

East Asian Geopolitics and Security

EIAS Conference

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East Asia as a region is understood to simultaneously be a vital engine of global economic growth, and a source of significant geopolitical uncertainty. With various powerful states vying for influence, the political and security situation in the region is a point of global intrigue. This conference brought together experts from across Europe and Asia in two sessions to address two of the most important debates in the study of the region: Cross-Strait Relations, and the various hotspots that shape East Asia's security landscape.

Welcome Remarks

Xavier Nuttin

After a word of welcome to this event's guests, EIAS Senior Associate, Mr Xavier Nuttin, highlighted the global role played by East Asia as both a vital engine of economic growth and a source of geopolitical uncertainty. With so much hanging on the future geopolitical and security developments in the region, both within East Asia and around the world, encouraging constructive dialogue around the various hot spots dotted throughout the region is an issue of global concern. Through bringing together a wealth of scholastic and academic expertise, Mr Nuttin asserted that encouraging such constructive dialogue and considering innovative ideas were the core objectives of this high-level conference.

Moving on to outline the specific subject of this conference's first session, Mr Nuttin stated that a peaceful Cross-Strait relationship is a prerequisite to the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. Whilst economic and people-to-people ties have been on the rise across the Taiwan Strait throughout the 21st century, since 2016 and the election of Tsai Ing-wen's Democratic Progressive Party, political tensions have been on the rise. With communication almost at a standstill across the Strait, Mr Nuttin explained how throughout the first session of this conference, the expert panel will first discuss both the current state, and future prospects of this complex relationship. From this point, they would be better placed to assess how it may develop into the future.

The conference's second session, Mr Nuttin outlined, would address the various other security hotspots that are prevalent throughout the region. Chief among these being the Korean Peninsula, and the various maritime disputes throughout South and East China Seas. Despite the situation on the Korean Peninsula having witnessed some positive developments in the past year and the apparent rapprochement happening between nations involved in maritime disputes, the security situation in the region is never far from the precipice. Mr Nuttin pointed out how it was the second session's panel's task to provide

expert analysis of the region's broader security landscape, before assessing how the aforementioned hotspots are likely to unfold into the future.

Following his welcoming remarks, Mr Nuttin once again thanked the two panels and the audience for their attendance, before handing the floor to the first session's moderator, Senior Lecturer at the University of Antwerp, Dr Elena Atanassova-Cornelis.

Session 1 - Cross-Strait Relations: Current State and Future Prospects

Dr Elena Atanassova-Cornelis

Following on from Mr Nuttin's remarks, Dr Atanassova-Cornelis introduced the first session's esteemed panel to the audience.

First, was Professor Dr Christopher R Hughes, Professor of international relations at the London School of Economics, where he served as director of the Asia Research Centre from 2002 to 2005. Prof. Hughes' research focusses predominantly around the Asia-Pacific, with a particular focus on Taiwanese and Chinese foreign policy and politics.

The second speaker introduced was Professor Dr Kerry Brown, Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London. He has also worked at the University of Sydney, headed the Asia Programme at Chatham House, and worked for the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Beijing. Having also written over ten books on modern Chinese politics, Prof. Brown is certainly another valuable addition to this panel.

The third panellist on this first panel to be introduced by Dr Atanassova-Cornelis was the Vice President of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Professor Dr Jiann-Fa Yan. Prof. Yan, this session's Taiwanese representative, had worked for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as Director of Policy Research from 1998-2000, and has a speciality covering Cross-Strait Relations and Taiwan's Diplomacy.

Finally, Dr Atanassova-Cornelis introduced this session's fourth and final panellist, Professor Dr Xinning Song. Prof. Song of Renmin University was a Senior Research Fellow at UNU-CRIS in Bruges until 2016. He is now the head of the VUB's Confucius Institute in Brussels, and has written extensively on EU-China relations.

With the panellists introduced, Dr Atanassova-Cornelis handed the floor to Prof. Dr Christopher Hughes, to discuss this session's topic: Cross Strait Relations.

Professor Dr Christopher Hughes

Setting the context for Cross Strait relations, Professor Hughes suggested that the current situation cannot be described as a crisis (as bigger crises have beset the relationship), but rather as a "slow strangulation" of Taiwan by China. This has been achieved through the recent removal of Taiwanese diplomatic allies (Dominican Republic, Burkina Faso, and El Salvador all in 2018), the ending of contact or official communication with Taiwan from China, and the use of "sharp power" techniques. Examples of "sharp power" include forcing airlines to stop using the name "Taiwan" as a travel destination, rather using the designation: Taipei, CN. This situation has been driven by the dislike existing between the democratically elected DPP in Taiwan, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and has led to an increasingly fraught cross-strait relationship.

In this month's local elections in Taiwan, the DPP suffered substantial losses to the Taiwanese opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), a party founded in Chinese nationalism. The results were well received in China, with some suggesting that Chinese economic pressure led to a swing towards to more pro-China KMT. Explaining these results has proven challenging for analysts, with many simply arguing that the DPP have failed politically. This explanation however, Prof Hughes argued, is too simplistic. Far more important elections are coming up in 2020, when the next general elections will be held. These will be key for the DPP, who are expected to react to the poor results in recent local elections. However, the CCP will also be keenly watching the 2020 elections, eager to optimise their position and achieve results that support their agenda.

An argument explaining the recent swing in voter confidence away from the DPP which Prof. Hughes suggested receives too little focus, is that the voting trends in Taiwan conform to the global trend of rejection of the status quo. Disillusion with the impacts of globalisation have led to numerous political upsets across the world in the past few years, with the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump being good examples of this.

In 2004, the DPP looked to be heading for an electoral defeat only to come back and emerge successful. The current Tsai Administration will be looking to repeat this feat, and are likely to be looking to experiences of the 2004 campaign for ideas. In 2004, the DPP managed to narrowly beat the KMT by mobilising the public around "Taiwanese Identity". Whilst this ensured them electoral success in 2004, the US reacted negatively to this appeal to Taiwanese identity, which effectively paved the way for the KMT to win the following election. This issue of identity is likely to be an important point within the next elections, as due to their party identity being based in Chinese nationalism, the KMT are struggling to realise their place and their identity within the new Taiwan.

Looking forward to 2020, the relationship between the two main parties and China is likely to prove an important factor. Although China has been successful in offering Taiwan economic boosts, it has had little success in altering Chinese identity, and the public remains concerned about national security. This being the case, the KMT in particular will have to re-assess its relationship with China, especially given the recent success of new, young KMT politicians aiming to reorient the party away from traditional Chinese nationalism.

Concerning the European Union's relationship with Taiwan, Prof. Hughes observed how marginal concessions have been made in recent years. Although he argued that diplomatic recognition was out of the question, pushing at the margins is possible, albeit it must happen carefully and cautiously.

Finally, Prof. Hughes suggested that amongst pragmatists in China, it is a commonly held belief that, due to China's economic interests in Taiwan, stable relations across the Strait

are in their national interests. Especially in light of the recent negative trends in China's economy, Taiwan is increasingly important for China, with Taiwan's R&D excellence being one example of where Taiwan represents a great opportunity.

Professor Dr Kerry Brown

After thanking the other panellists and the audience for their attendance, Prof. Dr Kerry Brown began his address by picking up on a phrase mentioned by Prof. Hughes which referred to "slow strangulation". On this point, Prof. Brown mentioned how as recently as ten years ago, he believed that Hong Kong and Taiwan were models of how China can advance. However, with the PRC developing in a way that few expected or anticipated, he no longer views Hong Kong or Taiwan as archetypes for China to follow. As China has defied expectations and predictions, the Cross-Strait relationship has developed into a strategic game, however not all involved are aware of this.

Within the geopolitics of East Asia, Prof. Brown argued that its core lies both rationality and emotion - describing it as a theatre of aspiration. In the region's complex geopolitical environment, it is important to understand what actions are deliberate, and which are non-intentional. On this point, Prof. Brown highlighted how throughout most of the world, and especially within the USA, Beijing is understood to attribute significant strategic intent to geopolitics. Many of the actions of the PRC are assumed to be part of a deliberate and targeted strategic agenda, however Prof. Brown suggested that this is not the case.

Providing examples of where China has demonstrated a lack of strategic vision and intent, Prof. Brown started by highlighting not only China's mis-read of the election of Donald Trump, but also its lack of awareness surrounding the popular narrative in the USA that suggests "something must be done regarding China". More recently, China's visceral, knee-jerk reaction to the Huawei situation (taking in two Canadian citizens) has been a strategic mistake. Another area in which Prof. Brown suggested China has demonstrated little strategic intent concerns security issues in Xinjiang, where China's enormous and unsustainable spending of security is likely to lead to significant resentment and

incalculable costs into the future. Two other areas mentioned by Prof. Brown were Hong Kong and Taiwan, where he suggested China's strategic approach to these issues has been found wanting.

Moving on to discuss Taiwan specifically, Prof. Brown highlighted how the importance of Taiwan in the eyes of many Sinologists and Chinese alike lies in its significance within the "great story of China". This however, it was argued, must be separated, as the story of China and the story of Taiwan are now very separate stories. In the recent past, Taiwan was popularly understood as a "vision of Chinese modernity", however in light of China's recent, defiant development, it is becoming clear that Taiwan's story is exemplary in itself and cannot be transferred to the Chinese case.

Leading to his conclusion, Prof. Brown posited that "we are all Taiwanese now". Expanding upon this comment, Prof. Brown explained how with all people now tacitly observing all manifestations of power from the Chinese state, both deliberate and non-deliberate. An increasingly observed example of China's use of state power refers to "sharp power", an issue raised by Prof. Hughes. People and states around the world need to start making decisions about how we interpret China's sharp power exercises, and whether we see them benign, or malign.

It is clear that popular opinion across the political divide in the USA frames China's strategic agenda and its use of sharp power as a malignant and fearful thing, however opinions in the EU are less clear. With the EU's seemingly still unsure as to what China is doing strategically or geopolitically, it is time for it to devise and implement both a clear opinion and a relevant strategy. An important question for the EU to consider when considering its future approach to China, is whether Taiwan is important, and if yes, why?

As a final note, Prof. Brown made reference to the rise of populism in the EU, a phenomenon experienced all over the world, including, as Prof. Hughes pointed out, Taiwan. On this subject, Prof. Brown was clear to point out that this rise in electoral success

for populists is stemming from a dissatisfaction and anger at the status quo, not so much out of enthusiasm for the populist alternative.

Professor Dr Jiann-Fa Yan

Next to speak was Professor Yan, who began his presentation by showing the audience a collection of maps demonstrating and contrasting the grand strategies of the US and China - the Indo-Pacific Rebalance and the Belt and Road Initiative respectively. Following this, Prof. Yan went on to highlight Taiwan's geographical position within both of these strategies, lying in the centre of a strategically important island chain.

Within East Asia, scholars suggest that there are three key points from which conflicts are likely to emerge, these being: the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait. Whilst Prof. Yan agreed that there is a real chance of conflict arising in all of these locations, he conjectured that the least likely place for a conflict to arise out of these three is the Taiwan Strait. This, it was suggested, is due to China being a very rational global actor.

In recent years, China has invested heavily in the South Pacific, the second island chain lying off the coast of the mainland. This island chain lies beyond that of which Taiwan is a part, and Prof. Yan argued that Chinese investment in the South Pacific island chain is acting to draw a line underneath Taiwan, along which China can develop a significant military presence. As this process advances, Prof. Yan suggested that it would lead to a state of panic amongst the liberally aligned countries of the region.

Moving on to discuss the notion of a "One China Principle", Prof. Yan made reference to the liberation of Taiwan from Japanese imperialism, pointing out how it was the USA and not China who freed Taiwan from imperial rule. At the time of Taiwan's liberation, the CCP were in fact in the mountains following their defeat to the KMT, Prof. Yan mentioned. In the past, the PRC have acknowledged the existence of the ROC, however today, the CCP claims authority over the territory, despite having never occupied any land in Taiwan. For this reason, it is hard for the people of Taiwan to accept the One China Principle.

Moving on to discuss the results of the recent local election of Taiwan, Prof. Yan argued that the swing away from the DPP and towards the China-friendly KMT doesn't result from Chinese policy, but rather from domestic political issues in Taiwan. Prof. Yan then went on to suggest that the future of Taiwan is likely to be determined by the US and China, drawing an analogy to a boxing match between the two great powers. He suggested that on the issue of Taiwan, the US and China will continue to fight many rounds, however in the end, Prof. Yan predicted, China would emerge as victor.

Discussing US-China relations, Prof. Yan pointed out how anti-Chinese sentiment in the USA is at extremely high levels, but that neither the US or China want things to come to a head any time soon. If a conflict were to arise however, Taiwan would be forced to take sides. Given Taiwan's size, it is unable to influence the overall structure of international politics, and thus, would have to hitch to a certain bandwagon should a conflict arise between the regions two hegemons.

Whilst the US and China are likely to dictate the future of Taiwan, the next generation of Taiwanese citizens will play an increasingly large role in determining the future of the island. With this generation not being born after the Cultural Revolution, Prof. Yan suggested that they may be a source of optimism concerning Cross-Strait relations.

Professor Dr Xinning Song

After thanking the previous panellists for their contributions, Professor Xinning Song returned to Prof. Yan's point on the One China Principle. He highlighted that this principle is not just declared by China, but also throughout the global, multilateral architecture, with the UN and the EU both accepting it.

Moving on to discuss Taiwan and the impact of its domestic politics upon Cross-Strait Relations, Prof. Song highlighted how relations across the Strait seemed very good

between 2008 and 2016 under the rule of the KMT, with no substantial problems emerging between the two sides. There is a saying on the Mainland, that says "there will be no unification with KMT, and no independence with DPP". In light of this, Prof. Song suggested that both Taiwan and the PRC would be better off with the KMT being in power in Taipei.

Since the 2016 election of the DPP, there has been substantial political tension across the Taiwan Strait, and contact between either side has broken down entirely. Despite this, the Taiwan-China economic relationship has remained strong, and whilst trade across the Strait has decreased, Prof. Song argues that this is not as a result of politics. In the first ten months of 2018, the world witnessed an 18.6 per cent increase in Cross-Strait trade. Putting the importance of the Cross-Strait trade relationship in context, Prof. Song explained how China has more trade with Taiwan than it does with Germany, or the entire African continent.

Moving on to discuss the fraught US-China trade relationship and the prospective trade war, Prof. Song highlighted how despite efforts from the US administration, the US-China trade imbalance has grown further this year. As this relationship degrades, Taiwan is in a precarious position. Although Taiwan hasn't experienced many negative impacts yet, it is at risk of being negatively impacted. With the biggest companies exporting to the USA from the PRC being either Taiwanese, or joint ventures between Taiwanese and Chinese firms. If the current trade-dispute develops into a trade war, Taiwan stands to suffer greatly.

Turning to discuss China's influence in the domestic politics of Taiwan, Prof. Song mentioned how the PRC are conscious that they shouldn't push Taiwan too hard, as they run the risk of helping the DPP be re-elected in 2020. In relation to the recent results of the local elections, Prof. Song acknowledged that Cross-Strait relations are less of an influencing factor than in general elections. This being the case, the PRC shouldn't view the recent results as too much of an indicator for the general election in 2020, and should not push Taiwan too hard politically.

Bringing his presentation to a close, Prof. Song highlighted how the primary strategy of the PRC towards Taiwan isn't to promote unification, but to prevent independence. Within the PRC, it is widely acknowledged that unification is a long way off. There are concerns that if unification is to be achieved, it can only be done militarily, however Prof. Song rejects the idea that this is a likely outcome given the huge amount of domestic issues that Xi Jinping has to deal with. As a final note, Prof. Song joked that China aims to have realised the "Chinese Dream" by 2050, so unification may yet be a long way off.

Session 2 - Geopolitics in East Asia: The Security Landscape

The second session, focusing on the various security hotspot throughout East Asia and hosted by EIAS Senior Associate, Mr Xavier Nuttin also brings together various high-profile experts from Europe, Taiwan and China. After thanking the audience and panel for their attendance, Mr Nuttin swiftly handed the floor to Dr Sarah Kirchberger from Kiel University.

Dr Sarah Kirchberger

Dr Kirchberger started her presentation by discussing China's fast developing naval capacity. In recent years, China has been investing heavily in maritime security, and as a result of this, other countries in the region (particularly Japan and Australia) have also been developing their maritime capacity. Given the growth in both the quality and quantity of the Chinese military, Dr Kirchberger suggested that the only military build-up comparative to this in history has been that of Kaiser Wilhelm II before World War I.

Providing some context to the recent growth of Chinese naval capability, Dr Kirchberger explained how the size of China's Naval fleet added since 2014 is more or less equal to the entire Navy of Japan or the UK. Within China's naval capacity, build-up has happened across three tiers: official navy, coast guard, and sea-based militia. All three of these tiers have added to the profile of China's navy, contributing submarines, aircraft carriers, and amphibious vehicles. On the point of submarines, Dr Kirchberger mentioned how since

2005, China's submarine fleet has become far more active, with some suggesting that China may be aiming to expand their range into the South Atlantic.

Moving on to discuss the drivers for China's naval build-up, Dr Kirchberger suggested that there are three layers of threat perception that have led to the discussed proliferation. Firstly, the concept from within China, originally popularised by Hu Jintao, that "everyone is out to subvert the Chinese polity" plays a significant role. Secondly, China's unique geostrategic situation was also mentioned as a driver of military build-up. Very importantly on this point has been the defensive line of US military bases across China's Eastern coast, and the shallow depth of China's territorial waters. Beyond Taiwan and into the South China Sea, the sea depth is great, providing a good environment for launching ballistic missiles, making this area of ocean very strategically important. Up until recently, US containment of China has been very successful, however as China increasingly gains a foothold in the South China Sea, the US's eastern defensive line may prove less effective.

The final layer of threat perception driving build-up mentioned by Dr Kirchberger related to the threat from military-technology. Given the US's propensity to share its significant net-warfare information and capacity with its allies throughout the region (Australia and Japan), China is becoming increasingly concerned. In order to counter these perceived threats, China aims to drive wedges between the US and its alliance partners in the region. Whilst in some cases this may prove extremely difficult, China has identified Taiwan as both geographically and politically key to the region. This being the case, China is likely to continue investing significant resources in the Cross-Strait relationship in the near future.

Moving to discuss the possibility of China forcibly unifying across the Taiwan Strait, Dr Kirchberger made reference to an article written by famous Chinese navalist, Zhang Wenmu. In this article, Zhang Wenmu drew a comparison between the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the potential approaches China could take in reunifying across the strait. Using Crimea as an example of how a state can annex a strategically important region, Zhang wrote how "the unification across the Taiwan Strait is in China's core interest, and with one interest, one can use unlimited means".

Recently, China has enhanced both its nuclear and conventional deterrence in East Asia. Despite this however, China views the USA's "Prompt Global Strike" (PGS) as having the capacity to nullify China's nuclear deterrence. Some analysts studying PGS from within China have concluded that China should drop its "no first use" policy with nuclear weapons. Additionally, some analysts argue that the militarisation of space and the increase of cyber personnel should also be priorities for the PRC.

Mr Bruno Hellendorff

The second session's next speaker was Mr Bruno Hellendorff, Joint Research Fellow at the Egmont Institute. Mr Hellendorff's contribution had a greater focus on the relationship between the EU and regional actors in East Asia, and the role it can play in the region's complex security environment.

Mr Hellendorff got his account underway by discussing a recent trip he had taken to Taiwan, and how on that trip, he had been surprised by the stark discrepancy between what the EU can offer Taiwan, and what Taiwan expects of the EU. Europeans are more inclined to discuss issues covering trade, investment and connectivity, whereas the Taiwanese partners met on his previous trip had discussed almost exclusively military hardware. It is important for Europeans to better understand the perspectives of the Taiwanese, and why these perspectives exist. To do this, Mr Hellendorff argued, the EU must focus its attention on three big trends within the region.

The first of these big trends raised by Mr Hellendorff referred to the increasingly fashionable notion of an "Indo-Pacific". The emergence of this term is not simply a meaningless shift in political vernacular, instead it represents a significant shift in the security issues of the region. Whereas previously, the security issues of North East, South East, and South Asia were often considered distinct and separate, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific has acted to merge them strategically. Within the new landscape formed by the integration of security complexes, the South China Sea lies right at its centre, representing more than ever a key point in security and strategic affairs both regionally and globally. When one considers that

21 per cent of global trade crosses the South China Sea region (not a huge amount of US trade, but lots of EU trade), it is clear why the security of the South China Sea is a huge concern of Taiwan, and should be for the EU. This is a good example of how security concerns are being “multilateralised” and are increasingly entering the strategic considerations of all global actors.

The next significant trend mentioned by Mr Hellendorff relates to the current shift of great power relationships. Key to this shift has been the development of new Chinese military programmes and the ensuing rise in China’s global power projection. As mentioned by Dr Kirchberger, Mr Hellendorff also highlighted the importance of China’s multi-faceted naval build-up. Given China’s investment in coast guard and maritime militia forces as well as traditional naval capabilities, they are now set on a distinctly different course than other states in the region. Whilst the emergence of the concept of the Indo-Pacific has multilateralised security concerns, the sheer increase of military power within China means that bilateral security issues will remain important on a bilateral level as well.

The final recent trend within the region of East Asia that Mr Hellendorff raised relates to the role played by regional actors as the US-China rivalry develops. Regional actors have long been content to surf under the US-China rivalry, using hedging strategies to ensure their prosperity and security. As the US-China relationship becomes increasingly competitive however, the tenability of this strategy is likely to decrease, and regional actors will be forced to make big decisions. Another consequence of this change in US-China relations is the decreasing influence and power of multilateral organisations, including the EU. This being the case, there is a greater need than ever before for dialogue and cooperation in the region. Additionally, Mr Hellendorff suggested that the EU should react to this situation by attributing more focus to traditional security, in particular: maritime security, maritime connectivity, and maritime cyber.

Dr Shih-Chung Liu

This panel's third speaker was Dr Shih-Chung Liu, Vice Chairman of the Taiwan External Trade and Development Council. To start his account, Dr Liu discussed the US's National Security Strategy (NSS), describing it as a translation of President Trump's "America First" rhetoric into a national strategic policy. Key take away points from the NSS for Dr Liu were the distinct China focus and the normalisation of the idea of an "open Indo-Pacific". Another key part of the NSS, reiterated in various speeches by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, has been the push to forge deeper bonds with new alliance partners globally, especially in Asia.

Concerning US policy towards China, Dr Liu suggested that Mike Pence set the official tone for this relationship going forwards in his speech at the Hudson Institute in October 2018. This speech set its sights on the Made in China 2025 strategy, and discussed the continued importance of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the USA, Australia, Japan and India. Referring to the "Quad", Dr Liu argued that it is not so much a military or security alliance, but rather a commitment to defending the openness of the Indo-Pacific region. Whilst this four-way relationship is understood as being hugely important for all involved, the ambitions of Indian and Japanese Prime Minister's Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe to improve ties with China perhaps threaten the Quad's coherence.

The next topic raised by Dr Liu referred to the US's engagement policy with China. As China grew as a global actor, the USA and the liberal, multilateral world order were keen to make it a responsible and integrated global actor. Nowadays however, there is some consensus, particularly in the US, that this process has failed. Whilst this may be the case, Dr Liu argued that disengagement at this point is far too risky, as it would simply further fuel the US-China rivalry and create global instability.

Moving on to discuss the impact of the US-China rivalry on Taiwan, Dr Liu questioned whether it was good or bad for the future of Taiwan. Given the significance of this rivalry upon Taiwan, it is important to analyse how Taiwan has responded to recent developments. He observed that the Tsai Administration is exercising caution and seeing how things are likely to play out, stressing that it is important for Taiwan to maintain stability across the

strait. Concerning the US's perspective on the issue of Taiwan, Dr Liu argued that the US views Taiwan as a strategic asset. This being the case, it was argued that in to the future, Taiwan should aim to make itself indispensable to the US in order to maintain its strategic influence and autonomy.

Dr Liu then pointed out how since 2010, there has been a drop in financial and human flows between China and Taiwan. In reaction to this, as a hedging strategy, Taiwanese firms have been looking to relocate production from China to various ASEAN states. The Tsai Administration's formalised this trend into policy in the "Southbound Policy", launched in 2016. This trend of reorienting economic focus increasingly towards India and ASEAN is becoming increasingly common, and Dr Liu argued it is in part as a result of the Indo-Pacific strategy. With this trend now prevalent globally, Taiwan, thanks in part to its Southbound Policy, is ahead of the curve.

Professor Dr Junhua Zhang

The final panellist from this second session was Prof. Dr Junhua Zhang of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Prof. Zhang started by discussing the big play that China has been making in Asia in recent years, saying how this process has been achieved primarily through mercantilist means. Whilst he observed that China has occasionally flexed its military muscles, it is cautious to avoid criticism from other countries concerning some sensitive issues. Since the beginning of Trump's trade war however, China's foreign and security policy has undergone some major changes, not least the gradual development of its conventional strike capabilities.

With the ongoing spat between China and the USA significantly altering the strategic environment in Asia, other actors in the region are having to adapt their foreign policy appropriately. For states caught within this conflict, they are generally presented with two options: either balancing against threats or bandwagoning with a great power. After highlighting this, Prof. Zhang then went on to analyse a few examples of how states in the region have responded within this new strategic environment.

The first country discussed by Prof. Zhang was Vietnam. It was observed that in response to the discussed changing environment, Vietnam has significantly changed its approach to dealing with China, opting to provide a mix of praise and condemnation to the regional hegemon. Whilst Vietnam has changed its approach to dealing with China, it has at the same time been sure to maintain its strong defence relationship with the US. This dual approach can be understood as a soft balancing act between the two great rival powers in the region.

The next country assessed by Prof. Zhang was the Philippines, which has also been adjusting its foreign policy in light of strategic developments in the region. Given the upwards trend of China's economic and political influence in the region, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has adopted a softer approach to their historical adversary, and has been willing to cooperate with China on certain issues. The main driver behind this move towards cooperation has been the economic benefits that can be gained through increased interaction with China. With the Philippines still valuing their historical alliance with the USA, much like Vietnam, archipelago nation is evidently also opting to balance between the competing regional powers. Prof. Zhang argued that most ASEAN nations have reacted to the current environment by using soft balancing techniques.

North Korea was the next country analysed by Prof. Zhang, who argued that the Kim Regime has recently and shrewdly changed its attitude towards their historical, regional ally. Despite its economic dependence on China, the DPRK government has been moving towards changes that the Chinese government are against. Whilst it was suggested that the PRC would welcome denuclearisation, moves from the DPRK towards rapprochement with the USA and Korean unification don't sit well within Beijing. In light of the significant changes in North Korea's approach to global diplomacy, with a greater emphasis on balancing, the DPRK now poses a new challenge to the Chinese leadership.

Examples of hard balancing approaches in the region are clear with the policies of both Japan and Taiwan. Both Japan and Taiwan have a very strong security relationship with the USA and are clear historical adversaries of China. Whilst Japan has been shaping

towards rapprochement with China, the Abe administration has been particularly adept at dealing with the idiosyncratic Trump Administration, and the Japan-US alliance remains strong. Concerning Taiwan, the PRC's sharp power has been putting the administration under severe pressure, and the US security alliance remains hugely important.

In conclusion, Prof. Zhang reiterated the propensity of Asian nations to opt for balancing techniques ahead of bandwagoning. Whilst balancing approaches vary significantly between the soft approach of ASEAN nations to the harder style of Japan and Taiwan, it is clearly the prevalent response to the new strategic environment brought about by an increasingly strong and assertive China.

Report written by Edward Danks.

