

MEMORANDUM

To : THE HONORABLE MEMBERS

Thru : THE HONORABLE SECRETARY-GENERAL

From : COMMITTEE SECRETARY ALINE RUTH VIDAL-VILLALUZ
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Date : 28 June 2019

Subject : HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS OF THE IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE
ON PEACE AND SECURITY HELD ON 31 MAY-02 JUNE 2019 IN
SINGAPORE

Relative to the pressing issue of peace and security in the region, the Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) conducted the 18th Asia Security Summit held in Singapore on 31 May to 02 June 2019, among other equally important concerns. The Dialogue is said to be the premier defense and security summit in the Asia-Pacific.

Of the personalities who addressed the forum, the speeches and policy statements of Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, US Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan, Chinese Admiral Sun highlighted the sense of ASEAN countries and the positions of the two superpowers vis-á-vis the region's security and stability.

Prime Minister Lee set a reconciliatory tone in the Dialogue by offering a solution to the tension caused by the growing dominance of China in the region. He underscored the need for China's growth to be accommodated and all countries to adjust accordingly. He suggested for a "top-down" approach to address the basic issues between the US and China. After engaging in the top level "openly and candidly", he continued, that the nations' leaders would have to persuade their respective domestic publics to accept any agreed accommodations. Thereafter, the two countries can deal with specific issues like their trade disputes purely on its merits. With established rules and renewed trust, this strategy will avoid confrontations and conflict between them.

On how the “big powers” and the “small countries” may relate with each other, the Prime Minister admonished that small countries must make friends with everyone and avoid taking sides as well as for the big countries not to pressure them to do so. He urged for small countries to work on building up multilateral institutions instead such as the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) and the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). He stressed that as Asian countries deepen their links with China, they also need to grow their ties with the US, Europe, Japan and others. In this backdrop, he pointed out that China needs to wield its strength with restraint and legitimacy, resolve disputes peacefully in accordance with international law including the UNCLOS, go through diplomacy and compromise rather than force or threat of force. He emphasized that the Belt Road Initiative should help China integrate with the world and concluded that the end result should be to strengthen globalization and not to divide the world into rival spheres of influence.

Acting Defense Secretary Shanahan on the other hand, warned China over its behavior stating that “behaviour that erodes other nations’ sovereignty and sows distrust of China’s intentions must end”. He further stated that the mismatch between words and deeds run counter to law and order. He also reaffirmed the US’ commitment to safeguard the freedom of navigation and the rights of nation states by implementing its plan to continually make the Indo-Pacific region free and open. He stressed the importance of this “because it allows countries to prosper, and prosperous countries are stable and capable of contributing to regional security and stability. For this reason, the US does not want any country in this region to have to choose or forgo positive economic relations with any partner. Expanding prosperity is vital for all of us.” The Defense Secretary also related that “the US is the world’s largest economy and the defence budget is 60% of our discretionary spending. Our government is devoting significant resources to this mission, and our geographic focus, the priority theatre of our strategy, is right here in the Indo-Pacific”. He underscored the big budgetary allocations to military and security infrastructures in the region and how this is beneficial to the US allies and partners.

Meanwhile, Admiral Sun cited the primary reasons why China has disagreements with the US. The first is China’s firm opposition against the US action favoring and recognizing Taiwan as a state and second is the US presence and meddling in the South China Sea. The Admiral strongly stated that China sticks to the path of peaceful development and mentioned the Belt Road Initiative, the Asia Bank and the Silk Fund. As a specific interest for the Philippines, the high-ranking Chinese official emphatically stated that “Over the past 70 years since the founding of the PRC, China has never

provoked a war or conflict, nor has it ever invaded another country or taken an inch of land from others..."

For your Honors' information and reference.