leadership factor and emphasized the importance of leadership in times of crisis. He then reflected on the importance of correlating Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship to the Myanmar Crisis. Prasetyono argued that despite what it has been seen from the outside, Indonesia has been proactive in taking measures for ASEAN to step up its role by creating dialogues with the junta. For instance, the Indonesian foreign minister had reached out to one of the junta representatives as soon as the coup took place in 2021.

Questions

Ibrahim:

Prior to addressing his question, Ibrahim first commented on the Myanmar Crisis and the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (COC) negotiation. Since Indonesia started its tenure in December last year, he argued that the country has not been able to resolve the Myanmar crisis under its ASEAN Chairmanship. While on the COC negotiation he conveyed his concern that, although China has agreed to continue the discussion, the process could still take up for an unpredictable period of time.

Question: "The AMS are seemingly more inclined to the geo-economic rather than geopolitical agenda. With the great power constellation in the region involving the US' IPEF and, prior to that, China's BRI, how would the adjustment be made to cope with the development?"

Responses

Edy Prasetyono (Professional Staff of International Relations and Diplomacy, National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas)):

Prasetyono first asserted that both IPEF and BRI were not actually part of the ASEAN cooperation framework. Hence, the interpretation and adjustment would be solely dependent on the individual AMS' needs and initiatives. However, among the criticisms that the IPEF has been facing from the AMS includes the prospective practical benefit. He assessed that the criticisms from the AMS might be rooted in the absence of clear incentives in terms of opening the market and investments in their countries.

Questions

NN (Captain of Sri Lanka Navy, RIDU):

Question: "With all the new developments and security challenges the Philippines is facing, how could the country push ASEAN's basic principles, like ASEAN Way and regional unity, in its future engagement?"

Responses

Richard J. Heydarian (Senior Lecturer, the Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman):

Heydarian answered the question by first emphasizing that ASEAN needs to steer clear of false equivalence of what problems are taking place in the region. From what he observed, ASEAN saw there is a similar level of threat that the US and China are posing to its regional integrity and national sovereignty. He then asserted that the threats in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait were actually emanating neither from the US, Japan, nor South Korea, but coming from a particular great power that the world might be aware of.

By putting the said facts forward, instead of choosing sides in the great power rivalry, ASEAN needs to maintain the shared commitment to ASEAN Centrality. Nevertheless, Heydarian expressed his concerns on ASEAN maintaining the ASEAN Centrality. Firstly, what he saw was the concept of ASEAN centrality is rather an aspiration than a reality.

Secondly, although ASEAN's external partners acknowledged the importance of ASEAN centrality, he questioned the trust these external partners put in the grouping's embodiment of ASEAN centrality. Therefore, he perceived that it is important for ASEAN to effectuate the ASEAN centrality

in its decision-making process.

In discussing the embodiment of ASEAN centrality, Heydarian brought up the COC negotiation process. Although the COC negotiation has been taking a long time to process, he viewed that China's uncooperative gesture has made it almost impossible to move on further. ASEAN needs to reassess its position – whether it actually sits in the driver's seat along the process – and whether the COC negotiation should have employed the minilateral mechanism rather than involving the whole AMS within the process. In his perspective, reaching unanimity on sensitive issues in ASEAN would be rather difficult if China has excessive influence over particular AMS.

In discussing the Philippines' effort to push ASEAN's basic principles, Heydarian perceived that President Marcos Jr. has acted differently to his predecessor – Former President Rodrigo Duterte. He argued that President Marcos Jr. has put the vision of ASEAN centrality embodiment within the Philippines' foreign policy after a long time. President Marcos Jr. has linked the Philippines to fellow ASEAN neighbors, such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam, to strengthen bilateral and minilateral connections, as well as create an environment for honest conversation on whether ASEAN is actually driving the dynamic in its own region.

Questions

Michael Brown (US Embassy in Indonesia):

Prior to addressing his question, Brown expressed his agreement with the discussion revolving around the Philippines' increasing its agreements with the US military. However, He pointed out that aside from the Philippines, Thailand is also US' ally and Singapore is the US' very close security partner in ASEAN. He also argued that as the US–Filipino alliance has predated China's rise by about 50 years, he did not agree that the alliance would be the one that threatens ASEAN when Lao PDR, Cambodia, as well as the recent situation in Myanmar, are being used and leveraged by China to weaken ASEAN by pulling off bilateral allies. In supporting his argument, Brown brought up the situation of the COC negotiation.

Question: "Some of the AMS have a large number of immigrant workers working in Taiwan. In these past few months as well the world has seen non-combatant evacuation operations in Sudan, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. With Indonesia having almost 300,000 Indonesian workers in Taiwan, how does the Cross-Strait crisis affect Indonesia's foreign policy and interests?"

Responses

Rodon Pedrason (Vice Rector, the Republic of Indonesia Defense University (RIDU)):

In regards to Taiwan and the Cross-Strait issues, Pedrason mentioned that although Indonesia does not have any diplomatic relations with Taiwan and vice versa, Indonesia and Taiwan are bound to a commendable economic and socio-cultural linkage and cooperation. Both entities have their economic and trade representatives in each of their territories thus saw this as a reflection of both entities' efforts in respecting the freedom of thinking, expression, and action. In the light of respecting these freedoms, Pedrason also highlighted Indonesia's effort to respect the freedom of Indonesian citizens.

Indonesia would always be in the position of maintaining good relations and opening its door for communication with Taiwan while also respecting China. In the possible case of Chinese threats to Taiwan, he explained that Indonesia would never agree to any threats made to any parties. As it is stipulated within Indonesia's constitution, it would never allow colonialism and occupation to occur. Indonesia would also never agree to any party taking any measure that would threaten the life of many.

Edy Prasetyono (Professional Staff of International Relations and Diplomacy, National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas)):

Prasetyono found the discussion on the issue of migrant workers' protection in the case of possible escalating conflict between China and Taiwan as very complex. The discussion on this matter has been ongoing, especially after the war started between Russia and Ukraine. As he continued, Prasetyono assessed that the absence of diplomatic relations with Taiwan adds up as another complexity in finding a way out of this question.

In touching on the possible protection scenarios, Prasetyono explained that Indonesia would initially coordinate with Taiwan and China. Furthermore, Indonesia would also maximize its coordination with the countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Through this scenario, it is hoped that Indonesia could create jurisdiction and transport Indonesian citizens in Taiwan into their territories before the Government of Indonesia transports them into Indonesian territory.



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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