



**IMPACT OF THE
SINO-JAPANESE
COMPETITIVE
RELATIONSHIP ON
ASEAN AS A REGION
AND INSTITUTION**

Event Report
24 September 2014

Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel
Singapore

Event Report

**RSIS ROUNDTABLE ON
“IMPACT OF THE SINO-JAPANESE
COMPETITIVE RELATIONSHIP ON ASEAN
AS A REGION AND INSTITUTION”**

Report of a Roundtable Organised by:
The Multilateralism and Regionalism Programme,
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies,
Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore

Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel,
Singapore
24 September 2014

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Opening Remarks

Bhubhindar Singh **RSIS**

Bhubhindar Singh highlighted two reasons for the importance of the roundtable's topic, "Impact of the Sino-Japanese Competitive Relationship on ASEAN as a Region and Institution." First, the Sino-Japanese relationship is one of the biggest challenges for East Asia and Southeast Asia today. Following the collision between a Chinese fishing trawler and Japanese Coast Guard patrol boats in September 2010, and Japan's nationalisation of the *Senkaku/Diaoyu* Islands in September 2012, tensions had escalated in most areas of bilateral relations. The responses from China and Japan have been to strengthen economic, military and diplomatic strategies against each other. Second, given that both China

and Japan were dialogue partners of ASEAN, they had also enhanced their respective relations with the ASEAN institution and its member states. ASEAN's central role in the competitive strategies of China and Japan was thus in the spotlight.

Consequently, the roundtable aimed to assess the impact of the Sino-Japanese rivalry on ASEAN and its member states in three main areas: major power competition on specific bilateral relationships; maritime security; as well as regionalism and institution building. The questions posed for the roundtable discussion were: (i) what was the impact of the Sino-Japanese competition on Southeast Asia/ASEAN; and (ii) how was Southeast Asia/ASEAN coping with the competitive relations between Japan and China?

Panel I: Major Power Competition and Southeast Asia/ASEAN States

Tang Siew Mun **Institute of Southeast Asian Studies**

Tang Siew Mun noted that Sino-Japanese relations have been strained in recent times. In a recent survey, 93 per cent of Japanese respondents registered negative views on China while 87 per cent of Chinese respondents had negative views of the Japanese. A larger percentage of Chinese (53 per cent) than Japanese (29 per cent) expected the bilateral relations to deteriorate into open warfare. He noted that until recently, Sino-Japanese rivalry in the region was largely a "one-player-game" in which only China featured. But given Japan's revived militarisation under the Abe administration and the decline of Chinese "charm diplomacy", the region would likely witness increased competition between both countries.

In the realm of economics, Tang observed that while the Japanese trailed significantly behind the Chinese in total trade with ASEAN,

in terms of foreign direct investment, Japan was still ahead. This suggested that neither China nor Japan possessed a clear advantage of dominance over the other in regard to trade relations with ASEAN. As such, there is a lot to play for which would mean that ASEAN would likely benefit from this increased competition. Nevertheless, different ASEAN countries are likely to respond differently to courting by Japan and China, depending on respective national interests. Among ASEAN countries, he noted Malaysia as one on which Japan had considerable reservoir of goodwill in and that Malaysia of late had also shifted its position concerning its relations with China. According to Tang, the relative diplomatic and economic strength of archipelagic ASEAN vis-à-vis continental ASEAN would allow the former to better accommodate and provide strategic space for China and Japan to engage them without taking sides. Overall, ASEAN had much to gain from this rivalry that would be played out in diplomatic, economic and soft-power spheres.



Kicking off the Roundtable

Le Thu Huong
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

Le Thu Huong commented that both China and Japan had “balanced each other” by virtue of their behaviour and that developing ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam—CLMV) had little incentive to try balancing them. Instead, the CLMV countries should allow themselves to act as “outlets”, thus benefitting from increased Chinese and Japanese engagement.

Huong noted the differences between Japan and China’s involvement in CLMV countries. Japan’s motivations were to: (i) rejuvenate its local industries and businesses as part of a strategy to revive its stagnant economy; (ii) to limit China’s influence in the region and; (iii) to advance Japan’s relations with ASEAN. To do so, Japan has provided mix aid programmes combining economic and social infrastructure, expressed support for ASEAN integration, promotion of value-oriented democracy (such as adherence to rule-of-law and human rights) and taking into account environmental sustainability in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

In the case of China, its motivations were to: (i) forge good neighbourly ties in line with its development strategy; (ii) to boost the economy of its Western provinces, particularly Yunnan, thus allowing China to access the Andaman Sea via land links and; (iii) to achieve peaceful relations so as to mitigate the image of a “China threat”. To do so, it has focused its aim on delivering economic infrastructure and energy provisions, delivering “no-strings-attached” economic assistance, promoting a win-win scenario, adopting a “non-interference in domestic affairs” approach and handing out interest-free or low-interest loans.

As a result, CLMV states have benefitted much from both Japan and China as evidenced by a dense network of connectivity and economic corridors throughout the region. However, Huong also pointed out several challenges CLMV states faced such as the rapid growth of public debt, repercussions on recipient states’ domestic governance, political and economic dependency and the unsustainability of natural resources extraction.



Participants during the discussion

Discussion

Participants expressed concern towards ASEAN's ongoing ability to manage Sino-Japanese relations and noted the difference in perception between China and Japan towards ASEAN. It was mentioned that while Japan seeks to “cultivate” ASEAN support against China, China views ASEAN as its “own backyard” in which it seeks to project its leadership aspirations upon. The possibility of rifts among the CLMV countries was also raised, given China's ability to buttress support through economic carrots. Likewise, the danger of an explicit anti-China stance was mentioned, particularly if the Philippines—which would assume ASEAN Chairmanship in 2017—chose to deliberately antagonize the Chinese. Participants agreed that China's global leadership would be sorely tested in its relations with ASEAN and that it needed to be careful what kind of image it projected. Among ASEAN states, it was noted that Vietnam

possibly understood the Chinese best, given its shared land border and common political system. It was mentioned that Vietnam would welcome a strong Japanese presence and that it was slightly resentful towards Cambodia for its 2012 ASEAN chairmanship which allowed China to gain undue influence.

Participants also noted that Japan's economic problems would limit the extent to which it is able to be engaged in ASEAN. Japan's revived military was also a cause for concern given uncertainty towards Japanese intentions. As such, participants stressed the need for a united ASEAN that would not take sides between China and Japan. It was also observed that not everything Japan does is aimed at countering China; therefore ASEAN need not be overly sensitive. It was noted that China faced huge domestic problems that would also limit the extent of its rise.

Panel II: Maritime Security

Aileen Baviera
University of the Philippines

Aileen S.P. Baviera's presentation focused on the similarities and differences between the territorial disputes over the East China Sea's *Senkaku/Diaoyu* Islands and the South China Sea's Spratly and Paracel islands. She noted that in both cases, China had become more assertive and appeared ready to back up its territorial claims with coercive measures. Despite facing this common challenge, Japan, Philippines and Vietnam—all claimant states in dispute with China—had not formed a defence coalition against Beijing. This defiance of realist balancing logic was due to the differences that prevailed between the two disputes. For example, while the United States had declared its firm commitment to Japan's defence in scenarios of conflict over the *Senkaku/Diaoyu* Islands, it remained ambiguous to invoking alliance obligations to the Philippine claims in the South China Sea.

Noting that the East and South China Seas—or Northeast and Southeast Asia—were forming a single security complex, Baviera highlighted three aspects in which maritime disputes in the two seas could affect each other. First, the approach of the affected countries in addressing their disputed claims with China could provide a model for other countries in the same boat. Second, given the connectivity of the maritime domain, the level of freedom of navigation in one region could affect the freedom of navigation in the other. Third, the disputes reinforced the significance of maritime power in the Sino-U.S. competition for geo-political primacy.

Baviera opined that in the short-term, the Sino-Japanese rivalry could help boost Philippine maritime capabilities through assistance from and cooperation with Japan. Whether Japan's expanded security role in Southeast Asia would contribute to stability or aggravate tensions in the long-term, however, remained unclear.

Rocky Intan
Centre for Strategic and International Studies

Rocky Intan highlighted three elements of China and Japan's respective engagement with Southeast Asia. First, both countries had sought to participate in and integrate with the ASEAN-centred security architecture. Second, both countries had provided technical assistance to Southeast Asian countries, and although Japan's contributions exceeded that of China's, the latter displayed willingness to enhance cooperation in this area. Third, Japan was assessed to favour a more multilateral approach in its maritime strategy towards ASEAN and Southeast Asia, while China seemed to prefer bilateralism.

Indonesia's perspective of the Sino-Japanese rivalry was shaped by its status as a maritime country and a middle power in the region. As a maritime country, Indonesia's foremost interests were freedom of navigation at sea and the integrity of its maritime territory. To preserve these interests, Indonesia welcomed technical assistance from China and Japan which helped enhance its capacity to manage piracy at sea and maritime resources. As a middle power, Indonesia championed multilateralism which enabled it to punch above its weight and strengthen its attempts to hedge against China.

While pointing out that Southeast Asia was one of the prime arenas of Sino-Japanese geo-political competition, Intan also highlighted the potential for further engagement and cooperation among China, Japan and ASEAN. In this regard, he expressed Indonesia's hopes for more technical assistance from both the Northeast Asian powers to address common maritime challenges, as well as for both countries to further integrate themselves into the regional security architecture and multilateral forums.

Discussion

Participants highlighted that multilateral approaches had not been very effective in reducing tensions arising from the maritime territorial disputes, and as such, cooperation was plagued by issues of assurance and commitment. This had resulted in ASEAN-led multilateralism being overshadowed by power politics in the maritime domain. One participant noted that while the management of the territorial disputes—particularly in the South China Sea—could be achieved on a multilateral platform, the resolution of the issue could only be conducted bilaterally with the parties concerned.

It was also pointed out that ASEAN's definition of maritime security did not include territorial disputes. In this regard, some participants suggested that one strategy to enhance maritime cooperation among East Asian

countries was to look beyond the disputes and identify common issues which included both China and Japan as regional players.

A participant stressed that the circumstances surrounding the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas were very different. Sino-Japanese relations were perceived to be worse than Sino-Southeast Asian relations due to the historical legacy and power competition between China and Japan. In contrast, ties between China and ASEAN were deeply institutionalised. Moreover, the conflict in the East China Sea involved the second and third largest economies in the world, as well as modern navies and air forces—making the situation all the more dangerous. In the South China Sea disputes, however, the asymmetry of power could help to constrain Chinese actions.



Roundtable presentations

Panel III: Institution Building

Chulacheeb Chinwanno
Thammasat University

Chulacheeb Chinwanno noted that the East Asian region was facing economic and political transformations in the 21st century. He added that the rise of China brought about anxiety and uncertainty while Japan sought to play a greater role in the region. Noting the maritime conflict between China and Japan, he explained that while Japan viewed its actions towards nationalizing the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as preventing a likely crisis, China viewed the actions as a direct violation of the fragile status quo. This reflects a lack of understanding by both countries towards the perspective of the other.

According to Chinwanno, the competition and tension in China-Japan relations have already affected ASEAN relations with the two countries as well as dynamics within the ASEAN-centred security architecture in the region. While China wanted to deepen relations with ASEAN in the ASEAN Plus Three, Japan preferred to broaden the participation in the East Asian Summit (EAS) to include countries like Australia, New Zealand and India. These actions suggest that China and Japan were trying to prevent the other from establishing dominance over the region instead of promoting regional cooperation.

Chinwanno noted that the new Chinese leadership had expressed considerable interest in building closer ties with ASEAN member states through the “2+7 cooperation framework” so as to ease ASEAN’s suspicions towards China. As a result of the Sino-Japanese competition, it was an urgent task for ASEAN to strengthen its unity in order to maintain its centrality in playing the role as the “regional stabiliser.” There was a need to enhance ASEAN’s capability and to develop a clear road map for an enduring rules-based regional security order so as to manage existing multilateral processes such as the ASEAN Plus Three and the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM).

Moe Thuzar
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

Moe Thuzar compared ASEAN to a convenor and party organiser, and noted the similar length of time both Japan and China had to engage with ASEAN (since the late 70s). However, it was only the 1998 economic crisis which allowed China to flex its muscles as a financial power, thus kick-starting its active involvement within ASEAN.

Among the challenges faced by ASEAN in the coming years include: (i) sustaining regional interaction beyond 2015; (ii) maintaining its central role to balance the rise of China and India; (iii) helping newer ASEAN members open up through ASEAN integration, (iv) helping members adjust/adapt to trade and investment liberalisation, and possibly increased competition; and (v) moving towards rules-based engagement.

On the role played by Japan, Moe Thuzar commented that it could contribute to the peace and prosperity of Southeast Asia by serving as a bridge between ASEAN and the world as well as by providing capacity building, in the fields of trade and investment, infrastructure and institutions.

On Sino-ASEAN relations, Thuzar observed that ASEAN integration was in China’s interests and envisioned closer cooperation in ASEAN+3 and the EAS. China had also expressed great interest for ongoing multilateralism as seen by its decision not to devalue the Renminbi, and noted extensive investment by Chinese communities in Southeast Asia as well as a host of other links between China and ASEAN.

Moe Thuzar noted that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s “revisit” of the Fukuda Doctrine and continued engagement of ASEAN by President Xi Jinping had resulted in new dynamics for the region. Economically however, the region had good growth potential where Myanmar and Vietnam could play significant roles.

Discussion

Participants noted the following trends in the regional security architecture: (i) East Asia was characterised by conflicting patterns (economic well-being, geo-political tension); (ii) Sino-Japanese relations was defined by competition and cooperation; (iii) Sino-Japanese competition constrains the depth and extent of regional cooperation in East Asia; (iv) ASEAN is caught in a difficult situation to manage Sino-Japanese tensions, yet it has shown glimpses of creativity and leadership despite its limitations; and (v) ASEAN cannot afford to sit back but must do what it must, while it can.

The issue of ASEAN's centrality was also discussed as participants debated the extent to which ASEAN could provide leadership in

the regional architecture. It was noted that while ASEAN functioned as a regional bloc, yet decisions were made mostly on the basis of national interests whereby different countries have different priorities. It was suggested that the ASEAN Secretariat be further strengthened so as to provide guidance and leadership for the ASEAN community. Participants generally agreed that while ASEAN operated with a number of constraints, most major powers felt that ASEAN was sufficiently credible and were agreeable to working with it. Nevertheless ASEAN needed to respond to the changing global environment and strengthen its capacity-building ability.



Dr Tang Siew Mun, Director at ISIS (left) with Associate Professor Ralf Emmers, Associate Dean of RSIS



Participants having further discussions during the break

Panel IV: Way Forward for ASEAN

**Moderated by
Associate Professor Ralf Emmers and
Associate Professor Tan See Seng
RSIS**

Participants noted that major power competition in the region had provided opportunities for ASEAN for economic and diplomatic manoeuvre. However, the region remained geographically divided; for instance Cambodia was pro-China due to economic reasons while countries like Vietnam and the Philippines were tilting away from China. Geo-political tensions remained worrying and ASEAN remained ill-equipped to handle them, particularly in the area of territorial disputes where opportunities and access to equipping remained weak.

Participants also emphasised the need for a balanced approach in ensuring ASEAN's centrality in engaging China and Japan. Both countries were economically involved in ASEAN which created opportunities for growth, yet there is no such thing as a "free lunch"—ASEAN would have to respond in kind. Alternatives to an ASEAN-centered architecture were suggested, namely, bilateralism, minilateralism and a "concert of powers". It was also agreed that the only way ASEAN could resist the influence of major powers was to stay united and actively create conditions favourable for itself. The creation of the East Asia Summit and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation was cited as examples of successful ASEAN-led multilateral strategies. To ensure the ongoing relevance of ASEAN, a "balanced" engagement strategy was needed.

On China, it was mentioned that the new policy environment in Beijing is markedly different from the past. China does not view ASEAN as an equal and it had been sending signals that was read as demanding and assertive. As a result, ASEAN had to make a choice between China and the U.S. and China and Japan. Some scholars viewed such a hard stance as the new normal since ASEAN was perceived by the Chinese as its own backyard.

As such, greater ASEAN leadership—which was presently lacking—was sorely needed. If ASEAN continued being too polite, it ran the risk of being irrelevant. The way forward was to engage both China and Japan. ASEAN would need to be more frank with the Chinese and Japanese, and this could be best accomplished through track 1.5 channels. That said, it was noted that such resources were not forthcoming.

To maintain ASEAN neutrality, there was a need to revert to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation as the basis for ASEAN's relationship vis-à-vis external powers. In order to maintain ASEAN centrality, it needed to enhance its multilateral framework. For example, the EAS could be equipped with a conflict resolution mechanism. While ASEAN has economically succeeded to some extent, it had yet to attain the level of maturity that characterised security multilateral arrangements such as NATO. Nevertheless, ASEAN countries have cooperated on security issues, such as sharing of information and intelligence in combating terrorism and trans-national crime. Participants agreed that both Japan and China realise that it needed ASEAN despite its limitations. It was also pointed that China had proposed Tianjin as possible location for regional meetings with ASEAN leaders. Such a proposal has yet to receive ASEAN's approval. In the case of Japan, it needed to resolve tensions with China, especially over historical issues. There was a danger that Japan would exit its treaty relationship with the U.S. and that it would find itself alone.

The discussion concluded that Sino-Japanese relations may have already reached rock bottom, which meant that things could only improve from here. Such improvements could present a fresh context to ASEAN-China-Japan relations. This would entail ASEAN to manage Sino-Japanese relations in a manner conducive to regional prosperity. Ultimately, it was not in the interest of major powers to see ASEAN unravel.

Programme

| Time | Item |
|--|--|
| 23 Sep 2014, Tuesday 1900–2100 | Welcome Dinner <i>(by invitation only)</i> |
| 24 Sep 2014, Wednesday 0830–0900 | Registration |
| 0900–0915 | Opening Remarks |
| 0915–1045 | <p>Panel I: Major Power Competition and Southeast Asia/ASEAN States In this panel, the focus is on the impact of Sino-Japanese competition on its respective relations with ASEAN and its member states. The questions posed here are:</p> <p>(i) How does this rivalry play out in the economic, political and security/defence spheres in China and Japan's bilateral relations with Southeast Asian/ASEAN states?</p> <p>(ii) How have the individual Southeast Asian/ASEAN states responded to this rivalry?</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tang Siew Mun <i>Overview of Sino-Japanese rivalry on their relations with maritime Southeast Asian states</i> • Le Thu Huong, ISEAS <i>An assessment of the Sino-Japanese competition in Indo-China</i> <p>Discussant: Bhubhindar Singh, RSIS</p> |
| 1045–1100 | Coffee / Tea Break |
| 1100–1230 | <p>Panel II: Maritime Security Maritime security has been the main domain where the Sino-Japanese competition is played out. This is also the main area where Southeast Asia/ASEAN faces the biggest security challenge with China—the South China Sea dispute. The questions posed here are:</p> <p>(i) How have the maritime engagement strategies pursued by Japan and China with Southeast Asia/ASEAN been a source of stability or competition?</p> <p>(ii) To what extent does the situation in the East China Sea influence the South China Sea dispute?</p> |

Speakers:

- Rocky Intan, CSIS Indonesia
Assessing the impact of the maritime engagement strategies of Japan and China on Southeast Asia
- Aileen Baviera, UPD
Philippine perspective of the involvement of Japan and China in the South China Sea dispute

Discussant: Ralf Emmers, RSIS

1230–1400

Lunch

1400–1530

Panel III: Institution Building

This panel assesses the impact of the Sino-Japanese competition on ASEAN as a multilateral institution. The questions posed here are:

- How has the competition affected the multilateral processes of ASEAN (such as in the ARF, ADMM-Plus etc.), ASEAN unity and ASEAN centrality?
- What is the impact of Sino-Japanese rivalry on the regional economic and security architectures?

Speakers:

- Chulacheeb Chinwanno, Thammasat University
Assessment of the impact of the Sino-Japanese competition on the political and security architecture
- Moe Thuzar, ISEAS
Assessment of the impact of the Sino-Japanese competition on regional institutionalism

Discussant: Tan See Seng, RSIS

1530–1545

Coffee / Tea Break

1545–1645

Panel IV: Way forward for ASEAN

This final session is an assessment of ASEAN's future in light of the incremental escalation of tensions between Japan and China. It will aim to suggest policy recommendations, focusing on:

- How can ASEAN as an institution best manage its relations with China and Japan, considering the varying interests of its member states?
- How can Southeast Asia/ASEAN avoid getting entangled in the Sino-Japanese rivalry?
- How can Southeast Asia/ASEAN turn the Sino-Japanese competition to its advantage?

Moderators:

- Tan See Seng, RSIS
- Ralf Emmers, RSIS

List of Speakers and Discussants

1. **Dr Aileen BAVIERA**
Professor
Asian Center, University of the Philippines
Philippines
2. **Dr Chulacheeb CHINWANNO**
Associate Professor
Distinguished Scholar in Social Science
Faculty of Political Science,
Thammasat University
Thailand
3. **Dr Ralf EMMERS**
Associate Dean and Associate Professor
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
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4. **Dr Le Thu HUONG**
Visiting Fellow
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Singapore
5. **Mr Rocky INTAN**
Researcher
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Studies Indonesia
Indonesia
6. **Dr Bhubhindar SINGH**
Associate Professor and Coordinator
Multilateralism & Regionalism Programme
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
Singapore
7. **Dr TAN See Seng**
Deputy Director and Head of Research
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies;
Head of Centre for Multilateralism Studies
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
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8. **Dr TANG Siew Mun**
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Malaysia
9. **Ms Moe THUZAR**
Lead Researcher (socio-cultural),
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3. **Dr CHONG Ja Ian**
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Faculty of Arts and Social Science, NUS
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4. **Dr Leonard SEBASTIAN**
Associate Professor and Coordinator of
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5. **Mr TAN Seng Chye**
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6. **Dr Kaewkamol PITAKDUMRONGKIT**
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7. **Mr Mushahid Ali s/o Munshi Asmat ALI**
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Singapore

About the Multilateralism and Regionalism Programme

The Multilateralism and Regionalism Programme conducts advanced, cutting-edge research, networking and teaching in and on cooperative multilateralism and regionalism in the Asia Pacific. Since its inception in 2002, the Programme's output has contributed to the systematic accumulation of scholarly and policy-based knowledge on multilateralism and regionalism. Its agenda covers trans-regional, regional and sub-regional arrangements such as APEC, ASEAN, ASEAN+3, ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM, ADMM-Plus, East Asia Summit, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Six Party Talks, as well as non-official networks such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and Track 2 processes. The Programme is funded by Singapore's Ministry of Defence, and has been successful in attaining funding from international foundations such as the Sasakawa Peace Foundations of Japan and the United States, the MacArthur Foundation of the United States, and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany.

About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific.

For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.



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