

OVERVIEW REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

US-ASEAN SUMMIT STRATEGIC DIALOGUE ROUNDTABLE SEPTEMBER 21, 2010

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Introduction

The ASEAN Studies Center's off-the-record all-day roundtable, titled *The 2010 US-ASEAN Summit Strategic Dialogue Roundtable*, was held September 21 in McDowell Formal Lounge of American University. Funded through a grant from the Department of State, with additional financial assistance from The Asia Foundation and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore), the sessions focused on issues of priority concern to the United States and the member countries of ASEAN. The main objective of the roundtable was to elicit specific recommendations that might enrich the substantive government-to-government discussions at the second US-ASEAN Summit in New York on September 24, 2010.

The first such event ever attempted, this "strategic dialogue roundtable" brought together officials and subject-matter specialists representing each of the ASEAN member countries as well as the ASEAN Secretary-General, US Government departments and non-USG specialists from the think-tank, academic and NGO communities in the Washington area.

The major issues addressed were divided into five subject matter rubrics: (1) the US, ASEAN and regional architecture in Southeast Asia; (2) regional security cooperation, maritime security, and transnational crime; (3) democracy and human rights; (4) transnational issues including climate change, disaster relief, Lower Mekong water management and human resource development; and (5) trade and investments including the ASEAN Economic Community, the Doha Development Agenda and enlargement of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. In addition to those deliberations, broad perspectives from the US and ASEAN were provided through formal addresses by Mr. Joseph Yun, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State, and Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Twenty-five participants attended the roundtable, while another 35 subject-matter specialists, NGO representatives and officials of Southeast Asian and other embassies also attended part or all of the proceedings.

In order to produce results that would best contribute to helping lay the groundwork for discussions at the US-ASEAN Summit in New York, participants were encouraged to focus their comments on only those issues of highest priority, and to offer pragmatic suggestions for specific policies and actions that could reasonably be expected to draw wide support from participants at the Summit. The remainder of this brief report summarizes the major recommendations that emerged from the roundtable.

Policy Recommendations for US-ASEAN Summit

1. The US-ASEAN Summit process should serve as a mechanism to engage a wide range of official and private entities in building relationships that link US funding sources with ASEAN's priority needs in such areas as capacity-building human resources training, development of civil society institutions, and addressing environmental, health and food security concerns.
2. ASEAN member states should strengthen their internal decision-making capacity for bringing well-researched and well-coordinated ASEAN proposals to the US and other international funding bodies.
3. The US should step up its support for the ASEAN Secretariat to enable it to carry out its mandate to realize ASEAN's community-building goals in the political-security, economic and social-cultural realms, through better mechanisms to monitor the implementation of agreements, improve communication flows and conduct high-quality policy research and writing.
4. The US should give full support to the soon-to-be-launched Human Rights Resource Center in Jakarta and encourage the establishment of similar institutions in other ASEAN countries.
5. The US should provide grants to promote networking of civil society institutions within ASEAN both among member countries and with US counterparts. A fruitful initiative might be to focus on information sharing regarding counter-corruption or migrant worker "best practices" within ASEAN.
6. While recognizing and respecting Burma/Myanmar's sovereign rights, the US and ASEAN should strongly urge that the national election scheduled for November 7 be held in a manner that permits free and fair participation by all citizens of that nation.
7. The US should continue to assert its "national interest" in "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea (SCS) and vigorously encourage China to discuss SCS territorial issues multilaterally with ASEAN and its affected member states.
8. The US-ASEAN Summit should issue a joint statement calling for keeping the South China Sea open, safe and secure for navigation and communication and consider making the subject an agenda item at the next East Asia Summit (EAS).
9. The US and ASEAN should promote broad discussion of lessons learned regarding national, regional and international approaches to emergency response management and disaster relief assistance.
10. Water management issues in the Middle and Lower Mekong River deserve priority attention by ASEAN and increased financial and political support from the United States. The Lower Mekong Initiative has strong promise and annual meetings of the Mekong River Commission are valuable, but the highest priority should be given to the ASEAN

Mekong Basin Development Cooperation arrangement, and using it to encourage China to adopt fully transparent and more cooperative interactions with its Southeast Asian neighbors.

11. The US should give full support to the newly-configured ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM-Plus), especially its ADMM+8 format that includes the US, China, Japan, Korea, India, Russia, Australia and New Zealand. That Secretary of Defense Robert Gates will attend the October 2010 session in Vietnam is a most welcome evidence of US interest and support. The meetings should be held annually.
12. The US and ASEAN should work closely together to help ensure substantial progress at the forthcoming UN climate change conference in Cancun, Mexico.
13. With the US engaged in trade negotiations aimed at including additional ASEAN member states in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the US should strongly encourage those states aspiring to membership – Vietnam and Malaysia – to undertake domestic reforms required to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion.
14. The US should strongly encourage and work with ASEAN member countries to establish by 2015 “single window” mechanisms by which US and other foreign investors and traders can submit regulatory documents at a single location and have them applied throughout ASEAN.
15. US and ASEAN cooperation in fighting transnational crime should be increased, particularly in such areas as trafficking in persons, anti-narcotics efforts and reduction of small arms smuggling.
16. The US and ASEAN should strengthen cooperation in the context of the 2002 ASEAN-US Joint Declaration on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism to support programs of ASEAN member state counter-terrorism efforts in the areas of intelligence-sharing and law enforcement.
17. The US should consult with ASEAN member countries to stay abreast of their energy security initiatives, seek ways to curb harmful competition for the region’s energy resources and help develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
18. ASEAN countries should identify and coordinate their requirements for English language instruction and English teacher training and seek support from US government and private entities in meeting those needs.
19. The US and ASEAN should expand scholarships for Southeast Asians to study in the US and American students to pursue research and study in ASEAN countries.

Keynote presentations

Mr. Joseph Yun – Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State

Mr. Yun emphasized the Obama Administration’s commitment to more heavily engage with ASEAN, recognizing the body’s centrality within the East Asian security architecture. He pointed to President Barack Obama’s participation in the first US-ASEAN leaders meeting to be held in New York on September 24 and the decision to have Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attend the East Asian Summit (EAS) in Hanoi this November, with the commitment of President Obama to attend next year’s EAS. The United States views the EAS as an excellent forum for

discussing security and strategic issues as maritime security and counter-terrorism, as well as food security and climate change, while the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) mechanism retains its importance for advancing broad economic, business and investment interests. The US anticipates that its trade liberalization objectives can best be pursued through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) mechanism launched by Singapore and Brunei along with New Zealand and Chile. When additional ASEAN member states aspire to join the TPP, they will be required to meet standards for labor rights, environmental protection, intellectual property protection and financial services along the lines governing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the US.

Dr. Surin Pitsuwan – Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Dr. Pitsuwan welcomed the US desire to renew its engagement with Southeast Asia, as seen by its accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Commerce (TAC) and its hosting of the Second ASEAN-US Summit of leaders in New York three days hence. He said high-level meetings between the US and ASEAN are a means to broaden cooperation and coordination to promote overall security and stability while addressing specific topics such as conflict prevention, tension reduction, poverty, underdevelopment, energy resources, natural disasters and health issues. He also commended the ASEAN Studies Center at American University for organizing the Roundtable with participation from the ASEAN Studies Center in Singapore and ASEAN Studies Program in Jakarta to serve as a public forum preceding the summit, thus allowing a broader segment of the policy community to participate in the summit process. Dr. Pitsuwan added that ASEAN is actively developing institutions and processes to address the many challenges it faces, and stressed that Southeast Asia's location at the crossroads of great civilizations has given the historical experience and cultural diversity to help reduce tensions among outside forces and serve as the venue for socio-cultural dialogue between Islam and the West. At a broader level he called for greater US-ASEAN "connectivity" in the physical, institutional and human spheres, and said the region would welcome greater multidimensional engagement from the US, the European Union, China, Japan and South Korea, particularly in such areas as energy and resource development, and trade and investment. He closed with his address by wondering aloud "whether or not the American people have the fortitude and the stamina to lead the nation and the world out of their predicament by bearing the burdens they have borne in the past," answering his query by saying that he believes that, despite its current problems and internal debates, "the United States will remain engaged with the world and will continue to provide enlightened leadership in a shared global system."

Discussion session summaries

US, ASEAN and regional architecture in Southeast Asia

The discussion during this session focused mainly on ASEAN's performance and potential as a force for strengthening regional peace and security, while recognizing that the US military presence has for many decades played a critical stabilizing role. Though it has been difficult to establish a strong overarching security forum, ASEAN has substantially helped reduce the potential for intraregional conflict. In addition, it has proven adept at using "open

regionalism” to reach out to other countries, such as through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), which will soon include the US and Russia as members. Now it is tackling even tougher issues such as human rights and economic integration. Changes in the region are profound and the US should be an active player at all levels. Whether the US should deal with the Southeast Asian states bilaterally or multilaterally through ASEAN was a major point of discussion, with some arguing that the ball is now in ASEAN’s court to make the tough decisions that will move the region forward.

Regional security cooperation

In this session stress was put on the US desire to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation for maritime security to maintain shipping routes, protect natural resources and territorial boundaries and fight transnational crime. Additional attention was given to mutual efforts to address counter-proliferation, particularly through the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and counter-terrorism. The importance of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ participation in the forthcoming ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) was also favorably noted. In addition, participants welcomed the growing role of US forces in disaster relief, a new and growing dimension of security cooperation. Many other areas that fall within the general rubric of “non-traditional security issues” such as climate change and trafficking in persons and narcotics are beyond the capacity of ASEAN countries to handle on their own but instead require assistance from multilateral organizations and countries such as the US. ASEAN appreciates US support for its positions refuting China’s unilateral claims regarding South China Sea issues. While such US involvement may make China somewhat uneasy, recent indications are that the PRC may not consider it a “core territorial issue” on the level of, for example, Tibet or Taiwan. One participant cautioned that it is a mistake to confuse US-China differences over navigation rights in that area (an issue dramatized by a near collision between a Chinese vessel and the USS Impeccable in March 2009) with the conflicting territorial claims of China and some ASEAN member states.

Democracy and human rights

This discussion gave considerable attention to the creation in 2009 of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Human Rights Commission and that body’s strengths and weaknesses. The US is giving support to the Commission and to the Human Rights Resource Center that will soon be launched in Jakarta. It has also invited representatives of the Commission to the US to meet US Government officials and interact with civil society representatives. While some participants emphasized that human rights has become an increasingly important part of the ASEAN agenda in the past 15 years, others pointed to the fact that the body’s human rights concerns have not proven to be a factor in influencing the actions of the government of Burma/Myanmar and the Commission has yet to produce a promised “ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights.” Looking more broadly at ways to address human rights on a regional scale, it was suggested that all countries share common desires to root out corruption and make their governments more accountable for meeting the expectations of their citizens. In addition, recognition should be given to significant progress in certain countries in addressing problems of human trafficking and building viable civil society institutions.

Transnational issues

The participants in this session agreed that this field of transnational issues – more appropriately identified as “transnational” than the term “non-traditional security” as favored by some – offers a potentially rich area for cooperation between the US and ASEAN. Many Southeast Asian countries, primarily because of lack of resources and experience, simply cannot handle key issues such as climate change, disaster relief and early warning systems, food security, water resources management and pressing requirements to develop human resources. Considerable attention was given to issues of water security and water resource management as an essential component of ensuring food security, protecting the environment, keeping riverine transportation routes open and protecting national cultures, with special reference to the Middle and Lower Mekong countries, which was considered a particularly serious issue. It was noted that closer cooperation is needed among countries affected by China’s plans to build dams in the upper reaches of the river. The US was asked to increase its support to ASEAN on addressing these issues (including by helping Southeast Asian governments better analyze the long-term costs and benefits of their own hydroelectric projects) and to assist in encouraging China to adopt fully transparent and cooperative interactions with its Southeast Asian neighbors.

Trade and investment

The participants noted that ASEAN is a key destination for US foreign direct investments (FDI). For its part, Southeast Asia, an especially trade-dependent region, looks to the US as a vital market, source of investment and technology, and leader of efforts to promote trade liberalization. At the same time, new free trade agreements with the US will be not be easy. Because of the difficulties that would face ASEAN as a whole in fulfilling the stringent requirements for a multilateral FTA with the US, individual ASEAN member countries – such as Vietnam and Malaysia – that seek the benefits of a bilateral FTA will have to do so with through the enlargement process now underway for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The US-ASEAN Summit – along with movement toward realization of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) - affords opportunities for ASEAN members to more effectively harmonize their economic policies. If the Doha Development Round can achieve its goal of reaching agreement this year, the ASEAN countries will benefit greatly from its provisions securing market access and global economic stability. Some participants expressed skepticism that the US – given its current economic difficulties and political divisions – can deliver on its declared intention to join the TPP, while others feared that an active role of the US might make it harder for new members to join the TPP. From the perspective of the US private sector, it was noted that progress toward AEC is a crucial element in attracting US investment, especially in industries geared toward re-exporting to both the regional and global market. Having more ASEAN member countries join the TPP would also be warmly welcomed by the US business community.

ROUNDTABLE PRESENTERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Presenters & Participants from ASEAN

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US Government Presenters

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Ms. Christina Chan

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