



Discussion Report Talking ASEAN Webinar

on

AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific: Balancing or Provoking?

Jakarta, November 12th 2021



Introduction

On Friday, 12 November 2021, The Habibie Center convened the Talking ASEAN Webinar entitled **“AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific: Balancing or Provoking?”**. The webinar featured **Dr. Malcolm Davis** (Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute), **Dr. Curie Maharani Savitri** (Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University), and **Lieutenant Colonel Frega Wenas Inkiriwang, Ph.D.** (The Indonesian Army, Lecturer at the Republic of Indonesian Defense University). Also, this event was moderated by **Luthfy Ramiz** (Researcher of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center).


The objectives of this webinar were to: (a) discuss the recent development of the establishment of a trilateral security partnership by Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) called AUKUS; (b) identify the interests of the alliance in the Indo-Pacific region through the establishment of AUKUS; and (c) analyze the AUKUS and its implication on the dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region.

This discussion report summarized the key points of each speaker as well as the question and answer session that followed.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Malcolm Davis
(Senior Analyst,
Australian Strategic Policy Institute)



Dr. Malcolm Davis began his presentation by highlighting the significance of the AUKUS agreement. Cooperating with the US and the UK as a tripartite, AUKUS represents technology sharing and elevation of strategic cooperation against China's increasingly assertive posture, particularly in the maritime domain. The AUKUS terminated the deal that was made beforehand with France, resulting in a major diplomatic crisis following its announcement. Dr. Davis argued that the decision to switch its procurement source was reasonable, given the slow pace and ballooning cost of acquiring the diesel-electric submarine (SSK) with the French Naval Group.

Australia's decision to pursue a nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) was momentous, considering such a move has not been considered before. Apart from SSN, AUKUS cooperation also highlights other defense technologies, including quantum technology, artificial intelligence (AI), cyber, and autonomous systems that constitute the critical and emerging technology in the security field.

A few days after its announcement, Australia and the US convened the Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) that signaled a greater US presence in Australia in the future. AUKUS's announcement was also followed by the discussion in Quad Summit that decided to emphasize emerging and critical technology such as

space cooperation with Japan and India. To better socialize its significance, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has contacted Australia's key partners in the Indo-Pacific, including its ASEAN counterparts.

Dr. Davis contended that AUKUS represents a fundamental shift in Australia's strategic policies. This shift can be seen in several aspects, including: (1) the decision to pursue a more advanced SSN, instead of relying on SSK; (2) AUKUS' initiative to open and deepen the range of possible cooperation with key partners in the future, together with AUSMIN and Quad; and most importantly (3) AUKUS delivers a message to China about the resilience of free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, the presentation refuted China's claims that AUKUS will violate the non-proliferation regime and provoke an arms race. The development of SSN, a nuclear-powered – not a nuclear-armed submarine – will comply with the non-proliferation treaty (NPT). On the other hand, Dr. Davis pointed out that China is the one that rapidly expands its nuclear capability from 280 deliverable warheads in 2020 to at least 1000 in 2021, based on the 2021 China Military Power Report by the US Department of Defense. It is also on China's side to instigate an arms race by expanding its SSNs, ballistic-missile submarines, and People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy that overtakes the numbers of the US Navy.

Without China's growing military threats, Dr. Davis stated that AUKUS would have not ever been agreed upon in the first place. Instead,



SPEAKERS

Malcolm Davis


Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute



AUKUS can be seen as the 'achievements' of China's more nationalist and aggressive posture that threaten regional stability and increase the risk of future war. That in result, compels Australia, the US, and the UK to conduct such an arrangement.

Moving on to Australia's defense policy, it is evidenced by the 2020 Defense Strategic Update and Force Structure Plan that Australia recognizes that the possibility of 'high-intensity military conflict in the Indo-Pacific is less remote than at the time of 2016 Defense Whitepaper.' The latest Defense Strategic Update also explicitly noted that the 'coercion, competition and grey-zone activities', primarily carried out by China, is currently happening and requires greater attention.

The presentation was then continued by an assessment on the challenges and opportunities of AUKUS ahead. As of capability challenges, the first of eight planned SSNs will not be able to operate until 2034-2040. During the course of fully acquiring the submarine, Australia will need two 'Life of Type Extensions' (LOTEs) to sustain the operation of the existing six Collins-class SSKs. Furthermore, the new SSK capability to complement the SSK or lease the older SSN, such as a US Navy Los Angeles class SSN or a Royal Navy Trafalgar class SSN is still absent. These gaps reveal the vulnerability of the risk over growing geopolitical tension and potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait.



However, the 'AUKUS moment' also provides an opportunity to be exploited, namely to make a shift in defense policy by accelerating capability acquisition. Other cooperation aspects such as undersea warfare capability, AI, hypersonics, and space allow rapid acquisition that favor 'small, cheap, and many' rather than 'large, complex, and costly' paradigm. In short, AUKUS opens the opportunity to 'fast track' a broad range of technological acquisitions that could accelerate the Australia Defense Forces (ADF) shift from traditional settings.

Dr. Davis contended that 'AUKUS moment' needs to be recognized and exploited, not only to accelerate the defense acquisition, but also to accept the challenges that emerge from deepening defense diplomacy with Australia's key partners, ASEAN included. Australia should better engage its neighbour in ASEAN and the Southwest Pacific to explain the significance of AUKUS, notably as the means to respond to China's threats, so that the opportunity is not wasted.

Australia has to effectively carry out its diplomacy both from the Department of Defense, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and through collaboration with think-tank to portray AUKUS as a positive development for regional security. The soft power surrounding AUKUS has been overshadowed by the debate over SSN. Aside from its nature as a technology agreement, AUKUS also serves as an important geopolitical partnership that aims to strengthen a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This aspect can only be realized by advancing better defense diplomacy outside of AUKUS, including critical defense partnerships with ASEAN and Southwest Pacific countries.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Curie Maharani Savitri
(Faculty Member,
International Relations Department
at Binus University)



Dr. Curie's presentation shed light on the implication of AUKUS to regional security dynamics in ASEAN. Dr. Curie's presentation started by explaining the significance of its announcement. First, it solidifies the view that Australia is going back to its past position as the US's dependent ally. Second, it captures the higher risk of regional conflict flashpoints, particularly in the South China Sea and Taiwan. And third, it further shows the disunity of ASEAN. While Indonesia expressed deep concern over the potential arms race and power projection, countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Singapore signaled their support towards the trilateral initiative. The varying attitude illustrates ASEAN's weakening centrality and growing concern over its sidelined role in managing regional security.

Furthermore, the presentation explained the possible repercussions of AUKUS and Quad to ASEAN. Dr. Curie clarified that a nuclear-powered submarine is not a nuclear weapon which the latter violates the non-proliferation regime. Equipped by cutting-edge technology, nuclear-powered submarines can operate for up to two months and transverse into critical areas, including the South China Sea and Taiwan. Although AUKUS might not directly instigate a nuclear arms race, its announcement further pushes ASEAN's maritime countries between China and the US coalition. Ultimately, AUKUS can also increase the possibility of an arms race, power projection, and geopolitical risk over the upcoming conflict in the region.

Dr. Curie also presented data that suggest asymmetrical military power between the US and China, particularly in the Pacific. Although by Dr. Curie's account the US Navy still outpaces the PLA, the US is burdened with the areas that it needs to cover. On the other hand, the Chinese Navy is more focused on an operation across Asia-Pacific. Subsequently, Dr. Curie also presented the data that compares the relative imbalance between military power in the region. Based on triangulation of military dynamics determinants, the presentation concluded that the US' defense economy still outperforms China. However, in terms of potential, China could possibly take the US's position in the future, given its current phase of modernization that puts it in the category of 'arms-build-up', acquiring various high-end technology such as unmanned undersea vehicle (UUV), hypersonic missiles, and anti-ballistic missiles.

In contrast, ASEAN Member States' (AMS) military capability is pale in comparison to the two superpowers. Indonesia is the only country that can stand a chance and is still on the status of 'military maintenance' which means Jakarta is hardly able to modernize its infantry. Only Singapore falls into the category of 'arms build up' and acquiring more than 16% of the latest technology for its infantry. On the polar opposite side, the Philippines currently is under the category of 'arms reduction'.

In addition to Taiwan, Dr. Curie contended that the South China Sea will also be the next flashpoint in the Indo-Pacific. The data set

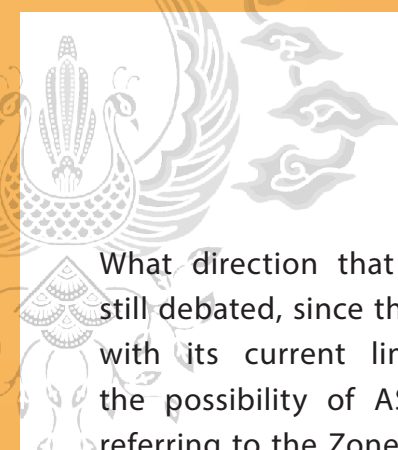
**SPEAKERS****Curie Maharani Savitri**

Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University



compiled by Dr. Curie reveals that there has been an alternating pattern in a maritime conflict where the numbers and parties involved escalate during the past ten years. The conflict also involved many parties, not only claimant-states but also external non-claimants such as the UK and the US. This trend further exposes the limitation of ASEAN in managing regional security, as evidenced by the slow progress of the Code of Conduct (COC). Although the condition will not directly lead to open war in the near future, the status quo is clearly tilting to China's preference. With relations that ASEAN still closely maintain with China, it is also less likely that the conflict will tip the scale that is threatening claimant states' survival. Considering their military imbalance, open war is clearly not an option.

To respond to the situation, ASEAN can consider several steps. Countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have gone closer to the US to balance China. However, improving military power does not necessarily equate with taking sides with either superpower. The data presented suggested that in the past twelve years, there are nine countries that reduce their dependence on the US' weapons. Countries with the largest reduction are the Philippines and Thailand. Whereas, on the other end of the spectrum, Indonesia opts to increase its dependence on China's weapons, although it is not significant. As for Malaysia, its weapon dependence on the US has decreased lately, but at the same time, its dependence on China's weaponry has increased. In short, the data showed that ASEAN countries still maintain their hedging policies between the US and China.



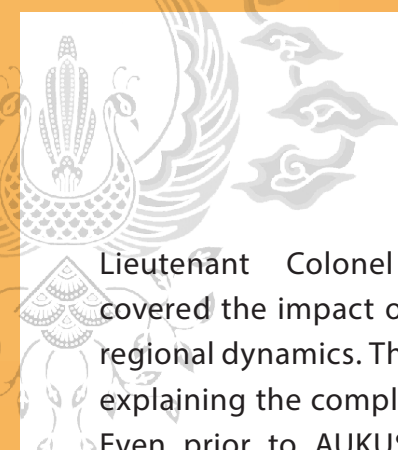
What direction that ASEAN should take is still debated, since there is not much to offer with its current limitation. Some discuss the possibility of ASEAN being neutral by referring to the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). ASEAN can also redefine what it means by neutrality since over years practicality of the concept has been shifting from keeping outside power in the region to inviting other powers in the region with their relations centered on ASEAN. The idea of 'armed neutrality' can also become a consideration to keep the safety from the ongoing geopolitical competition.

To recap the discussion, Dr. Curie restates that the events following AUKUS's announcement reveal ASEAN's disunity and deficit of military capability. It is important for ASEAN to revitalize itself and continue its persistence that international law should be the main tool to solve problems, instead of the military. In defense matters, it is important to begin formulating the concept of 'armed neutrality' which contains enough deterrence for keeping conflict of a superpower at bay, but defensive enough to be judged neutral. To mitigate the limitation resulting from diverging interests, ASEAN might also pursue a way through minilateralism to prevent open conflict among and involving superpowers in the future.

PRESENTATION FROM THE PANELIST



Frega Wenas Inkiriwang
(The Indonesian Army,
Lecturer at the Republic of
Indonesian Defense University)



Lieutenant Colonel Frega's presentation covered the impact of AUKUS on Indo-Pacific regional dynamics. The presentation began by explaining the complexity of the Indo-Pacific. Even prior to AUKUS, the region has been complex with an increasing number of actors and multilateral arrangements committed by different actors, such as the Quad, Quad Plus, Five Eyes Intelligence, Five Power Defense Arrangement, and most importantly ASEAN. The presentation then underscored the key area of AUKUS cooperation, which not only covers the prestigious nuclear-powered submarines, but also other areas including cyber capability, AI, quantum technology, as well as improving undersea capability. With this cooperation, AUKUS could be a game-changer for modern warfare that involves multi-domain operations and battles.

The key significance that regional countries take from AUKUS is the improvement of undersea capability. With nuclear-powered technology, submarines can operate in a significantly longer period—approximately five months at sea. The submarine equipped with this technology can also operate more quietly since not all countries have military devices advanced enough to detect SSNs. With AUKUS, Australia will obtain eight nuclear-powered submarines and become the 7th country to possess the technology.

The presentation was then followed by a brief outlook on how AUKUS impacted key countries in the region. France felt betrayed due to the absence of prior consultation before the

AUKUS announcement. It felt 'back-stabbed' considering the previous support that France has lent to AUKUS countries, such as joint-exercise with Quad and joint-statement that the country has made with Australia three weeks prior to cancellation of their contract. A similar experience was also shared by Indonesia after the 2+2 meeting with Australia in Jakarta, several days prior to the AUKUS announcement.

China reacted negatively towards the initiative. However, its reaction is highly anticipated since AUKUS, in the first place, is directed against China's increasingly assertive posture. China posits several claims to denounce the tripartite, including violation of the nuclear-proliferation treaty, showing 'Cold War mentality' and 'rule of the jungle' in geopolitics, and its nature for containing China's influences. In a similar vein, Russia also denounced AUKUS for threatening a nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Russia's main concern is the capability of nuclear-powered submarines and the commitment that Australia made with Western allies. Beijing and Moscow's responses correspond to each other and further exhibit the close relations between the two countries. During the past few years, Lieutenant Colonel Frega stated that Russia has approached China to gain better access to Sakhalin Island, Bering Strait, and the Arctic Ocean. Likewise, their alignment also provides China better access to the Arctic.





SPEAKERS

Frega Wenas Inkiriwang

The Indonesian Army, Lecturer at the Republic of Indonesian Defense University (RIDU)

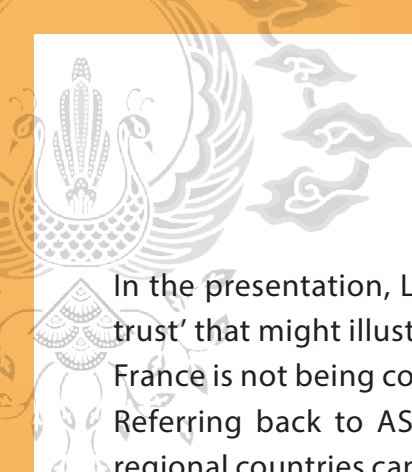


Moving on to one of the Quad countries, Lieutenant Colonel Frega stated that there's a sense of Japan being left out by the AUKUS arrangement. Only Japan is among the four Quad countries which do not possess such technology. There was some consideration for Washington to also provide similar assistance for Tokyo. However, the steps might be complicated since there will be another expectation to share it with other allies, such as South Korea.

On the outlook, AUKUS further solidifies the trend of unpredictable security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS can be a game-changer that other regional countries must adjust to, including ASEAN. Through the arrangement with Australia, the US attempts to expand and maintain its influence in the Southern hemisphere, leaving countries like

Japan and New Zealand apart. In the end, the varying responses only showcase that each country will pursue its interest, despite the commitment to regional architecture.

AUKUS might not directly trigger the nuclear arms race, but it highlights other means of deterrence that are being used in the conflict. Other than nuclear weapons, other technology may include subsonic and hypersonic missiles that are also having a detrimental impact. The threat that China, as well as Russia, sensed might invite the potential arms race in the region. Furthermore, the dynamics are also becoming more complicated with the involvement of external parties, such as France and the UK post-Brexit. Additionally, UK's consideration of becoming the Quad's new dialogue partner further increases the complexity of the situation.



In the presentation, Lieutenant Colonel Frega also introduced the concept of a 'layer of strategic trust' that might illustrate the situation surrounding AUKUS. Despite its long history as the US' ally, France is not being consulted about AUKUS. This trend shows different priorities from Washington. Referring back to ASEAN, Lieutenant Colonel Frega argued that there is no 'silver bullet' that regional countries can use to amend the situation. On further development, countries in the region might also be divided into different camps that correspond to their strategic interests. The first is regional countries that still want to maintain their non-alignment and neutrality, most notably ASEAN. The second group is the US and countries that are affiliated with it that want to curb China. And third is China that is supplemented by Russia that wants to keep its influence.



QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Questions

Tangguh Chairil and Fiana Isnaeni (Jakarta):

How could Australia and France do some remedies to their relations after the AUKUS circumstances? Would it be also provoking the European Union (EU) as well in regards to AUKUS?

Responses

Malcolm Davis (Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute):

In spite of the major crisis, Dr. Davis insisted that France knew the deal was falling behind schedule and ballooning on its cost, which in the end provided an exit point for their deal. When the US and UK offer a better prospect, it is only natural to switch for a more efficient deal. French indeed feel backstabbed because of the arrangement. However, Dr. Davis believed that the two countries still needed each other to secure their interest in the Indo-Pacific. 'It takes two to tango,' Dr. Davis uttered. There needs to be recognition from both sides that the previous deal went wrong and focus on other areas of cooperation that can be cultivated. For instance, the upcoming collaboration in long-range strike capability, command and control technology, and other range of deals besides the SSN. In the end, both countries' interests are similar and will soon engage in a dialogue. As for the EU, Dr. Davis stated that the two sides have maintained cordiality for a long time. AUKUS will not impact the EU at large, especially with more pressing security issues that the EU needs to prioritize.

Frega Wenas Inkiriwang (The Indonesian Army, Lecturer at the Republic of Indonesian Defense University):

To get back into a good relationship, Lieutenant Colonel Frega stated that other layers of trust are needed. In this regard, the US, as well as the UK, could serve an intermediary role that can bridge two countries. After all, all parties have built layers of strategic trust over decades, such as their joint operation during the invasion in Iraq, foreign operation in Afghanistan, and many more. As long as there is a commitment from the US position as the "big brother" and a country with stronger power, re-engagement is forthcoming.

Questions

Kang (Jakarta):

There is no uniformity in how ASEAN's countries respond to AUKUS. Will there be a unified statement from ASEAN in regards to AUKUS?

Responses

Curie Maharani Savitri (Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University):

Dr. Curie argued that AUKUS and Quad by themselves will not really affect much to ASEAN. ASEAN was not a solid group, to begin with, and latest development only exposed this fact. Over decades in managing their internal conflicts, it is evident that each country has their respective interests and it is normal. However, ASEAN needs to display its integrity to the outside. In this regard, the problem does not exclusively originate from a minilateral arrangement like the Quad, but also Chinese influence on some of ASEAN's member states.

Questions

Kang (Jakarta):

Based on the different reactions, will it impact ASEAN's solidarity and consensus when it comes to future external challenges?

Responses

Curie Maharani Savitri (Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University):

The answer will depend on the context of the issue. AMS do not share a similar interest in the South China Sea, not all the members are claimants and the stakes differ from each of the members. However, the main task of ASEAN is to remain consistent with the principles it has proposed in the past, such as the ZOPFAN and Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). At the core of the principles are ASEAN's persistence in resolving security issues with peaceful means and upholding international laws. Although in the past the Philippines had 'bypassed' the South China Sea matter to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, it still goes within the same path that the predecessor has taken.

Questions

Kang (Jakarta):

Judging from the recent development of the QUAD and AUKUS, how do they affect ASEAN?

Responses

Curie Maharani Savitri (Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University):

Quad and AUKUS represent the current trend where ASEAN is facing great power competition more directly in the region. To respond, ASEAN not only needs to maintain its unity but also go beyond by redefining the key concepts which are contained in ZOPFAN and TAC. ASEAN needs to be more selective on what principle might better address the situation and what principles that ASEAN can refrain from using.

Questions

Luthfy Ramiz (The Habibie Center):

What do you think about the evaluation that AUKUS does not go hand-in-hand with TAC?

Responses

Curie Maharani Savitri (Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University):

The approach of both countries may differ. However, Dr. Curie stated that we must have more understanding of why Australia ends up with AUKUS. Australia has a sense of encirclement by China and it leads the country to pursue a different strategic approach. ASEAN, on the other hand, too focuses on domestic matters, rather than the Indo-Pacific. Whether AUKUS contradicts the TAC, Australia still puts in many efforts to maintain good relations with ASEAN countries. Although the step has not directly alleviated Indonesia's concern over the arms race, it clearly shows Australia's goodwill to do so. After all, Canberra still view ASEAN as the central player in managing security challenges in the region.

Malcolm Davis (Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute):

To emphasize Australia's rationale, Dr. Davis explained that AUKUS came as a response to China's threats. China's economic and military growth has gone exponentially since the era of Deng Xiaoping. Unfortunately, it did not consider undertaking reform and providing space for the people to decide the government. If only China had the courage to let the Taiwanese decide their own future, stay with the promise to President Obama to not militarize the South China Sea, not casterizing the Uyghurs, China might have risen prosperously without any repercussions. Yet instead, China still committed these things, embracing the hawkish 'wolf warrior diplomacy',

militarizing islets in the South China Sea that as a result become a threat for countries in the region. Dr. Davis believed that China actually had the opportunity to rise in a different path, but it took otherwise on becoming a revisionist power that challenges rules-based regional order. Australia as well as other countries were not prepared to see a free and open Indo-Pacific subsumed into Chinese hegemony. Such a scenario should be avoided in the future.

Questions

Indra Wisnu Wibisono (Jakarta):

What is the impact of AUKUS on us Indonesians? Is it a threat to us? What will we do because of the increase of Australian undersea capability near our territorial waters?

Responses

Frega Wenas Inkiriwang (The Indonesian Army, Lecturer at the Republic of Indonesian Defense University):

The key points of AUKUS are the improvement in Australia's undersea capability. From a realist perspective, Jakarta might perceive it in a negative way, especially when one of Indonesia's submarines recently sank because of technical issues. It is only natural to feel threatened. However, Indonesia can mitigate it by increasing its defense diplomacy with Australia. Despite the AUKUS, Australia-Indonesia security relations can still improve, as demonstrated during the last 2+2 meeting. As long as their interests align, their room for cooperation can still be filled. For example, by learning about the technological transfer from the US to Australia. Over decades, the two countries remain partners despite the up-and-down.

Questions

Tangguh Chairil (Jakarta):

What strategy of defense diplomacy do you think Indonesia should do to all parties in the region, to prevent the worst-case scenario? As we're still struggling even to make ASEAN solid.

Responses

Frega Wenas Inkiriwang (The Indonesian Army, Lecturer at the Republic of Indonesian Defense University):

Lieutenant Colonel Frega argued that making a strategy that can be used by all parties is utopian, there is simply no 'silver bullet' that can answer the scenarios. However, Indonesia could maximize its potential by improving its defense diplomacy which also incorporates public diplomacy and military instruments. With the latest development of regional security, it is clear that the center of gravity lies in the military capability of one's country. It will highly define the geopolitical development after AUKUS.

Malcolm Davis (Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute):

Dr. Davis recalled a statement made by former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, in which he said that Australia wanted to ensure "security from Asia", rather than "with Asia." Dr. Davis argued that such a statement is fundamentally wrong. Australia has built and maintained security relations with Asia for a long time. If not, Australian Foreign Minister Marisa Payne will not put such an effort to allay regional concern over AUKUS. Australia views China as a common threat, yet it also understands that ASEAN has a different approach in dealing with it. The common ground needs to be achieved.

Questions

Indra Wisnu Wibisono (Jakarta):

Is it the right time for ASEAN to start being independent and think about itself by making a defense joint-pact between ASEAN member states as a balance of power between China and AUKUS?

Responses

Curie Maharani Savitri (Faculty Member, International Relations Department at Binus University):

Before analyzing the possibility, the assessment needs to define what it means by 'independent'. Whether it is economy, security, or both are interlinked, especially in the context of Southeast Asia. But in Dr. Curie's assessment, 'independent' can be interpreted as being neutral and impartial as ASEAN has envisioned. However, a defense pact is something that has been ruled out by ASEAN. Not only because ASEAN members have nothing to offer from their current capability, but its security interest also differs from each other. Moreover, Indonesia's 'free and active' principle eschews

such a binding arrangement. Instead of making a defense pact, Dr. Curie suggested ASEAN create a condition of 'armed neutrality' by making ASEAN's neutrality acknowledged by other powers. However, the concept still needs to be elaborated, including from academia. Indonesia has the potential to formulate the idea that could entice other countries to bandwagon the idea.

Frega Wenas Inkiriwang (The Indonesian Army, Lecturer at the Republic of Indonesian Defense University):

Dr. Frega argued that being independent is not easy, considering the different capabilities and interests between each of AMS. Especially during this time, when ASEAN is still focusing on domestic issues in order to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. If ASEAN wants to make a defense pact, it needs sufficient resources and economy, which ASEAN is still lacking. Even if the military capability of all ASEAN nations were combined, it is still pale in comparison to any major power. If ASEAN decides to invite an external country, it will even complicate matters. Instead, ASEAN over years has carried out the 'Omni-enmeshment' approach that engages collectively by regional platform. This approach is also complemented by bilateral engagement. Even this approach is not always ideal amidst growing disunity. In short, the scenario is still elusive since ASEAN still focuses on managing domestic politics. Not to mention that each of AMS has a different focus for their foreign policy, especially with the partnership that has been committed previously, such as treaty alliance and minilateralism. But, reformulating how ASEAN deals with conflict should be considered, given the limitations caused by existing principles, such as non-intervention that is being showcased in the Myanmar case.

Questions

Arrizal Jaknanihan (Jakarta):

AUKUS thus far has gained mixed receptions from AMS. How do you think it could complement the security needs for the region, given the fault lines?

Responses

Malcolm Davis (Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute):

Dr. Davis stated that Asia has been one of Australia's priorities and thus strengthening relations with ASEAN constitutes part of Canberra's strategy. The problem with armed neutrality that wants to be pursued is that sometimes ASEAN is not given a choice for going neutral. China could unilaterally impose its will. Therefore, both sides should cooperate in the field of defense and security. Dr. Davis reiterated the importance of AUKUS for not only showing acquisition of nuclear-

powered submarines, but also other areas that can become potential with ASEAN, such as AI, space, and maritime domain awareness. For ASEAN, it is clear that it still wants to balance the relations between the US and China. To begin, Australia can focus on small steps with deliverable outcomes.

Questions

Taufan Samudra (The Habibie Center):

How could Australia in the long term build trust in ASEAN in regards to defense diplomacy?

Responses

Malcolm Davis (Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute):

Dr. Davis stated that trust shouldn't be something that is under challenge on this issue. AUKUS is not an arrangement that was purposely made to threaten and weaken ASEAN. The cooperation was specifically directed against China's threat, not Indonesia or other ASEAN countries. Dr. Davis did not quite understand why there is a mindset that AUKUS derails Australia's trust in ASEAN. It is about strengthening capability to protect Australia's as well as ASEAN's interest. It is about strengthening the resilience of the Indo-Pacific region, something that ASEAN also wanted. The key issue is not only how to restore trust, but how to navigate AUKUS to strengthen the relationship between Australia and ASEAN because the initiative represents a positive development in the region, Dr. Davis stated.



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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