



SESSION SKETCHES

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
www.asanplenum.org

US Pivot to Asia

Panel: Session 1(Regency Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 12:30-13:45

Speakers: Christopher Nelson, Samuels International Associates, Inc.
Kurt Campbell, The Asia Group
Chung Jae Ho, Seoul National University
James Lindsay, Council on Foreign Relations
Walter Lohman, Heritage Foundation
Shen Dingli, Fudan University

Rapporteur: Seukhoon Paul Choi, Council on Foreign Relations

Christopher Nelson of Samuels International Associates, Inc. began the session noting that he supported interpreting the US pivot to Asia as refocusing on the region. He argued that there has been an excess of discourse and effort to establish the pivot as a theory, when in actuality the policy was meant to shift US psychology to where the future and growth potential would be determined, as well as where the US should invest its energy.

Fudan University’s Shen Dingli explained that China welcomes US rebalancing, when such an effort facilitate peace and stability. He argued that even before the term was coined, the US enacted a “rebalance” when it deployed the USS George Washington to the Yellow Sea in the wake of the North Korean shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. This arguably deterred North Korea from launching another attack amid rising tensions and stabilized the situation on the peninsula. In this way, not all US rebalancing is negative or adverse to Chinese interests.

Walter Lohman of the Heritage Foundation argued that US policy toward Asia in Washington is generally a bipartisan issue and that the Asia pivot as an expression of commitment to the region, enjoys support from a majority of republicans. Lohman noted however that the policy is underresourced. He disagreed with the position that the pivot is overly focused on the military. And although the policy is not entirely about China, especially the strategy’s trade component, it is a response to Chinese actions in the region, which the US considers provocative.

James Lindsay of the Council on Foreign Relations explained that the rebalance remains a work in progress that may get derailed. He noted five broad challenges to the policy. There is a fundamental vagueness about the concept. Although Washington may want to deemphasize the Middle East in US foreign policy, the region may not be inclined to let go of the US. The rebalance is misaligned with US budgetary and domestic political realities. Shifting from a focus on bilateral to multilateral cooperation is difficult as US allies in the region lack a history of working together. Finally, a nuanced Chinese diplomacy may compound the challenges that the US faces in advancing this policy.

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

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of theAsanPlenum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.



SESSION SKETCHES

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
www.asanplenum.org

Seoul National University’s Jae Ho Chung noted that no concept has been more controversial in Asia than the “axis of evil.” From South Korea’s perspective, this is particularly true because of China’s significance in the policy. Chung argued that there is a wide range of areas where the stage has been set for US-Sino confrontation. There is obvious dissonance in the rhetoric, military development, and normative values of the two countries. Although he does not attribute the potential for conflict entirely to the pivot, Chung explained the action-reaction cycle between the two countries is creating an alarming picture for countries in the region.

Kurt Campbell of the Asia Group explained that the overall approach of President Obama and Secretary Clinton was inspired by a profound recognition that Asia would determine the world’s future and that the US needed to adjust its policy accordingly. He noted that much of the pivot and rebalance had unintended consequences and inspired misinterpretations. There exists a combination of both true and purposeful misunderstanding in US-Sino relations. The US is neither vacating the Middle East, nor diminishing the importance of cooperation with Europe. Finally, although the pivot may be perceived as primarily involving the military, it is a strategy that is overwhelmingly diplomatic.

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

*The views expressed herein are panel overviews of theAsanPlenum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.