

**Media Release**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **ASEAN Centrality Key to Weather Sino-American Tensions**

**Singapore, Thursday, 29 August 2019** – ASEAN centrality is key to weathering the Sino-American conflict, according to a report launched today at the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN and Asia Forum (AAF) by the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), Singapore's oldest independent think tank.

The report, titled, "The Sino-American Conflict and ASEAN: Surviving, Transforming, Succeeding", elaborates on the key implications of the conflict for ASEAN. It highlights how ASEAN centrality and collective leadership can act as a bulwark against long-term negative implications of Sino-American conflict. (The PDF version of the report is available for download on the SIIA's website [here](#).)

Speaking at the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN & Asia Forum (AAF), SIIA Chairman, Associate Professor Simon Tay, said, "The issues are deep, broad, and long term. It is not just about the trade numbers, it is also about technology and broader competition." However, he noted there is some "silver lining". He said, "Some of it will come about with greater ASEAN integration, and I hope Singapore will continue to invest, engage, and serve as a hub."

The 12<sup>th</sup> AAF's Guest-of-Honour Mr Chan Chun Sing, Singapore's Minister of Trade and Industry, said, "Southeast Asia will be at the intersection of China and US geostrategic interests. He added, "If we position ourselves well, we will be the connector, appreciated by all. If we do not position ourselves well, we will soon come under pressure from all sides."

However, balancing relations with China and US is challenging.

For Malaysia, the Sino-American standoff is not only about keeping track of potential positive and negative impacts, but understanding how ASEAN countries can enjoy mutual benefits from investment diversion. Malaysian Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister, Dr Ong Kian Ming, said at the Forum, "Investments into one country can have spill-over effects." Raising the example of Dyson's investments into Singapore, Dr Ong described the situation as a "win-win" as manufacturing and assembly stages would also take place in Johor. Dr Ong also noted a "shift in the thinking of the Chinese government in terms of standards of transparency and governance" since the second Belt and Road Initiative summit. He presented the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project in Malaysia as a positive example of how "a project can be renegotiated on a win-win basis to ensure financial sustainability".

The effects of the Sino-American tension are cascading across the world. For Japan, to minimise the impacts, the country is looking to build even closer ties with ASEAN. "Asian dynamism has always saved the world trade system when faced with challenges," said former Japanese Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Mr Kazumasa Kusaka, now the Chairman & CEO of the Japan Economic Foundation. "Facing the risk of economic slowdown triggered by US-China friction, we are urged to work for an early agreement of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and Japan is in the role to lead it."

Besides pursuing multilateral trade deals like the RCEP, ASEAN and others in the region are, at the same time, intensifying efforts to harness the digital economy as a new engine of growth. ASEAN members are working to improve digital connectivity while harnessing Industry 4.0 to move up the global value chain.

"With or without the trade war, we have to transform," said Ms Pimchanok Vonkorpon, Director-General of the Trade Policy and Strategy Office at Thailand's Ministry of Commerce. She continued, "The digital economy will help facilitate trade and investment, transform ASEAN, and increase its competitiveness. Ultimately it would help in reducing inequality gaps."

"Transformation allows us to be nimble in a sea of change," added Ms Shyn Yee Ho-Strangas, Director of Expedia's Global Product Management team. As tourism contributes 12 per cent of ASEAN's GDP, Expedia has been investing in technology to better serve its partners and customers, working towards "job creation, improving access, wealth distribution, and sustainable local communities".

The AAF is a flagship event organised by the SIIA to bring policy makers and the business community together to facilitate dialogue about the region's political, economic and strategic challenges. Into its 12<sup>th</sup> edition, the AAF saw an attendance of more than 200 participants from both public and private sectors. The 12<sup>th</sup> AAF was made possible with the support of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Expedia Group, the Hong Kong Economic & Trade Office (HKETO), MUFG Bank and Jepsen & Jessen. (The programme for the 12<sup>th</sup> AAF is attached in the Annex.)

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## **About the Singapore Institute of International Affairs**

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Established in 1962, the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) is a non-profit and independent think tank committed to producing policy analysis, fostering in-depth dialogues and bridging gaps between policymakers, private sector decision-makers and experts to shape public policy and social responses. Centred around ASEAN focused themes, the institute aims to deliver policy analysis in international affairs and on issues driving environmental sustainability. The SIIA has been consistently ranked as one of the leading think tanks in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, in the Global Go-To Think Tank Index by the University of Pennsylvania. Since 2017, the SIIA was ranked the No. 1 independent think tank in Asia. It was also recognised as one of the top 50 think tanks globally, excluding the United States of America.

**12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN and Asia Forum  
Programme**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Details</b>
0800-0845	<b>Registration</b>
0845-0855	<b>Welcome Remarks</b> <b>Associate Professor Simon Tay</b> , Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs
0855-0915	<p><b>Opening Keynote: Keeping ASEAN Ahead amidst Global Uncertainty</b></p> <p>Geopolitical tensions are creating an uncertain external environment for Singapore and the region. As a trade-dependent economy, Singapore is experiencing a slowdown. Even if the Sino-American trade tensions are resolved, the shifts in supply chains and production patterns that have resulted from the trade war are unlikely to revert to previous norms. In this context, Singapore and its ASEAN neighbours are working to improve connectivity and pursuing multilateral trade deals like the RCEP, while harnessing Industry 4.0 to move up the global value chain. In the days ahead, it will be necessary for Singapore and ASEAN to transform in order to survive and succeed in an evolving global economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How is US-China competition manifesting, and what are the long-term implications for ASEAN?</li> <li>● Besides the trade war, what are the other trends affecting the global economy, and how are Singapore and ASEAN responding?</li> <li>● What should Singapore-based businesses and investors do in the current economic climate?</li> </ul> <p><b>Keynote Speaker:</b> <b>Mr. Chan Chun Sing</b>, Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore</p>
0915-0930	<p><b>In Conversation with Mr. Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore</b></p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> <b>Mr. Chan Chun Sing</b>, Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore</p> <p><b>Chair:</b> <b>Associate Professor Simon Tay</b>, Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs</p>

Time	Details
0930-1030	<p data-bbox="277 235 1505 302"><b>The Hatakeyama Dialogue: Navigating the Trade War – Regional Implications of the Sino-American Tensions</b></p> <p data-bbox="277 349 1505 613">Tensions between the United States and China are heating up, in areas ranging from trade to technology. With the US and China at odds, ASEAN, Japan, and other middle powers have sought to maintain links with both sides and broker an end to the conflict. But there are growing concerns that the ongoing frictions are not merely about trade deficits or 5G networks, but reflect a deepening longer-term competition between the region’s great powers. The Sino-American standoff has already affected regional supply chains and investor sentiments, resulting in winners and losers.</p> <ul data-bbox="328 660 1505 884" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the prospects for an end to the trade war, and what variables will affect Sino-American relations?</li> <li>• What can the US, China, and others in Asia do to improve ties between the major economies?</li> <li>• Has the trade war undermined the global economic order, and can FTAs such as the RCEP and the CPTPP help sustain momentum towards trade liberalisation?</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="277 931 427 963"><b>Panellists:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="328 969 1505 1120" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>H.E. Ambassador Curtis Chin</b>, Senior Asia Fellow, Milken Institute; Former US Ambassador to Asian Development Bank</li> <li>• <b>Professor Shen Dingli</b>, Institute of International Studies, Fudan University</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Kazumasa Kusaka</b>, Chairman &amp; CEO, Japan Economic Foundation</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="277 1167 363 1198"><b>Chair:</b></p> <p data-bbox="277 1205 1505 1272"><b>Mr. Nicholas Fang</b>, Director, Security &amp; Global Affairs, Singapore Institute of International Affairs</p>
1030-1050	<b>Tea Break</b>
1050-1150	<p data-bbox="277 1400 1305 1431"><b>Panel 2: Between the BRI and Indo-Pacific – How is ASEAN Responding?</b></p> <p data-bbox="277 1476 1505 1740">The trade war has created both opportunities and challenges for ASEAN countries. Both the US and China are important economic partners of ASEAN countries, and a slowdown in either would have knock-on effect for the region’s economy. ASEAN countries also benefit from China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which promises to help address the high regional demand for infrastructure. However, the initiative has been accused of creating debt traps for host countries, while ASEAN is also being courted as a key American partner under the Indo-Pacific Strategy.</p> <ul data-bbox="328 1787 1505 1937" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What opportunities are there for ASEAN amid the trade war?</li> <li>• How should governments and businesses engage with the BRI?</li> <li>• What are ASEAN countries doing to balance their relationship with China and the US, and what more should be done?</li> </ul>

Time	Details
	<p><b>Panel Keynote:</b>  <b>Dr. Ong Kian Ming</b>, Deputy Minister, Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Malaysia</p> <p><b>Panellists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Dr. Lili Yan Ing</b>, Lead Advisor on International Trade to the Minister of Trade, Indonesia</li> <li>● <b>Dr. Panitan Wattanayagorn</b>, former Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister for Security, Thailand; and Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University</li> <li>● <b>Mr. Jasper Wong</b>, Head of Construction and Infrastructure, Sector Solutions Group, United Overseas Bank (UOB)</li> </ul> <p><b>Chair:</b>  <b>Associate Professor Simon Tay</b>, Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs</p>
1150-1250	<p><b>Panel 3: Moving Beyond the Trade War – Digitisation and Transformation in ASEAN</b></p> <p>As global trade tensions worsen, ASEAN countries are intensifying efforts to harness the digital economy as a new engine of growth. ASEAN members are working to improve digital connectivity, promote e-commerce, and support innovation and entrepreneurship. While ASEAN's businesses – especially micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) – stand to benefit from enhanced access to markets, finance, and technology, ASEAN countries also face challenges in adapting to the new realities of a digital era.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How ready is ASEAN to ride the digital economy as its next engine of growth?</li> <li>● How are ongoing geopolitical tensions affecting ASEAN's telcos and tech companies?</li> <li>● How can ASEAN's partners support ASEAN's digital transformation?</li> </ul> <p><b>Panellists:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Ms. Pimchanok Vonkorpon</b>, Director-General, Trade Policy and Strategy Office, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand</li> <li>● <b>Mr. Kiren Kumar</b>, Assistant Managing Director, EDB, and Digital Industry Singapore</li> <li>● <b>Ms. Shyn Yee Ho-Strangas</b>, Director, Global Product Management, 'Brand Expedia', Expedia Group</li> <li>● <b>Mr. Vijay Motwani</b>, Chief Operating Officer, SAP South East Asia</li> </ul> <p><b>Chair:</b>  <b>Ms. Lee Chen Chen</b>, Director, Policy Programmes, Singapore Institute of International Affairs</p>
1250-1300	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b>  <b>Associate Professor Simon Tay</b>, Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs</p>