

China and ASEAN

Panel: Session 5 (Grand Ballroom III)

Date/Time: Wednesday May 1, 2013 / 14:00-15:15

Speakers: A. Greer Meisels, The Wilson Center
Satu Limaye, East-West Center in Washington
Liu Lin, Academy of Military Science
Francesco Mancini, International Peace Institute
Nguyen Hung Son, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

Rapporteur: Victoria Tuke, Tokyo Foundation

Satu Limaye began his remarks by noting how relations have worsened considerably in the past 3-4 years, asking whether this can be easily rectified or if the situation will worsen. Limaye recognized the possibility of miscalculation but also that there was some room for management given the significant stakes for all parties involved. The challenge for ASEAN lies in how to create cohesion and unity when relationships within the region are becoming internationalized and additional players such as India, South Korea and Japan are also becoming involved.

Regarding the US role, Limaye considered Southeast Asia to represent the most innovative element of the US 'pivot', through which for the first time in history, the US was working with all ten ASEAN members. Limaye noted, however, that whilst each is seeking US participation, this does not equate to 'alignment'. Instead members of ASEAN are looking beyond the bilateral to the multilateral networks, which working with the US facilitates.

Liu Lin drew attention to the South China Sea, considered an unavoidable topic for discussion. According to Lin the issue also relates to the continued modernization of Southeast Asian states' militaries, rising nationalism and the need for resources which has intensified competition. The US 'pivot', which as Limaye noted earlier had given more focus to Southeast Asia, had also created a situation whereby whilst ASEAN sought a closer economic relationship with China, the US was preferred on security matters. Lin appreciated that China should be more sensitive about ASEAN concerns but also that others should realize China's caution regarding internationalizing the issue.

Francesco Mancini's comments began on a positive note, identifying how global trends in regionalism were increasingly dynamic. For Mancini, regionalism is a response to rising global challenges and as China continues to rise, so too will ASEAN be encouraged to work together on issues such as trade and FDI, as well as political alignment. Mancini also brought attention to the problems of corruption, organized crime and disaster relief as further incentives for cooperation.

Whilst China had made significant moves towards ASEAN in the past decade, Nguyen

Hung Son argued that in 2012 Beijing made a 'strategic mistake'. By placing pressure on Cambodia, then Chair of ARF proceedings, for the first time no joint communique was released. Despite Chinese efforts for 'silence' on the South China Sea dispute, Nguyen stated that the actual outcome was much louder and served only to reinforce regional fears of China's intentions. In addition, if China sought to push away the US, the result was greater US involvement.

To conclude, Nguyen called on China to work with ASEAN in establishing a more binding code of conduct on the South China Sea which he stated could prevent the need to refer to international courts. For Nguyen, China does not need a buffer zone since in the context of globalization, a maritime blockade was highly unlikely. Nguyen further asked if China could rethink its strategy towards North Korea, then a similar reassessment should be made towards the South China Sea.