

Asan Beijing Forum Keynote Address

Date/Time: November 14, 2013 / 9:00-10:20

Keynote Address: Qi Yaqing, China Foreign Affairs University

Summary

Qin Yaqing, Executive Vice President and Professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, delivered the keynote address for the inaugural *Asan Beijing Forum* on the topic of “Structures, Processes, and Regional Order in East Asia.” Dr. Qin’s speech covered a broad range of issues related to the region’s changing political and strategic architecture and its impact on the power dynamics among major powers such as China and the United States, as well as regional bodies such as ASEAN.

Dr. Qin began by outlining the importance of the interactions among major powers in East Asia and how it has evolved along the “dynamic parallel processes of economics and security.” With the regional order in flux, he suggested that the structures and processes existing in the region are not necessarily static. He argued that the rise of China and the US rebalance to Asia are both welcome developments, when managed effectively.

Since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Dr. Qin noted that China had come to play a greater role in regional integration and multilateralism, particularly in Southeast Asia. But he cited the subsequent enlargement of the East Asia Summit as a potential competitor to ASEAN’s centrality across the region. The extension of membership to states outside what Dr. Qin referred to as the “10+3” of the ten members of ASEAN plus China, Japan, and Korea, meant it had become a parallel process, something exacerbated by the US and Russia entry.

In light of the US rebalance, Dr. Qin emphasized the importance of ASEAN in integrating a growing number of neighbors into a web of cooperation. He pointed out that the regional

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order has been relatively stable over the past two decades and that the notion of ASEAN Centrality has been useful in channeling investment into priority areas. Nonetheless, if the China-US relationship were to focus more exclusively on security issues, it could lead to escalation and possible tensions elsewhere. As the regional situation has grown increasingly complex with the growing number of powers, Dr. Qin suggested that more complicated power networks could prove difficult to manage.

Looking ahead, Dr. Qin expressed optimism about the potential of major powers in the region to better coordinate their relations. The economic imperative alone will continue to drive regional cooperation given that the combined gross domestic product of China, Japan, and Korea accounted for 90 percent of East Asia's total. Progress on cooperative mechanisms was exemplified by the launch of the China-Japan-Korea (CJK) free trade negotiations. Dr. Qin heralded the CJK FTA as an important milestone in growing regional cooperation. However, challenges caused by territorial disputes and Japanese attitudes towards history have been impediments to finalizing the CJK deal.

In light of the growing tensions, Dr. Qin welcomed more active US involvement in East Asia, though he acknowledged that it can raise suspicions in some corners. There was a need to address the popular mistrust that exists on both sides by strengthening dialogue and track II exchanges. Dr. Qin noted that China has never been included in any US-led security arrangement. He suggested that its future involvement would go a long way to improving the regional dynamics.

Following his speech, Dr. Qin took a number of questions from the audience. In response to a question on whether he considered the US to be an enemy or rival of China, he replied that China's model of regionalism encompasses an open interpretation that welcomes the US as a legitimate stakeholder. For instance, if the US had better communicated its plans to rebalance assets to Asia, Dr. Qin speculated that it would have generated far less tensions.

Another member of the audience asked why Dr. Qin discussed North Korea's nuclear

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weapons as a Korean peninsula problem, as opposed to being a North Korean problem. Dr. Qing explained that the ramifications of North Korea's nuclear weapons were huge for the whole region, and not just a problem for either or both Koreas to manage. In addition, he strongly urged for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks to resume dialogue. On a question about Japan's troubled relationship with both China and Korea, his advice was for increased dialogues that seek to improve relations even when political leaders are at odds. He quoted an old Chinese saying that "If the nation states want to be friends, their people should be friends first."

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