BACKGROUND

In an era defined by dynamic shifts in geopolitics, technological advancements, and emerging threats, the imperative for a concerted approach to maintain regional stability has never been more pronounced. It is within this context that Asia Collective 2024 was executed; an initiative designed to be a crucible of ideas and strategies in safeguarding the interests of our nations.

INTRODUCTION

1. The theme for Asia Collective 2024 was Defence Cooperation and Strategic Partnerships for Regional Stability, and was held on 5 November 2024 from 8am to 3pm at St. Regis Jakarta, Indonesia. The event was attended by 191 ticketholders.

2. The objectives of Asia Collective 24 were:
   a. Fostering Collaboration. Leveraging the platform for collaborative endeavours among thought leaders, policy-makers, and experts to address shared security challenges.
   b. Innovation and Adaptation. Exploring innovative solutions and adapting to evolving threats through the incorporation of emerging technologies.
   c. Knowledge Exchange. Facilitating knowledge exchange to enhance the collective understanding of regional security dynamics.
   d. Strategic Formulation. Contributing to the formulation of actionable strategies that strengthen regional cooperation and resilience.

AUDIENCE METRICS

3. A total of 358 participants registered for Asia Collective 2024, a free-to-attend event, via the dedicated Google registration form available on Linktree and the website. The event saw a total of 222 participants, of which;
   a. 41 foreigners, including from Belgium, China, France, Iraq, Malaysia, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, UAE, UK and USA.
   b. 12 officials from embassies and government/diplomatic organisations.
   c. 10 staff of international media and press.
   d. Senior military and law enforcement officers, government officials, experts and academics, researchers, business and industry leaders and international organisations, in order of attendance numbers, made up the bulk of the participants.

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SPEAKERS PROFILE AND TOPICS

4. Anastasia Febiola S.
Research Coordinator and Manager, Semar Sentinel

Opening Remarks

At the 2024 Asia Collective forum in Jakarta, Ms. Febiola pointed out the importance of Defence Cooperation and Strategic Partnership within Southeast Asia amid the concerning trends in global and regional security contexts. She highlighted conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon and the Red Sea as a reminder of potential threats closer to home, in this case the Asia-Pacific region, which could have catastrophic consequences if not addressed proactively. Ms. Febiola emphasised that within the region, Southeast Asia also faces unique security challenges, including territorial disputes and non-traditional threats, which are further aggravated by the impacts of climate change. In this context, she stressed that defence cooperation is not just beneficial, but rather essential for the region's stability and security, that ranges from simple meetings to large-scale military exercises to build trust, capabilities, and confidence. She argued that the Asia Collective Forum serves as a platform to deepen alliances and explore new ones, fostering both trust and mutual understanding. Ms. Febiola added that through the forum, the participants will be able to discuss innovative solutions, addressing both immediate and long-term security challenges

5. Major General Yusman Madayun, S.IP.
Expert Staff, Office of the Indonesian Defence Force Commander

Keynote Speech

In his keynote speech, MG Madayun underlined the importance of the Asia Collective 2024 as a platform for forging long-term partnerships and as a collective effort to address the rapidly evolving strategic challenges. He highlighted the military, non-military, and hybrid threats such as terrorism, separatism, cyber-attacks, natural disasters, and border violations, which may significantly impact a nation's geopolitical and strategic positioning. MG Madayun emphasised that the forum plays an important role in generating innovative ideas and building consensus across differing viewpoints, hence enhancing defense collaboration in key areas such as cybersecurity, national security, counterterrorism, and technology. He also encouraged participants to develop strategies to strengthen regional cooperation, with the goal of creating a stable and secure Southeast Asia.

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6. Maj Gen Datuk Johnny Lim Eng Seng
Commandant, National Resilience College

Malaysia's Security Perspectives for Regional Stability
MG Johnny Lim's presentation focused on the evolving security threats in Asia Pacific, shaped by historical conflicts, colonial legacies, and the rise of non-state actors. He mentioned that non-state actors and non-traditional security challenges, which often come from unexpected sources, might complicate the geopolitical landscape. He added that issues such as political instability, global terrorism, transnational crimes, and cyber threats are becoming more prevalent, requiring versatile and comprehensive security strategies. He also pointed out that Malaysia's geography, with its extensive land borders shared with four ASEAN neighbors, combined with large maritime and airspace vulnerabilities, makes it susceptible to both traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

In line with its national objectives, MG Lim emphasised Malaysia's commitment to advocate for regional and global peace, which involves active participation in security engagements and fostering close relationships with neighboring countries. He asserted the country's commitment to resolving outstanding issues—such as overlapping claims and boundary demarcations through regional frameworks like ASEAN, which has proven to be a successful platform for cooperation and tension diffusion.

MG Lim also highlighted the importance of trust in maintaining regional security, emphasising the value of intelligence sharing and robust communication networks. He mentioned a key initiative that the Malaysian Government has attempted to pursue, such as the expansion of the Malaysian Defence Cooperation Programme (MDCP) from 13 countries in 2002 to 41 by 2024, including joint exercises and strategic partnerships. He also pointed out that defence diplomacy could be seen through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and bilateral agreements. In his presentation, MG Lim also explained about the increasing cyber threats, which lead to the need for cyber resilience and technological integration, and could be seen as one of the priorities of Malaysia's national security policy.

7. Dr. Chester Cabalza
President and Co-Founder, International Development and Security Cooperation (IDSC)

Strategic Foresights in Philippines Defence Partnerships: Symmetrical balance with ASEAN, China and the US
In his presentation, Dr. Chester Cabalza discussed the importance of the Blue Economy, which highlights the long-term use of ocean resources to promote economic growth, create jobs, and protect marine ecosystems. He mentioned the Philippine Rise and the South China Sea as key locations with valuable but untapped resources, such as natural gas and oil. He further explained the complexities of the

Philippines' maritime disputes, particularly concerning its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and contested areas like the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. According to Dr. Cabalza, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is presented as the key framework guiding the definition of these maritime boundaries. Despite a favorable 2016 ruling from The Hague that rejected China's historical claims, tensions persist due to overlapping claims and interests in the region.

Dr. Cabalza further pointed out the complexities of managing China's growing presence and its assertive claims in the South China Sea. He highlighted how the Philippines has turned to legal mechanisms, such as the Hague ruling, to challenge China's historical claims, emphasising the importance of international law. Despite these legal victories, the situation remains volatile, reflecting the ongoing geopolitical struggle for dominance in the region. Dr. Cabalza also explores the shifting diplomatic strategies of the Philippines. He mentioned that under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, the country sought closer ties with China, setting aside the Hague ruling in hopes of economic cooperation, though these efforts did not result in significant changes. The country's current administration has moved back to traditional allies, renewing defense partnerships with countries like the United States, Australia, and Japan to build a collective deterrence against regional security threats.

To address these challenges, Dr. Cabalza stressed the need for ASEAN unity. He underscored the significance of regional cooperation in mitigating shared security and economic concerns, pointing to ASEAN's potential role in maintaining stability. The presentation also advocates for a balance between trade and security to ensure long-term prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. This balanced approach is seen as vital for managing geopolitical tensions, safeguarding the Philippines' sovereignty, and promoting a sustainable and economically prosperous future in the region.

8. Dr. Alan Chong
Senior Fellow, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Defence Diplomacy in Asia: Between Virtual Friendship and Virtual Deterrence

Dr. Alan Chong's presentation provides an in-depth look into the evolution and importance of defense diplomacy in Asia. He defined defense diplomacy as the cooperative use of military resources and defense ministries to achieve foreign policy goals, emphasising how military maneuvers—once seen as potential threats—have become effective tools for building confidence among nations. The presentation outlined the initial challenges faced by Asian countries related to defense diplomacy. The formation of ASEAN in 1967 represented a cautious move towards preventive diplomacy, seeking to reduce regional tensions without addressing military security issues directly. By 1992, ASEAN's comfort with military cooperation grew, leading to the establishment of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM-Plus format, which includes external partners like the U.S., China, and Japan.

Dr. Chong emphasised ASEAN's strategic approach to preventive diplomacy, underlining the importance of dialogue and relationship-building as means to lower the risk of conflict. This process began with bilateral military exercises and expanded into a network of defense ties that the Indonesian Minister of Defense described as a "spider web." These exercises laid the groundwork for more complex multilateral engagements, showcasing ASEAN's gradual acceptance of security discussions. He also noted that these defense efforts are not solely about traditional military threats; they include non-traditional security challenges such as humanitarian aid, disaster relief, chemical and biological threats, counter-terrorism, cyber defense, and illegal cross-border activities like piracy and human trafficking, such as through Malacca Straits Patrol and the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (INDOMALPHI).

Dr. Chong also discussed the rise of "virtual competition" and "virtual deterrence" in the region, which he refers to as "Top Gun diplomacy." This concept involves leveraging military displays and defense technology advancements to signal strength without engaging in direct conflict. He suggested that defense diplomacy can mitigate these tensions by focusing on confidence-building and cooperation, despite underlying geopolitical rivalries. He discusses how events like defense exhibitions, bilateral military exercises, and educational exchanges can serve as platforms for showcasing technological capabilities and fostering friendly competition. In this sense, ASEAN could serve as a platform to foster a stable and peaceful environment in the region, while addressing both traditional and non-traditional security concerns.

9. Dr. Ma Bo
Assistant Director, China Center for Collaborative Studies of the South China Sea

Evolving Dynamics: Is China-ASEAN Defense Cooperation Moving from Bilateral to Minilateral?

Dr. Ma Bo's presentation focused on the evolving dynamics of China-ASEAN defense cooperation, highlighting the shift from bilateral to minilateral frameworks, such as AUKUS and QUAD. Dr. Ma argued that minilateralism, which involves smaller groups of countries collaborating on specific regional security issues, offers several benefits, including greater flexibility and efficiency in responding to security threats, as well as lower participation costs due to fewer countries being involved. Additionally, minilateral cooperation allows for more targeted collaboration based on mutual interests and specific security challenges, particularly in sensitive areas like counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing.

Dr. Ma also highlighted the growth of China-ASEAN minilateral cooperation from 2016 to 2024. Initially, there were three events in 2016, but by 2023, the number increased to eight, although slightly declining in 2024 due to external factors like the pandemic. The primary themes of cooperation include joint military exercises, humanitarian assistance, defense dialogues, and maritime patrols. This collaboration has evolved to address a variety of security concerns, from counter-terrorism to disaster relief and maritime security. For

example, joint search and rescue drills and anti-piracy operations have become central to ensuring safe navigation in critical regions like the South China Sea and the Mekong.

However, several challenges to minilateralism exist, including differences in threat perceptions among ASEAN countries, particularly regarding China's activities in the South China Sea. The non-binding nature of minilateral frameworks can limit long-term commitment, as there are no formal treaties to enforce these agreements. Additionally, the selective nature of minilateral partnerships may create feelings of exclusion among non-participating countries, leading to concerns over elitism. Dr. Ma added that the influence of external powers, particularly the United States, also affects the strategic calculations of ASEAN members.

Dr. Ma discussed the strategic implications of China's growing role in Southeast Asia, which could reshape the regional balance of power, especially in light of the US-China competition. He suggests that minilateral security cooperation could expand in the future, particularly in areas like cybersecurity, maritime domain awareness, and high-tech fields such as AI. To address these challenges, he recommends managing diverging interests among ASEAN members, focusing on non-controversial cooperation areas like disaster relief, and building confidence through communication channels like hotlines. He also advocates for reinforcing ASEAN-led security mechanisms to ensure that ASEAN remains central to the region's security initiatives.

10. Major General Dr Oktaheroe Ramsi S.IP., M.Sc.
Dean for the Faculty of Defense Strategy, Republic Indonesia Defense University

Indonesia at the Forefront: Enhancing Regional Stability through Confidence-Building and Defence Cooperation.
MG Oktaheroe Ramsi's presentation discussed the critical role of defense cooperation and strategic partnerships in addressing the complex security challenges within the Asia-Pacific region. Dr. Ramsi highlighted how modern threats, such as geopolitical tensions, cybersecurity risks, terrorism, and maritime disputes, transcend national borders and demand collaborative solutions to ensure regional stability. He elaborated the emerging risks, including advancements in unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), artificial intelligence (AI), and hybrid warfare, noting that these technologies are reshaping the security landscape and requiring adaptive, unified responses.

He further explained that defense cooperation could enhance security, particularly by fostering collective crisis responses, building capacity among nations, and improving interoperability to handle these challenges effectively. Dr. Ramsi underscored Indonesia's pivotal role in promoting regional stability through its "Free and Active Foreign Policy." He describes how Indonesia, as a founding member of ASEAN, has addressed critical security issues such as terrorism, piracy, and transnational crimes.

Dr. Ramsi also provided an in-depth look into the importance of defense diplomacy as a modern tool for fostering partnerships. He highlighted the role of education, research, and

joint initiatives, citing the Republic of Indonesia Defence University as a key institution in building trust and collaboration through joint research, policy exchanges, and seminars. He stressed the role of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in reducing tensions, preventing conflicts, and fostering trust among nations, such as the ASEAN Defense Interaction Program. He also acknowledged the significant contributions of civil society organisations in addressing non-traditional security issues through advocacy and community engagement.

In conclusion, Dr. Ramsi reiterated that the Asia-Pacific region is at the center of evolving security, political, and economic challenges, which need coordinated action. He emphasised the vital role of defense cooperation and CBMs in achieving regional stability and fostering positive diplomatic relations. Indonesia's leadership, as articulated by Dr. Ramsi, exemplifies how collaboration and proactive policies can address these multifaceted challenges. He called for continued prioritisation of mutual understanding and partnerships to ensure a secure and prosperous future for all nations in the region.

11. Panel discussion
moderated by Anastasia Febiola S.
Research Coordinator and Manager, Semar Sentinel

The panel discussion began with a kickstarting question to address the elephant in the room: the increasing tension in the South China Sea, particularly the confrontation between China and Philippines. He believes that China's approach stems from a desire to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity, suggesting that dialogue and a mutual understanding of historical and strategic perspectives are essential for ASEAN members to navigate the conflict's complexities. Dr. Ma highlighted the importance of closed-door diplomacy between Manila and Beijing, using the example of China and Malaysia's successful bilateral talks, as it provides a space for open exchanges, facilitating understanding and reducing tensions. Additionally, Dr. Ma advocated for multi-level dialogues, including official channels, Track 1.5, and Track 2 diplomacy, to foster trust and cooperation.

Meanwhile, Dr. Cabalza discussed both idealistic and realistic approaches. He noted that while open dialogue and people-to-people engagement can bridge divides, the reality of international politics—with its competing strategic interests—complicates these efforts. Nevertheless, he underscored the need to respect international law and sovereignty to achieve regional stability. Dr. Cabalza further emphasised that both China and the Philippines,

as signatories to the UNCLOS, are legally obligated to respect its provisions. He also pointed out a gap between rhetoric and action, observing that while both countries often stress the importance of a rules-based international order, their actions sometimes do not align with this commitment.

MG Lim reiterated Malaysia's diplomatic commitment, stressing a preference for peace, open trade, and the ASEAN way of consensus and non-interference. He outlined Malaysia's priorities for 2025, including the formal inclusion of Timor-Leste in ASEAN, while acknowledging the enduring complexities of the South China Sea dispute. Similarly, MG Ramsi discussed ASEAN's cohesion and Indonesia's role in promoting intra-regional cooperation. Furthermore, Dr. Chong viewed ASEAN as a mechanism to cool down tensions without necessarily resolving them, such as the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea and military confidence-building, which help manage disputes and prevent escalation, even if a definitive solution remains elusive.

In response to the question about when a country should assert its posture to defend its sovereign interests, particularly in situations where the application of international law is rather unclear, MG Lim discussed the importance of maintaining territorial integrity while also emphasising that military action should be seen as a last resort. MG Ramsi further added that ASEAN countries should focus on collaboration through joint military exercises to build mutual trust and understanding. Engaging in such exercises with nations like China and the United States helps promote regional stability through military diplomacy.

The panel also discussed the involvement of new technologies like AI and data analytics in enhancing the stability of defence partnerships. Dr. Chong highlighted the challenges of addressing cybersecurity and digital defense within ASEAN, noting that the cyber domain affects all sectors, including business and diplomacy. Dr. Chong stressed the importance of early discussions within platforms like ADMM to prepare for these evolving challenges and avoid misunderstandings.

Dr. Cabalza emphasized the importance of addressing the implications of AI and cyber technologies, especially for digital natives from Generation Z and Alpha. Afterwards, Dr. Ma asserted the importance of the US-China dialogue on AI, particularly regarding nuclear weapon decision-making, where AI could potentially misinterpret threat perceptions. Dr. Ma also emphasised the need for a clear definition and protocol regarding the use of force in cyberspace, suggesting that China and ASEAN could play a significant role in establishing such frameworks.

MG Lim emphasised the complexities of distinguishing between a cyber-attack and cyber warfare, noting that while many cyber-attacks are commercial in nature, they can still severely impact critical infrastructure, such as transportation. Drawing from his experiences in Malaysia and South Korea, he emphasised the importance of rapid responses, strong systems, proactive measures, and the need to recognise patterns in cyber threats, especially those tied to geopolitical events, to better prepare for future risks. From Indonesia’s perspective, MG Ramsi voiced the need for collective action among ASEAN countries to address the increasing threat of cyber-attacks. He highlighted Indonesia’s effort to create a dedicated cyber service within the military. While still under discussion, this initiative aims to strengthen Indonesia’s cyber defence.

In discussing the current defence white papers from various states in Southeast Asia, Dr. Cabalza pointed out the role of the military in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), especially following the recent Super Typhoon in the Philippines. He also stressed the importance of modernising the military and Coast Guard to strengthen disaster response, sovereignty defence, and economic recovery efforts. He also called for a "whole-of-society" approach, with collaboration between defence sectors and citizens, and stressed the need for international cooperation to improve resilience and preparedness.

Meanwhile, Dr. Chong highlighted the significance of HADR as a tool for defence diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific, noting the region's shared challenges with climate change. He pointed out Singapore's contributions through the Information Fusion Centre and the Regional HADR Coordination Centre, which facilitate coordination and information sharing, crucial for disaster response. Dr. Alan also discussed the importance of military exercises in reducing suspicion and enhancing mutual understanding between nations, stressing that such activities signal ASEAN's commitment to inclusivity.

Dr. Ma highlighted rising sea levels as a critical issue where China and ASEAN, especially maritime nations, could collaborate. He referenced President Prabowo Subianto's push for Chinese funding to prevent Jakarta from sinking, also underlining the vulnerability of Indonesian coastal cities. Drawing a parallel to China's land reclamation in the South China Sea, which has fueled regional tensions, Dr. Ma suggested leveraging China's expertise in this area to address the impact of climate challenges, transforming a contentious issue into a potential opportunity for cooperation.

MG Lim emphasised Malaysia's active role in HADR both regionally and globally, underscoring the reciprocal nature of goodwill in the issue, as well as strengthening international relations and fostering pride in its armed forces. While MG Ramsi stressed the importance of quick, cooperative action within ASEAN, ensuring that when a member faces threats or natural disasters, swift assistance is mobilised from neighbouring countries.

Mini Defence Showcase

12. Asia Collective 24 saw the first conduct of a sideline mini defence showcase from 6 companies.

13. Atlas Robotics (Singapore). Atlas Robotics specialises in robotics innovation and customized ROV and underwater drone solutions. Offering distribution, consultancy, and strategic partnerships, Atlas Robotics empowers businesses in Southeast Asia to enhance efficiency and embrace automation for sustainable growth.

14. CES (Turkey). CES Advanced Composites & Defence Technologies Inc. is a global leader in designing and manufacturing advanced composite materials, ballistic protective armor, and aerospace and defense components. With state-of-the-art facilities in Turkey and the UK, CES delivers innovative solutions for land, air, and naval platforms, supported by internationally accredited R&D and production capabilities.

15. Dataxet (Indonesia). Dataxet is a media intelligence group operating across Asia, delivering enhanced marketing and communication value through innovative technology, local expertise, and customer-focused solutions. With a presence in four countries and a growing base of over 1,000 clients, Dataxet is committed to advancing insights and impact in the media intelligence industry.

16. Mirage Defence (Singapore). Mirage Defence is a Singapore-based provider of defence consulting, services, and distribution, specializing in tailored solutions for government agencies, military organisations, and private sector clients. With decades of expertise and a diverse portfolio of cutting-edge products, Mirage Defence empowers clients to address modern security challenges through strategic consulting, advanced technologies, and trusted partnerships.

17. Semar Sentinel (Indonesia). Semar Sentinel Indonesia is a consulting firm developing tailored solutions to meet the unique needs of its partners. Their core expertise lies in comprehensive risk analysis, cutting-edge business intelligence, and strategic focus on security, defence, and aerospace sectors.

18. ST Engineering (Singapore). ST Engineering is a global technology, defence, and engineering group dedicated to creating real-world solutions for a more secure and sustainable future. With expertise spanning commercial aviation, defence systems, and smart city technologies, ST Engineering serves customers in over 100 countries with proven innovation and engineering excellence.

PARTNERS

19. Semar Sentinel

SEMAR SENTINEL A consulting firm specialised in security, defence and aerospace sectors. Semar Sentinel offers services and solutions to partners and clients, to get a better understanding of opportunities they might encounter and threats they might be confronted with, shedding light on security, defence and aerospace issues and matters.

20. International Development and Security Cooperation (IDSC)

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY COOPERATION A non-profit policy research organisation dedicated to advancing global development converging holistic, strategic, and progressive discourses on transnational development and regional security issues through collaboration, education, research, and training. IDSC helps policymakers make decisions based on evidence-based research and for academics to contribute to an alternative, balanced, and independent platform through shared intelligent conversations with premiere analysts across the globe.

21. M Group Asia

An established business solution service provider to a comprehensive range of corporations to SMEs, MNCs, local and overseas companies and individuals, combining on-the-ground leg work with top-level strategic insights to deliver the highest quality analysis and value added solutions. They provide unique insights into how governments, economies, companies and individuals in the Asia-Pacific converge and make decisions that impact businesses.

22. United Peace Keepers Federal Council

They collaborate with UN Agencies and other International Organizations for supporting the Peacekeeping missions and mandates of the United Nations, engaging and promoting Peace Building process globally. As part of their UN-mandated responsibility to help prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict abroad, the UNPKFC joins the efforts being undertaken by civil society organizations, elected officials and governments across the world to address issues of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field of peace-building.

23. Mirage Defence

A leading provider of comprehensive defence solutions, specialising in consultancy services, product distribution, and representation for defence and security industries. They work closely with government agencies, military organisations, and private sector clients to deliver tailored strategies and solutions that meet the ever-evolving challenges of today's defence landscape. Mirage Defence's consulting services encompass a wide range of areas, including threat assessment, risk analysis, strategic planning, and policy development.

CONCLUSION

15. Overall, Asia Collective 2024 could be deemed a successful international and track two diplomacy forum, focusing on Defence Cooperation and Strategic Partnerships for Regional Stability. The event featured substantive exchanges on topics like territorial disputes, cyber threats, and non-traditional security challenges, alongside discussions on innovative technologies such as AI and cybersecurity. Notable highlights included insights from diverse experts, strengthened diplomatic relationships, and opportunities to deepen defence collaboration, all of which contributed to fostering trust and advancing regional stability.

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