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# RSIS COMMENTARIES

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No. 142/2010 dated 4 November 2010

## **BEYOND ASEAN PLUS TO EAST ASIA COMMUNITY: THE HANOI ASEAN SUMMITS**

By Mushahid Ali

### **Synopsis**

*The Hanoi Summit of ASEAN Leaders and Dialogue Partners produced two significant achievements: the widening of the East Asia Summit with the inclusion of Russia and the United States, and the adoption of the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan. Both underscore the relevance and centrality of ASEAN in the evolving Asia Pacific security architecture.*

### **Commentary**

ASEAN LEADERS meeting in Hanoi with their Dialogue Partners on 30 Oct 2010 admitted to their East Asia Summit the two major powers in the Asia-Pacific: Russia and the United States. They received Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as special guests and formally invited the presidents of the two countries to participate in the EAS from 2011.

In so doing the ASEAN leaders have asserted and the Dialogue Partners have confirmed, the centrality of ASEAN in the evolving regional architecture in the Asia-Pacific. At their own summit earlier (28 Oct 10) the ASEAN Heads of Government had stressed the importance of promoting a regional architecture based on multiple existing regional frameworks which were mutually supporting and reinforcing with ASEAN as the driving force. They agreed to continue efforts to encourage deeper engagement by ASEAN's major partners with a view to promoting peace, security and prosperity in the region. They believed the participation of Russia and the US in the EAS would provide further momentum to the natural evolution of their regional architecture.

### **Russian and US Response**

The Russian and American response was encouraging. Medvedev committed Russia's increased cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region while Clinton stated the US goal to help strengthen and build the EAS. She affirmed the US' enduring commitment to the EAS which President Obama would attend in 2011 in Jakarta. The ASEAN Leaders would have been pleased with her support for ASEAN's continued central role and leadership as EAS evolved. "We view ASEAN as a fulcrum for the region's emerging regional architecture," she said. Further, the US shared ASEAN's vision of EAS as a forum where leaders could have intimate and informal discussions on important and strategic issues. The US believed the EAS should also reinforce the work being done in other forums such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM).

Medvedev also met ASEAN Leaders in an ASEAN-Russia Summit which reportedly focussed on a common approach to security issues, economic development of the Asia-Pacific region and the overall strengthening of relations. They also discussed cooperation in the field of nuclear security, stating "Russia and the ASEAN members assume that modern international security challenges should be dealt with based on the Non-Proliferation Treaty," and creating a zone free from nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia would "contribute to global nuclear disarmament." (Medvedev went on to sign several bilateral economic agreements with Vietnam including one to build Vietnam's first nuclear power plant).

Buried in media reports of a US-China altercation over South China Sea claims, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao welcomed the participation of Russia and the US in the EAS. The EAS, he noted, had stuck to its orientation and launched fruitful dialogue and cooperation in various fields such as finance, energy, education and avian flu control. China would like to discuss with all its partners the proposals for economic integration in East Asia and jointly promote regional peace, stability and development.

### **ASEAN Plus Three**

The widening of the EAS overshadowed the ASEAN Plus meetings that ASEAN Leaders engaged in with Dialogue Partners, namely Japan, South Korea, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand. The ASEAN Plus Three Summit (involving Japan, Korea and Japan) endorsed the Joint Declaration on ASEAN Plus Three Civil Service Cooperation adopted in Laos before the summit. Separately Japan's prime minister Naoto Kan announced that Tokyo was ready to help ASEAN implement the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity which the ASEAN Summit had adopted in Hanoi.

ASEAN Leaders proposed that Japan's support be hinged on economic corridors development and capacity building. Korea's President Lee Myung Bak and ASEAN Leaders committed to elevate the comprehensive cooperation between them to a strategic partnership, to be implemented in a five-year plan. China's Premier Wen and ASEAN Leaders agreed to a joint statement on sustainable development, to promote economic growth, trade and investment linkages, social development, poverty reduction and environmental protection.

### **ASEAN Connectivity**

The ASEAN Leaders had in their summit endorsed the Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity (ACM) which specified measures to improve links and deepen cooperation among member states. As Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described it, the ACM was an overarching umbrella to bring ASEAN countries closer together among themselves and also with their cooperation partners. The ACM encompassed physical connections, institutional linkages, and people to people contacts, such as physical infrastructure to enable goods, services and people to move freely across national boundaries and remove impediments.

The ACM set out ASEAN's priorities such as completion of roads in the ASEAN Highway Network, missing links in the Singapore-Kunming Railway Link, and broadband corridor across ASEAN. According to the Vietnam Chair's statement the ACM had set benchmarks for the ASEAN Community, particularly the ASEAN Economic Community, to be attained by 2015.

PM Lee assessed the ACM an important achievement of the Hanoi Summit, along with the broadening of the East Asia Summit, because it had resonance with many of the ASEAN countries and Dialogue Partners. He thought the inclusion of Russia and the US in the EAS was another significant step forward; it is a widening of the group -- bringing in two important players which could make significant contributions to the Asia Pacific.

In sum, both the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan and the widening of the East Asia Summit underscore the continued relevance and centrality of ASEAN in the evolving regional architecture of the Asia-Pacific.

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