

MULTILATERAL MATTERS

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FEATURED COMMENTARY: THE EAST ASIA SUMMIT AND THE FUTURE OF ASIAN REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

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By **Mushahid Ali & Ralf Emmers**

THE East Asia Summit in Bali on 19 November 2011 was a game changer for regional cooperation in more ways than one. It brought together all the major powers in the Asia-Pacific region, including for the first time, Russia and America. Their presence have balanced the Asian giants, China and India, if not actually overshadowing them.

American leaders have highlighted the United States as a Pacific power with interests in the East Asia region. This posture has given a security orientation to U.S. participation in the EAS, raising concerns that it could rekindle big power rivalry in a new Great Game in East Asia. Asian countries, however, have a more nuanced perspective of the emerging regional architecture.

ASEAN's desire to engage outside powers peacefully is fundamental to its original development of an Asian regional architecture. United in their belief that the inclusion of the United

States and Russia would enhance the value, weight and influence of the ASEAN Plus bloc, ASEAN member states have over the years persisted with incremental steps towards regional cooperation and integration. At the Bali Summit, ASEAN reaffirmed its commitment to build an ASEAN Community that would undertake global-level cooperation based on its three pillars of economic, political-security and socio-cultural cooperation.

The integrated ASEAN Community would comprise a market of 600 million that would enhance ASEAN's capacity for trade and economic interaction with other regional powers and groupings. When the three components of the ASEAN Community are realised, the ASEAN Community would form the core of the larger East Asia Community envisaged for the Asia-Pacific.

Challenges though still abound. The U.S. participation in the EAS raises the important

question of how the summit can complement existing cooperative arrangements and contribute to the emerging security architecture. The risk that the EAS and APEC could end up competing with one another is certainly one cause for concern, particularly if the East Asia Community as envisaged is moved in an economic-oriented direction, instead of a security-oriented one.

Finally, the expanded EAS will also test the fortitude of ASEAN countries to draw up and deliver on a robust agenda. The challenge for the Southeast Asian countries will be to lead the EAS in such a way as to make it acceptable to Beijing as well as relevant to Washington.

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“The challenge for the South-east Asian countries will be to lead the EAS in such a way as to make it acceptable to Beijing as well as relevant to Washington”

FEATURE STORY: EAST ASIA SUMMIT

LEADERS from the United States, Russia, Australia, India, New Zealand, China, Japan and South Korea, along with ASEAN leaders met at the sixth East Asia Summit, held in Bali on 19 November last year.

The Summit which witnessed the participation of the United States and Russia for the first time saw a host of issues being discussed. These include: maritime security, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and ASEAN's connectivity plan.

U.S. President Barack Obama whose attendance at the EAS makes him the first U.S. president to do so, reiterated Washington's commitment to deepening engagement in the Asia-Pacific region and playing a leadership role in its emerging institutions. At the sidelines, President Obama also spoke with his Chinese counterpart Premier Wen Jiabao on territorial disputes over the South China Sea.

In his assessment of the Summit, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that the EAS achieved a "good balance" between larger, strategic issues and specific, practical areas

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The 6th East Asia Summit saw U.S.-China relations feature as a key discussion topic

WHAT THEY SAY:

We asked several experts on their take on the revamped EAS and what it means to the ASEAN region:

"ASEAN wishes to avoid a destabilizing competition for influence in the region between the major powers, especially between the U.S. and China. Our strategy is to bring them all together and embed them in a cooperative framework. Hopefully, this will lead to cooperative activities and thereby reduce the deficit of trust."

Ambassador Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-Large and Special Adviser to the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore

"America is not and does not wish to be seen as a half-super power in Asia, consigned only to a security role. It is not in the interest of the United States for Southeast Asians to go to the Americans for ships, but to the Chinese for sales... U.S.-ASEAN relations could get more, not less interesting between now and 2015, a year that will include what ASEANists hope will be an impressively grand occasion: the epochal birth of an ASEAN Community."

Professor Donald Emmerson, Director, Southeast Asia Forum, Stanford University

"The EAS provides a unique platform at which big powers could interact with each other... [and] may partially contribute to a structure of 'concert of powers'. For ASEAN, it could continue to play the role of facilitator, but it is likely to be overshadowed by the big powers."

Associate Research Professor Sun Ru, Deputy Director, Institute of World Politics Studies, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations

ASEAN wishes to avoid a destabilising competition for influence in the region between major powers, especially between the U.S. and China... our strategy is to bring them all together and embed them in a cooperative framework —
Amb. Tommy Koh

AMBASSADOR TOMMY KOH SPEAKS AT APU-RSIS CONFERENCE

A CONFERENCE entitled “Engaging the United States: Asia-Pacific Responses” jointly organised by Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University and RSIS was held on 2 December 2011 at the Traders Hotel. Professor Tommy Koh, who formerly served as Singapore’s ambassador to the United States, was the keynote speaker. In his speech, Koh expressed his optimism over the U.S.’ ongoing engagement within the Asia-Pacific region. He added that the economic rise of China was beneficial to the region and that Beijing needs to exercise greater responsibility to uphold the preponderance of the rule of law within the international system.

Three main topics were covered at the conference. The topics focused on (i) U.S. Statutory Allies, (ii) U.S.-Southeast Asia relationships, and (iii) the changing global dynamics. A variety of speakers, from the diplomatic, professional and academic backgrounds took turns to speak on the topics.

The event concluded with a presentation by David L. Carden, the U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN. In his speech, Ambassador Carden urged countries in the Asia-Pacific to put aside debates on power-balancing, competition and political hedging and to instead find ways to cooperate and resolve global challenges. He added that shared commitment and responsibility between the regional actors and the United States were needed so as to ensure the long-term stability of the region.



David L. Carden, U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN, giving a speech at the APU-RSIS conference



Ambassador Tommy Koh giving his keynote speech at the APU-RSIS conference

No one is expecting anything to happen overnight but it shows you the importance of this ASEAN setting and what we mean by ASEAN centrality —
PM Lee Hsien Loong

EAST ASIA SUMMIT

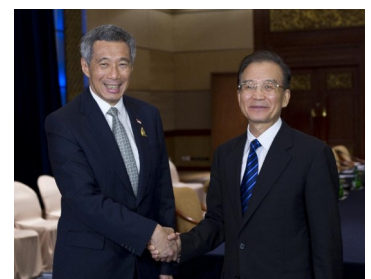
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of cooperation—and should stay this way. Mr Lee also highlighted the importance of having a tightly knitted ASEAN community as it would link Singapore to “a bigger life raft” if it was hit by a crisis.

“If you have a storm come in your direction, you have something to hang onto which is more cohesive and integrated,” said Mr Lee.

Likewise, Indonesia’s President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in his opening speech emphasised the intention of ASEAN to play a more active role in global affairs.

He said: “In this increasingly complex and interconnected world, ASEAN must truly be at the forefront to address the many challenges arise. ASEAN cannot just be a passive audience, a vulnerable victim to problems from other parts of the world.”



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the sidelines of the 6th East Asia Summit

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES/SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

[Tweaking China's Soft Power](#)

Benjamin Ho, *The Diplomat*, 12 Dec 2011

[Why not make food, health part of security](#)

Ong Suan Ee, *China Daily*, 18 Nov 2011

[Japan's Internationalism and EAS](#)

Bhubindar Singh, *RSIS Commentaries No. 169*, 17 Nov 2011

[Visions at War? EAS in the Regional Architecture Debate](#)

Tan See Seng, *The Straits Times*, 12 Nov 2011

[US in East Asia Summit: Implications for US-ASEAN Relations](#)

Ralf Emmers, *RSIS Commentaries No. 163*, 9 Nov 2011

[Russia's role in EAS: Promoting interregional cooperation](#)

Alica Kizekova, *The Jakarta Post*, 8 Nov 2011

[A proposal to enhance the G20's "input" legitimacy](#)

Pradumna B. Rana, *Vox*, 22 Oct 2011

[From 'Boots' to 'Brogues': The Rise of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia](#)

Bhubindar Singh and See Seng Tan, *RSIS Monograph No. 21*, 2011

UPCOMING EVENTS

Asia-Pacific Security
Conference 2012: The
Changing Geo-political
Landscape of the Asia-
Pacific,
12-13 Feb 2012,
Raffles City Convention
Centre, Singapore

RSIS-ADB Conference on
The Evolving Global
Architecture,
26-27 Mar 2012,
Location: TBA, Singapore

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ABOUT THE CENTRE

The Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS) is a research entity within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The CMS team conducts cutting-edge research, teaching/training, and networking on cooperative multilateralism in the Asia Pacific region. The Centre aims to contribute to international academic and public discourses on regional architecture and order in Asia Pacific. It aspires to be an international knowledge hub for multilateral cooperation and regional integration.