

Panel: China and the ASEAN (Lilac & Tulip Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, December 11, 2012 / 15:45-17:00

Talking Points for: Carlyle Thayer, Emeritus Professor, University of New South Wales

Can the Center Hold? ASEAN in the Midst of China-United States Strategic Rivalry

ASEAN unity and cohesion are central to maintaining its centrality in Southeast Asia's emerging economic and security architecture. ASEAN is internally divided on both economic and security issues. Several ASEAN members are committed to the U.S.-promoted Trans-Pacific Partnership, while other members support the recently launched Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. ASEAN is divided into three groupings with respect to the South China Sea disputes: the mainland states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand), the littoral states (Philippines and Vietnam/Malaysia and Brunei) and the maritime states (Indonesia and Singapore). The littoral and maritime states favour a Code of Conduct with China. China under Xi Jinping will promote stepped up economic integration with ASEAN by raising bilateral trade, increasing investment, promoting transportation connectivity and heightened people-to-people interaction. China will also play on internal ASEAN divisions to prevent its claims over the South China Sea from being further internationalized. China will pursue its economic and security goals primarily through the ASEAN Plus One and ASEAN Plus Three mechanisms. ASEAN will be very hard pressed to achieve its goal of becoming an effective ASEAN Community by the end of 2015.

*** The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.**