

## Will the Crisis Divide Asia from America?

**A**ssociate Professor **Simon Tay**, Chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) spoke at an ISIS International Affairs Forum on July 9, 2010. His talk was entitled 'Will the Crisis Divide Asia From America?' It was based on his recently published book, 'Asia Alone: The Dangerous Post-Crisis Divide From America.' Former ISIS Researcher **Suwita Hani Randhawa** reports.



*Simon Tay*

The end of 2008 represented a moment of crisis in the Western world said Assoc. Prof Simon Tay. The collapse of Wall Street and the ensuing loss of confidence in the financial system brought about an economic and financial crisis. During this time however, the economies of Asian countries like China and India experienced a different fate. Instead of a crisis, these countries experienced economic growth. Tay said these different economic trajectories have contributed to a greater strain in the relationship between the United States and Asia.

He also attributed the strain to the ebb in the soft power of the United States. The US has been in steady decline since the end of the Bush Administration, and this was evident in the use of US military power in Afghanistan, the conduct of the war against terror, and the Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib incidents.

Tay said the existence of these stresses must not only be keenly appreciated, it is important that they be ironed out as there is much that Asia stands to gain from good relations with the US. Asia for instance, requires America's economic presence across the region, both in terms of trade and investments, and technological innovation. Asia also requires the presence of the US for military and security reasons. However, several issues currently stand in the way of improving US-Asia relations.

Firstly, there is the ongoing tension between the United States and China. Although the political leaders of China have been astute and responsible in managing their relations with the US, a strident strain of nationalism is on the rise in China. In Tay's view, contrary to academic views about China's impending 'rise,' the Chinese youth widely see China as having already risen. This difference in perception may present a further source of tension between the US and



*(From left) Simon Tay, Mohamed Jawhar Hassan and Mahani Zainal Abidin*

China. He also said that the US-China relationship will be the dominant relationship that will structure US-Asia relations, and as such, an improvement in US-China relations is a necessity for the improvement of US-Asia relations.

Secondly, there is the issue of the Obama administration's ability to sustain interest and involvement in Asia. Even though the Obama Administration has expressed considerable interest in Asia and Asean, whether this interest will translate into greater engagement remains to be seen. The possibility of the United States being distracted by domestic priorities cannot be ruled out entirely. While the recent signals from the Obama Administration on its interest in Asia are both positive and encouraging, any improvement in US-Asia relations, nevertheless, will require sustained interest and involvement by the US in Asia.

Tay then spoke about the prospects for a shared future across the Pacific. Here, he expressed his support for existing efforts in community-building. But we are now standing before a crucial

policy juncture; what has thus far kept the Asian region stable and prosperous could start to change. In order to avoid this, we must be prepared to introduce policy shifts across our region. He highlighted three areas, in this regard, where new policy responses could be introduced.

Firstly, Apec must be reinvigorated and given new importance. Secondly, greater substance must be injected into existing Asean-US Summits. And



*Simon Tay and Mohamed Jawhar Hassan*

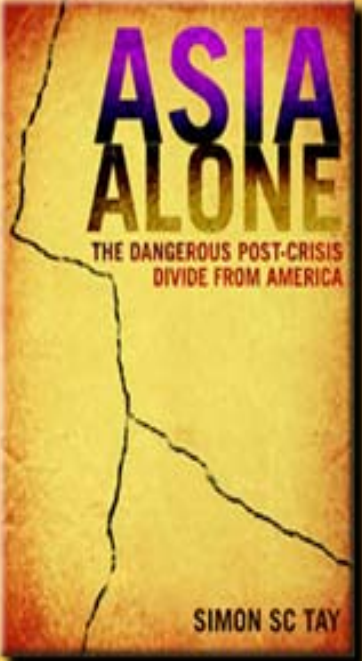
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*A section of the audience*

thirdly, new processes aimed at engaging the US with all Asian powers must be introduced. Given that two active proponents of Asian regionalism—former Prime Minister Hatoyama of Japan and former Prime Minister Rudd of Australia—are no longer in power, it now falls upon the region to craft innovative proposals that will foster greater integration between the US and all Asian powers.

Tay concluded his presentation with a brief but pertinent remark: fundamental shifts are currently underway across our region and the countries have to be prepared to foster relationships with the US, and to overcome political obstacles that lie in the way of this.



*Dialogue with Simon Tay, Author, Asia Alone*  
**“Will Crisis Divide Asia from America?”**

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