

# PERSPECTIVE

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## **China’s COVID-19 Assistance to Southeast Asia: Uninterrupted Aid amid Global Uncertainties**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- China’s COVID-19 assistance to ASEAN and its member states has been relatively trouble-free compared to that extended to other countries.
- All ASEAN Member States have received material assistance such as medical supplies and equipment from China. The Philippines, Cambodia and Myanmar were among the first in line. Vietnam and Singapore received the least material assistance, and at a later date.
- China further shared its experience and expertise in fighting the pandemic with ASEAN and with five member-states. It sent a civilian medical team to Cambodia, long before it did so to Pakistan, widely considered Beijing’s “iron-clad” and “all-weather” friend. Laos, the Philippines, Myanmar and Malaysia followed as recipients thereafter.
- Apart from civilian medical teams, Myanmar and Laos stood out for hosting a Chinese military medical team. As military medical teams rank a rung higher than their civilian counterparts, they indicate the added importance China attaches to these two countries.
- Beijing can be expected to extend more COVID-19 assistance to ASEAN and its member states. One area to watch is the global race to develop a vaccine with China having vowed that it would make it accessible and affordable as a “global public good”.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chinese President Xi Jinping has pledged China's commitment to help the world fight COVID-19, not only in tackling the immediate health threat, but also in reviving the growth momentum of the world economy, and alleviating the burden on developing countries.<sup>1</sup> One particular aspect of China's effort lies in its "mask diplomacy" where tonnes of medical supplies and equipment have been flown to various countries across the world.

The worldwide response to China's aid has been rather mixed. While many welcomed the assistance, others have questioned China's intentions with doubts similar to those raised over China's motivations behind the Belt and Road Initiative. In the same vein, Beijing has received brickbats over the quality of some China-made products.

However, relatively little attention has been paid to China's assistance to Southeast Asia which, in contrast to other parts of the world, has proceeded in a relatively smooth and trouble-free manner. Beijing can be expected to do more in this area for ASEAN and the ASEAN Member States (AMS) at a time when its relations with other key countries are under increasing strain. Moreover, Southeast Asia is an integral part of Beijing's neighbourhood diplomacy to create a stable southern flank.

## **CHINA'S EXTENSION OF AID**

China started extending COVID-19 assistance to Southeast Asia in early February 2020, at a time when it was still in the thick of fighting the coronavirus threat within its own borders. However, Beijing's aid to the rest of the world, including Southeast Asia, picked up momentum since March 2020, especially after Chinese President Xi Jinping's much anticipated visit to Wuhan on 10 March that marked a victory of sorts in China's fight against the coronavirus.

The nature of China's assistance to Southeast Asia can be divided into two broad categories. The first category is material aid in the form of medical supplies and equipment. These include masks (such as face masks, surgical masks and KN95 respirators),<sup>2</sup> test kits, thermometers, infusion pumps, ventilators and personal protective equipment (such as gloves, face shields, goggles, isolation gowns, protective suits and medical boot covers).

### **(a) Material Assistance**

All AMS have received material assistance in some form from China although there is a difference in the order and scale of the assistance (see Table in **Annex**). The Philippines, Cambodia and Myanmar were among the first in line. An obvious reason for this is probably due to the close ties between these countries and China (most obviously so in the case of the Philippines and Cambodia).<sup>3</sup> As for Myanmar, apart from its strategic importance (in offering China access to the Indian Ocean, thereby reducing its reliance on the Straits of Malacca), it also shares a common border with China. In addition, China has stood by Myanmar especially over the Rohingya issue where Naypyidaw is largely on the defensive in the face of criticisms from the rest of the international community.

The other ASEAN countries that feature relatively prominently in terms of the order and scale of China's material aid are Laos, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Even Brunei, which has had only 141 COVID cases (as of end May 2020),<sup>4</sup> has been an active recipient of China's official and private sector assistance. Apart from the usual broad government-to-government and business-to-government channels, China has adopted a more targeted approach involving key institutions of both countries. For instance, the Chinese ambassador to Brunei, Madam Yu Hong, handed over an unspecified quantity of medical supplies and equipment from China's Ministry of National Defence to Brunei's Ministry of Defence on 14 May 2020.<sup>5</sup>

In comparison to the above countries, Vietnam and Singapore received limited material assistance and only in the later stages, sometime from April onwards. To a large extent, this may be due to these two countries being in a better position to handle the pandemic outbreak on their own. For Singapore, it was reported that China Communications and Construction Company, a state-owned company, helped to convert an existing facility belonging to the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore into an isolation ward at short notice in April 2020.<sup>6</sup> Singapore further received 600,000 masks from China in May 2020.

As for Vietnam, China's Ministry of Public Security donated a batch of medical supplies and equipment including masks, goggles, gloves and protective suits to its Vietnamese counterpart in May 2020.<sup>7</sup> The aid was delivered at a border crossing between the two countries. However, there was virtually no mention of this donation by Vietnam's official media although it was widely reported by China's state media.

#### (b) Other Forms of Assistance

The second category of China's assistance has to do with the softer aspects of sharing its experience and expertise in fighting the pandemic in areas such as prevention and control, testing, diagnosis, treatment and even training of their medical counterparts in Southeast Asia. There are also reports of China sharing its experience in combining Traditional Chinese Medicine with Western medicine in the treatment of COVID patients.<sup>8</sup>

Most notably, China has sent civilian medical teams to five AMS. Cambodia was the first to receive a seven-member team from Guangxi Autonomous Region, on 23 March.<sup>9</sup> In addition to stressing that the aid was to reciprocate Cambodia's earlier extension of assistance, China said that the aid demonstrated the "iron-clad" friendship between the two countries and the importance of building a "community with a shared future".<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the medical team that arrived in Phnom Penh came ahead of a Chinese medical team sent on 28 March to Pakistan,<sup>11</sup> which China traditionally regards as having an "iron-clad" and "all-weather" friendship.

The other ASEAN countries that received civilian medical teams were Laos (29 March), the Philippines (5 April), Myanmar (8 April) and Malaysia (18 April). The size of these teams ranged from seven to 12 members and the duration of their stay was usually two weeks. The personnel dispatched came from provincial medical institutions such as Guangxi (for Cambodia), Yunnan (for Laos, and Myanmar), Fujian (for the Philippines) and Guangdong (for Malaysia). The geographical distribution of these Chinese institutions highlights the country's access to a wider pool of resources at the local level which helped

reduce the strain on Beijing's resources, which are meant for national emergencies and for its leaders.

There is a further difference in the type of medical teams sent. Among the five ASEAN countries mentioned above, two stand out for having received additional military medical teams from China. On 24 April, Myanmar and Laos received a six-man and five-man military medical team respectively from the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Each team also brought with them an unspecified amount of military supplies and equipment for their military counterparts in Yangon and Vientiane.<sup>12</sup>

Military medical teams rank a rung higher than civilian medical teams and are considered better trained and have a higher political signature. They underscore the added importance China attaches to these two mainland Southeast Asian countries with which it shares a common border. In addition, Laos and Myanmar, like Cambodia, have committed to work with China to build a "community with a shared future".<sup>13</sup>

At the regional level, China and ASEAN have promoted the sharing of experience and expertise as well through video conferencing sessions. So far, two such sessions have been held. On 20 February 2020, health officials and clinical experts from ASEAN and China met to exchange practices and challenges in the clinical management of COVID-19 cases and to mitigate its impact on communities.<sup>14</sup> On 31 March 2020, they met a second time to discuss further cooperation in areas such as enhancing capacity building interventions; sharing of technical information and updates, lessons learnt and good practices; strengthening cooperation in risk communication and assessment; and strengthening policy dialogue on the pandemic including drug and vaccine development, security and self-reliance.<sup>15</sup>

These softer aspects of cooperation come on top of other more formal and senior cooperation mechanisms involving ministers and heads of government such as the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting (on 20 February 2020) and the Special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit on Coronavirus Disease (on 14 April 2020). At the latter meeting, the countries agreed, among other things, to explore setting up an APT reserve of essential medical supplies to enable rapid response to emergency needs. They further committed to keep markets open for trade and investment, and strengthen the resiliency and sustainability of regional supply chains, especially for essential goods such as food, commodities, medicines and medical supplies.<sup>16</sup>

## **SOME OBSERVATIONS**

Some key observations can be drawn from China's COVID-19 assistance to Southeast Asia especially in terms of the context. Its aid provision is occurring at a time when Beijing's relations with other key players has become increasingly strained. Most prominently, the war of words between China and the United States on the pandemic has intensified. America has accused China of cover-ups and a delayed response to the pandemic while China contends that America is resorting to a blame game to divert attention from its own poor response to the pandemic. The two have now locked horns over the national security law on

Hong Kong. The heightened tensions between the two countries are expected to endure in the run-up to the US presidential elections in November 2020.

China's relations with the EU and some European countries have also run into difficulties. Incidents like the EU toning down part of a report about Chinese state-backed disinformation,<sup>17</sup> and *China Daily*, a state-run newspaper, censoring an article co-written by the EU 27 ambassadors by removing references linking the outbreak of the coronavirus to China, have dampened relations.<sup>18</sup> Some European countries have issues with the quality of China-made masks and test kits.<sup>19</sup> China also appears to have grudgingly accepted the World Health Assembly's (WHA) call for an "impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation" of the global response to the pandemic based on an earlier EU draft, when it was initially opposed to any such probe.<sup>20</sup>

China-Australia ties have hit a new low with Canberra's strong push for an independent international review into the origins and spread of the pandemic. From early suggestions of a boycott of Australian products by Chinese consumers,<sup>21</sup> Beijing has imposed tariffs of 80.5% on Australian barley (due to alleged dumping) and banned imports of beef from four Australian exporters (due to alleged inspection and quarantine breaches). It has dismissed Australia's claim that its push for a review was vindicated by the WHA's call for a probe by calling it a "joke" and insisting that the two proposals were "totally different".<sup>22</sup>

Closer to home, there is also increased caution in the development of China-Japan relations with the Japanese government announcing the setting aside of a sum of US\$2.2 billion to encourage its businesses to shift manufacturing of high value-added products back to Japan, and for the production of other goods to be spread across Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup> South Korean companies are also reportedly considering moving some of their factories from China to India.<sup>24</sup> China-India ties are once again dogged by border tensions which last flared up in 2017.

Comparatively, China's relations with ASEAN as a whole and with AMS individually have been relatively stable minus the South China Sea issue.<sup>25</sup> In general, ASEAN and AMS have been receptive of China's provision of COVID-19 aid. Most of them do require such assistance. There have also not been any public reports from ASEAN or AMS regarding the quality of China's pandemic assistance. A related point is an absence of "wolf warrior" diplomacy involving Chinese officials in the region as had happened in France, Australia and Sri Lanka. This has largely been due to the lack of issues warranting such a practice.

Even before the onset of COVID-19, China had made a conscious effort to keep its relations with ASEAN and AMS on a generally positive note. This was especially true after US-China relations deteriorated in 2018 with tariffs and counter tariffs being imposed. In a rather unusual gesture, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang committed China to a three-year deadline to conclude consultations on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea with ASEAN when he visited Singapore in November 2018.<sup>26</sup> China and ASEAN further embarked on their first maritime drill in Zhanjiang (Guangdong) in October 2018<sup>27</sup> and several AMS' navies took part in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of the PLA Navy, in April 2019 in Qingdao (Shandong).<sup>28</sup>

China's provision of COVID-19 assistance to ASEAN and AMS cannot be divorced from the wider context of China's deteriorating relationship with other major partners. Arising from this, Beijing seeks to keep its Southeast Asia front manageable and relatively trouble-free. Another important reason is that China and six AMS cross important milestones in 2020 such as the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of relations with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Myanmar; the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of relations with Thailand and the Philippines; and, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of relations with Singapore. Hence, Beijing has placed greater emphasis on developing ties with Southeast Asia. The tone was set when Chinese President Xi Jinping chose Myanmar to be the first foreign country to visit at the beginning of this year.

Other oft-cited reasons behind China's COVID-19 assistance include China's objective of demonstrating that it is a responsible player on the global stage; reciprocating the assistance it had earlier received from Southeast Asia;<sup>29</sup> and seeking to build a "community with a shared future" by tackling common challenges together. All of these objectives are geared towards promoting China's interests, including the shaping of a positive image of itself in the region.

## **CONCLUSION**

China's COVID-19 assistance to ASEAN and AMS has been an overall positive spark in China's relations with Southeast Asia. Going forward, Beijing can be expected to continue to render aid to these countries not only to bring the pandemic under control but also to work with them to recover from the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. For one thing, they have reiterated their commitment to keeping markets open for trade and investment so as to uphold the multilateral trading order and globalisation which are key to economic recovery. They have also started exploring "people-to-people" travel on a selective basis. China and Singapore have established a "fast lane" arrangement in early June 2020 to facilitate essential travel for business and official purposes between the two countries.<sup>30</sup> More such arrangements are likely to be set up between China and Southeast Asia. Moreover, while racing to develop a vaccine, Chinese President Xi Jinping has vowed to make the vaccine a "global public good" that is readily accessible and affordable especially to developing countries once it is developed and deployed in China.<sup>31</sup> It will be interesting to watch how this pans out.

From the perspective of the AMS, they welcome an engagement with China that brings mutual benefits and that does not preclude them from growing their ties with other key players such as Japan, Australia, the EU and the United States. Being much smaller, the AMS are acutely aware of how bigger powers can come to wield a disproportionate amount of influence over them. With respect to China, past incidents serve as a reminder of this including the Philippine-China standoff over the Scarborough Shoal (in 2012), the Vietnam-China standoff over the Chinese Oil Rig 981 deployment near the Paracel Islands (in 2014), the nadir in Philippine-China relations arising from the arbitral tribunal case brought by the Philippines against China (from 2013 – 2016), and the downward spiral in Singapore-China relations over issues related to the South China Sea and their relationship with the United States (in 2016).



**Annex**
**China's COVID-19 Assistance to ASEAN and AMS**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Source</b>
3 Feb	Philippines	200,000 surgical masks; sharing of medical information and findings	<a href="#">Philippine News Agency</a>
20 Feb	ASEAN and China	A Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on coronavirus convened in Vientiane; a video conference, involving medical experts from ASEAN and China, was also held to share experience and findings	<a href="#">China's foreign ministry</a>
11 Mar	Myanmar	Medical supplies (including surgical masks and hand sanitiser)	<a href="#">Elevenmyanmar</a>
16 Mar	Philippines	2,000 test kits	<a href="#">CNN</a>
17 Mar	Cambodia	Medical supplies (including detection reagent, hazmat suits, surgical masks and other related materials – unspecified number)	<a href="#">Khmer Times</a>
17 Mar	Myanmar	2,016 test kits	<a href="#">Myanmar Times</a>
18 Mar	Laos	Test kits (unspecified number)	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
19 Mar	Thailand	Medical supplies including test kits, face masks, equipment and protective suits. The Chinese government also offered to coordinate Chinese companies to export medicine for the treatment of coronavirus in Thailand (pledge)	<a href="#">Khao Sod</a>
19 Mar	Malaysia	5,000 masks and 10,000 face shields	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
21 Mar	Philippines	100,000 test kits, 100,000 surgical masks, 10,000 KN95 masks and 10,000 personal protective equipment	<a href="#">Philippine News Agency</a>
21 Mar	Asia	1.8 million masks, 210,000 test kits, 36,000 protective suits, and ventilators and thermometers for 10 countries, i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, <b>Cambodia</b> , <b>Laos</b> , the Maldives, Mongolia, <b>Myanmar</b> , Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation – pledge)	<a href="#">Jack Ma's Twitter</a>
22 Mar	Brunei	Medical equipment and supplies (Zhejiang Hengyi Group)	<a href="#">China.org</a>
22 Mar	Indonesia	Nine tonnes of medical supplies flown in by Indonesian Air Force C-130.  An additional 17 tonnes of medical supplies including 800,000 test kits, 50,000 gloves and other materials arrived via Xiamen Air	<a href="#">Tempo</a>  <a href="#">Xinhua</a>
23 Mar	Cambodia	Medical team; and medical supplies and equipment including test kits, KN95 masks, surgical masks, isolation gowns and protective suits	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
24 Mar	Thailand	Medical supplies and equipment including face masks, test kits, protective garments and other materials	<a href="#">Chinese Embassy in Thailand</a>
25 Mar	Brunei	In a tele-conversation with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Brunei's Foreign Minister II Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof thanked China for offering "support and assistance" to Brunei	<a href="#">China's foreign ministry</a>

26 Mar	Malaysia	Video conference on tackling coronavirus; possibility of sending a medical team	<a href="#">New Straits Times</a>
26 Mar	Malaysia	20,000 masks and video conference on tackling coronavirus (from Fujian province to Sarawak under friendship agreement)	<a href="#">The Star</a>
26 Mar	Myanmar	200,000 surgical masks, 5,000 KN95 masks, and 5,000 protective clothing	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
26 Mar	Thailand	First batch of face masks, protective suits and face shields (by Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation)	<a href="#">Alizila</a>
27 Mar	Indonesia	40 tonnes of medical supplies and equipment including test kits, masks, personal protective equipment and ventilators	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
28 Mar	Philippines	500,000 masks (Bank of China)	<a href="#">Manila Bulletin</a>
28 Mar	Malaysia	500,000 surgical masks, 100,000 KN95 face masks, 100,000 test kits, 50,000 personal protective equipment, and 200 ventilators	<a href="#">Malay Mail</a>
29 Mar	Malaysia	166,000 face masks to Sabah	<a href="#">Borneo Post</a>
29 Mar	Cambodia	1 million face masks (pledge by Hodo Group); first batch of 200,000 face masks has started shipping	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
29 Mar	Asia	1.7 million masks, 165,000 test kits, protective clothing and medical equipment such as ventilators and forehead thermometers for seven countries, i.e. Azerbaijan, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and <b>Vietnam</b> (Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation – pledge)	<a href="#">Arab News</a>
29 Mar	Laos	Medical team and medical supplies (Xinhua highlighted that the medical team arrived less than five days after Laos confirmed its first two coronavirus cases on 24 Mar)	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
30 Mar	Thailand	Test kits (unspecified number donated by the China Shenzhen Mammoth Foundation)	<a href="#">Chinese Embassy in Bangkok</a>
5 Apr	Philippines	Medical team, medical supplies and equipment including 300,000 medical masks, 30,000 KN95 masks, 5,000 face shields, 5,000 protective suits, and 30 ventilators	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
7 Apr	Myanmar	Two Chinese enterprises donate 15,000 medical masks to two Myanmar government organizations	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
8 Apr	Myanmar	Medical team and medical supplies and equipment including test kits, 8,500 KN95 masks, 60,000 disposable masks and 5,500 protective suits	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
10 Apr	Singapore	The branch of China Communications and Construction Company in Singapore receives an urgent work assignment to convert the original emergency hall of the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore into an isolation ward comprising 96 units	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
14 Apr	ASEAN Plus Three countries	Special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit via video conference on Coronavirus Disease 2019 chaired by Vietnam; China proposed the setting-up of an APT reserve of essential medical supplies	<a href="#">China's foreign ministry</a>



13 Apr	Thailand	Medical supplies arrived during Songkran festival, on Thailand's traditional New Year's Day	<a href="#">CGTN</a>
18 Apr	Malaysia	Medical team	<a href="#">People's Daily</a>
23 Apr	Brunei	Medical supplies including 100,000 KN95 masks and 1,000 isolation gowns; the Chinese Embassy in Brunei further donated US\$42,158 to Brunei's COVID-19 Relief Fund	<a href="#">Global Times</a>
24 Apr	Myanmar	Military medical team and medical supplies including test kits and KN95 masks	<a href="#">China's military</a>
24 Apr	Laos	Military medical team and medical supplies	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
5 May	Singapore	500,000 surgical masks and 100,000 KN95 masks	<a href="#">Straits Times</a>
8 May	Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam	Five Chinese companies donated a total of 600,000 surgical masks to the six countries (the supplies left Nanning, Guangxi province on 8 May)	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
10 May	Philippines	Over 150,000 test kits and 18,000 protective suits	<a href="#">CGTN</a>
12 May	Indonesia	Medical supplies and equipment including medical masks, surgical masks, KN95 masks, goggles, protective screens, protective suits, waterproof isolation gowns, medical boot covers, nitrile gloves, infusion pumps, portable knapsack sprayers, infrared forehead thermometers and thermal imaging thermometer helmets	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
12 May	Thailand	Medical supplies and equipment including 100,000 medical face masks, 15,000 surgical masks, 10,500 pairs of goggles, 7,000 sets of personal protective equipment and 120 boxes of gloves, six ventilators, 10 electrocardiograms, 30 infusion pumps, 100 infrared thermometers and 6,000 test kits.	<a href="#">China's military &amp; Bangkok Post</a>
12 May	Vietnam	Medical supplies and equipment including KN95 masks, surgical masks, protective suits, gloves and goggles	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
12 May	Brunei	Medical supplies and equipment including masks, goggles, protective clothing, isolation suits (from the People's Liberation Army to the Brunei Army)	<a href="#">Xinhua</a>
13 May	Myanmar	150,000 test kits and 18,000 personal protective equipment	<a href="#">Global Times</a>

Source: Various public sources compiled by author

Note: This list is not meant to be exhaustive but is to provide a sense of China's COVID-19 assistance extended so far (as of 31 May 2020)

<sup>1</sup> "Full text: Speech by President Xi Jinping at opening of 73rd World Health Assembly", *Global Times*, 18 May 2020, at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1188716.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> KN95 refers to respirators that originate from China while their US equivalent is known as N95. See "Comparison of FFP2, KN95, and N95 and Other Filtering Facepiece Respirator Classes", 3M

Technical Bulletin, May 2020, at <https://multimedia.3m.com/mws/media/17915000/comparison-ffp2-95-n95-filtering-facepiece-respirator-classes-tb.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> In China's eyes, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was instrumental in the turnaround in Philippine-China relations since he assumed office in June 2016. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen is also widely regarded to be close to China. On 5 February 2020, he became the first foreign leader to visit Beijing amid the pandemic outbreak in China. See "Spotlight: Cambodian PM's special Beijing visit reflects nations' profound friendship, solidarity", Xinhua, 7 February 2020, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/07/c\\_138763037.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-02/07/c_138763037.htm).

<sup>4</sup> "Brunei reports no new COVID-19 cases for 19 straight days", Xinhua, 26 May 2020, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/26/c\\_139089745.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/26/c_139089745.htm). With a total population of around 437,000 (as of 13 May 2020), Brunei has a low infection rate of 0.03 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> "OFFICIAL HANDOVER OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT DONATION FROM THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND RBAF", Brunei's Ministry of Defence, 14 May 2020, at <http://www.mindef.gov.bn/Lists/News/DispForm.aspx?ID=5087>. See also "Brunei receives anti-COVID-19 medical donations from Chinese military", Xinhua, 15 May 2020, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/15/c\\_139058401.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/15/c_139058401.htm). The medical supplies were flown in on an Ilyushin Il-76 military transport aircraft belonging to the PLA Air Force.

<sup>6</sup> Tongxun: Zhongguo jiaojian jiangxin dajian Xinjiapo fangcang geli suo (Communications: China Communications and Construction Company builds Singapore modular isolation centre), Xinhua, 28 April 2020, at [http://sg.xinhuanet.com/2020-04/28/c\\_1125917093.htm](http://sg.xinhuanet.com/2020-04/28/c_1125917093.htm).

<sup>7</sup> "China's public security ministry donates anti-epidemic supplies to Vietnam", Xinhua, 12 May 2020, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/asiapacific/2020-05/12/c\\_139051444.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/asiapacific/2020-05/12/c_139051444.htm).

<sup>8</sup> "Medical support on its way to the Philippines", *China Daily*, 5 April 2020, at <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/05/WS5e897511a3101282172847a0.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Although Cambodia was the first country in ASEAN to receive a Chinese medical team, it was not the first country that China sent a medical team to. The first few countries that received Chinese medical teams were Iran (29 February), Iraq (7 March), Italy (two separate medical teams arrived on 12 March and 18 March respectively).

<sup>10</sup> "China sends medical team to Cambodia", Xinhua, 23 March 2020, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/23/c\\_138908734.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/23/c_138908734.htm). China and Cambodia signed the "Action Plan 2019-2023 on Building China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future" in April 2019 when Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen visited Beijing for the Second Belt and Road Forum. Under this action plan, the two countries committed to undertake 31 measures in five domains of politics, security, economics, people-to-people relations, and multilateral cooperation. See Dr Kin Phea (Director General of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia), "Cambodia-China Relations in the New Decade", May 2020, at <http://iric.gov.kh/cambodia-china-relations-in-the-new-decade-2/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Chinese medical team arrives in Pakistan to aid fight against COVID-19", CGTN, 28 March 2020, at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-03-28/China-sends-medical-experts-to-Pakistan-for-fight-against-COVID-19-PecdffkpmMM/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> "Zhongguo jundui kangyi yiliao zhuanjia dida miandian (China's anti-epidemic military medical experts arrive in Myanmar)", China's Ministry of Defence, 24 April 2020, at [http://www.mod.gov.cn/topnews/2020-04/24/content\\_4864100.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/topnews/2020-04/24/content_4864100.htm) and "Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun yuan lao kang yi yiliao zhuanjiazu dida laowo (China's People's Liberation Army aid and anti-epidemic expert team arrives in Laos), China's Ministry of Defence, 24 April 2020, at [http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jmywyl/2020-04/24/content\\_9800423.htm](http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jmywyl/2020-04/24/content_9800423.htm).

<sup>13</sup> In April 2019, Laos and China signed an action plan to build a "community with a shared future", at the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing. In January 2020, during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Myanmar, the two countries agreed to build a Myanmar-China "community with a shared future".

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- <sup>14</sup> “ASEAN, China exchange practices to better manage coronavirus disease 2019”, ASEAN Secretariat, 20 February 2020, at <https://asean.org/asean-china-exchange-practices-to-better-manage-coronavirus-disease-2019/>. This was held on the same day as the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on the Coronavirus Disease which convened in Vientiane.
- <sup>15</sup> “ASEAN, China enhance cooperation on COVID-19 pandemic response”, ASEAN Secretariat, 31 March 2020, at <https://asean.org/asean-china-enhance-cooperation-covid-19-pandemic-response/>.
- <sup>16</sup> “Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)”, ASEAN Secretariat, 14 April 2020, at <https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Final-Joint-Statement-of-the-Special-APT-Summit-on-COVID-193360.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> “EU toned down report on Chinese disinformation after Beijing threatened ‘repercussions’, diplomatic sources say”, *SCMP*, 25 April 2020, at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3081564/eu-toned-down-report-chinese-disinformation-after-beijing>.
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- <sup>25</sup> Minus China’s active presence in the Exclusive Economic Zones of other ASEAN claimant states in the South China Sea which seemed to have been stepped up in 2019 and 2020.
- <sup>26</sup> “Full text of Premier Li Keqiang’s speech at the 44th Singapore Lecture”, China’s State Council, 15 November 2018, at [http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/speeches/2018/11/15/content\\_281476391325308.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/speeches/2018/11/15/content_281476391325308.htm). Premier Li Keqiang was in Singapore on an official visit and to attend the ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in November 2018.

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- <sup>28</sup> “Opening Ceremony of "Joint Maritime Drill 2019" Held in Qingdao”, China’s Ministry of Defence, 26 April 2019, at [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/26/content\\_9490179.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/26/content_9490179.htm).
- <sup>29</sup> “Should we thank China for face mask donation when Filipinos donated first?”, *interaksyon*, 6 February 2020, at <https://www.interaksyon.com/politics-issues/2020/02/06/161505/donations-face-mask-philippines-china-novel-coronavirus/>; Brunei was reported to have donated at least 150,000 masks to China. See “Wenlai juanzeng shoupi 5 wan zhi fanghu kouzhao di Gui zhu Guangxi zhan ‘yi’” (Brunei donates first batch of 50,000 masks to Guangxi to fight the coronavirus), *Sina.com*, 5 February 2020, at [https://k.sina.com.cn/article\\_1784473157\\_6a5ce64502001pn34.html?from=news&subch=onews](https://k.sina.com.cn/article_1784473157_6a5ce64502001pn34.html?from=news&subch=onews); and, beginning from early February 2020, Singapore responded to China’s early request for personal protective equipment, medical supplies and equipment (including 3 polymerase chain reaction machines that can screen individuals for coronavirus), as well as diagnostic kits (20,000 test kits were sent). The government also contributed to an effort by the Singapore Red Cross to raise funds for humanitarian assistance to affected communities in China. Over S\$6 million was raised. See “Letters from Singapore Leaders on the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak in China”, Singapore’s foreign ministry, 24 February 2020, at <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2020/02/24022020-COVID19-letters---President-and-PM> and “Singapore to send test kits, machines that screen for coronavirus to China, says Heng Swee Keat”, *Straits Times*, 7 February 2020. The above are some examples of assistance from Southeast Asia to China. They are not exhaustive.
- <sup>30</sup> This fast lane arrangement would be first applied between Singapore and six Chinese provinces or municipalities, i.e. Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing, Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. See “Joint Press Statement – The 2<sup>nd</sup> Singapore-China Joint Meeting on COVID-19”, Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 May 2020, at <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2020/05/20200529---2ndSG-China-JM-Covid>.
- <sup>31</sup> “Full text: Speech by President Xi Jinping at opening of 73rd World Health Assembly”, *Global Times*, 18 May 2020.

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