



MICHAEL YEOH

Founder & CEO of the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI)

Marcus NOLAND

Now we are going to move from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia. Dr Jia gave us a nuclear induced earthquake, Mr Yeoh, I hope you do not have anything like that down in Malaysia.

Michael YEOH

Firstly I must apologise for leaving immediately after speaking because I have a 6.30 flight and I thought I could stay until the end of the session, but the transport people said I need to leave the hotel by 4pm.

I would say that, in my opinion, there are six key security challenges facing Asia as a whole. Number one, we have heard about the North Korean crisis. As we all know, this is a crisis that is unknown and unpredictable, but my point is that we cannot afford to have a war or a conflict because the cost of it is too high, and could perhaps even lead to World War III. We need to deal with those stubborn and unpredictable leaders and be prepared for uncertainties. Few people would have thought that several months ago the brother of Kim Jong-un would be assassinated in my country's airport in Kuala-Lumpur, and that was something totally unpredictable.

There are, perhaps, three ways that we should deal with North Korea. Firstly I think direct negotiation is important and has to be a forging of direct links. The US Special Representative for North Korea, Ambassador Joe Yun, happens to be a very close friend of mine because he was the Ambassador of Malaysia before taking up his new role. He was telling me that he is not allowed to even visit North Korea, and how can a person who is supposed to be handling negotiations with North Korea not be able to visit North Korea? I think we need to pursue the State Department to perhaps look at a more direct negotiation approach to North Korea. Secondly, I think, there has to be much stronger UN sanctions in North Korea, and enforcement of those sanctions. In Malaysia, for example, we have frozen the North Korean Embassy's bank account. The North Korean Embassy actively promotes North Korean trade, and uses the embassy in Malaysia to carry out other commercial activities, I think that we need to close it down. The third way is somewhat controversial; I think we need to ensure that there is no regime change in North Korea. None of us like Kim Jong-un, but I think it is very dangerous and unpredictable to pursue regime change, and could lead to unwanted consequences.

My second key security challenge that Asia needs to address is something that was alluded to earlier, the South China Sea. We need to find a way forward in the South China Sea, possibly bringing to fruition the conclusion of a Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN. It may need a two-part solution. China prefers bilateral negotiations between China and specific countries, which I think would possibly continue and go on, but I think China also needs to accept that it has to uphold multi-lateral and international norms, like the Law of the Sea and freedom of navigation. I think they disregard, many of us in ASEAN are hoping that at the China-ASEAN Summit in Manila next week, the CoC could be signed.

The third security challenge is in Myanmar, the Rohingya crisis. That, I think, is the biggest humanitarian crime facing Asia today. We are deeply disappointed with Aung San Suu Kyi. Many have held her up as a democracy icon, but now the ethnic and inhumane cleansing in Rakhine state could spur a growth of terrorism. I think the world must speak up on this serious humanitarian crisis.

The fourth challenge I think we need to deal with in Asia is the Pakistan/India/China border. Minor skirmishes there, but they could lead to an accidental flare-up. I will let the Governor speak about this later, as this is his specific area of expertise.



The fifth challenge I think we need to deal with is Islamic State terrorism, and the potential of lone-wolf attacks in Southeast Asia. I think that is something that we are very worried about, that is now the biggest threat to Southeast Asia now. The conflict in the city of Marawi, in the southern Philippines, is an almost open, urban war with volunteers coming from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, fighting alongside Filipino Islamic terrorists. The radicalised Muslim youth who fought as volunteers in Syria, are now coming back to our countries which is very worrying, because these people could become lone wolves carrying out terrorist activities.

My sixth point, which, I think, is important to take into consideration are non-traditional security threats, and these can be things like transboundary crimes, drop in human trafficking, economic and cybercrimes, piracy, human rights abuses, and the smuggling of children and women.

The key questions we face then are following: are existing confidence-building mechanisms sufficient? What more can be done to further enhance regional peace stability? For Southeast Asia right now, for many years, we have got the ASEAN Regional Forum and, more recently, the ASEAN Defence Ministers meeting, and I think these will continue to be important mechanisms. The question now is: should Asia adopt the European OSCE as a model that perhaps can be a bigger, region-wide security mechanism? We also need to have more intelligence sharing among countries in Asia because that is so important in the fight against terrorism. There also needs to be neo-mechanisms and protocols to ensure cybersecurity and to combat cyberterrorism.

One key point that we have been advocating for a long time, is that we need to have governments, throughout the region pushing forward for more inclusive development. To reduce inequalities is important because they are often the cause of terrorism, and we need to reduce these causes of terrorism. I think it is important that we are able to engage with the younger generation, many of them are attracted by Islamic fundamentalists and extremism. We need to be able to get out and have good exchanges with them.

At the end of the day, we need to have, perhaps, more Track II or Track 1.5 dialogues, candid, open, semi-official dialogues, which Track II or Track 1.5 can better achieve than the official government dialogues. I would like to quote Winston Churchill: "It is better to jaw-jaw than to war-war". Thank you.

Marcus NOLAND

Thank you Michael. If North Korea was not enough, he has added the South China Sea, Myanmar, Pakistan/India/China, ISIS, and non-traditional security threats to the agenda. Safe travels back to KL.