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TRANSCRIPT

Event

**“Asian Architecture Conference 2022: Panel 1:
ASEAN/East Asia Summit”**

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FEATURING

Ambassador Keo Chhea

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Transcript By

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Gregory Poling: So I know we are running about 15 minutes behind. And so what I'm going to arbitrarily do as the moderator is say we're going to run this panel about five minutes over, and then presumably – so we'll go until 11:05 for this one, which gives us about 50 minutes. And each of the panelists is going to give us some opening remarks of five to 10 minutes, and then we'll go, as Victor did, to Q&A with all of you. I will probably give up my prerogative as moderator to ask any questions in the interest of getting to all of you, which is the reason we're really here.

So we're going to go down the line in order. And first, let me introduce each – I'll introduce each speaker before they give their remarks to make sure they have all the time that they deserve. First, we're going to start with Ambassador Keo Chhea from Cambodia, as a representative of the host of ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, and the U.S.-ASEAN summit, and all the other many bilateral summits that will be happening – or, you know, ancillary summits that happen alongside ASEAN.

And I should note that Ambassador Keo's about the best person we could hope to have to talk about ASEAN, given that that's what he's done for a significant portion of his career. So prior to being posted here to Washington early this year, Ambassador Keo was the advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on ASEAN in Cambodia. He also spent more than a decade as a senior official at the ASEAN secretariate in Jakarta. And had previously been on the ASEAN desk in – the equivalent of the ASEAN desk in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cambodia.

And so with that, let me turn to Ambassador Keo to start us off with a few minutes of what we hope to see or what the host hopes to see next month. Thank you, sir.

Ambassador Keo Chhea: Thank you, Mr. Poling. And first of all, let me express my thanks to the CSIS for organizing this event and giving me an opportunity to brief you all a little bit on the ASEAN and as well as what Cambodia has done for the past one year in its capacity as the chair – rotating chairman of the ASEAN.

Dear experts, representative and panelists, Cambodia has inherited the chairmanship of ASEAN in a time when there are so many hot issues around the world, presenting a very big challenge to us, to our chairmanship, and so on. Namely, the Ukraine invasion – or the invasion in Ukraine by Russia, the Myanmar issues, and then the – of course, the South China Sea, the COVID – impact of the COVID, and as well as the rising tension in the Korean Peninsula quite recently.

Cambodia take the chairmanship this year as the third time for us to chair since we joined in ASEAN in 1999. And every time that we took the chairmanship, we face with so many challenges. But you see, our aim of Cambodia, as well as the priority of ASEAN itself, we are looking at maintaining peace and stability in the region, in Southeast Asia as well as in the region as a whole, so that we can build up our economy. We've been through hot and cold. We've been through war for the past more than two decades. Of course, Ambassador Heidt was here. He's an expert to ASEAN as well. He's been to Cambodia for three or four year, right? Yeah, five years. (Laughs.) So he knows very well inside Cambodia as well.

You see this time, when we entered ASEAN – of course, before I go into that, I will brief you a little bit on the – what you call the team of this year's ASEAN. We call it ASEAN ACT. That mean act together to address the challenge. This mean what? This mean we have to address issue – every issue that we face together because we realize that, ranging from climate change to COVID to everything else, that we cannot act alone in dealing the issues. And that's how ASEAN try to maintain its centralities, its unities as the prime objective so that we can move our region forward to build up our economy, to build up our societies.

Let me start with the issue that we face first: Myanmar. It's unfortunate that the Myanmar issue has been pop up right before we took the chairmanship in early 2022, so we inherit the problem and we have to solve. We have established our – what you call the special envoy for the ASEAN chair to try to pave the way to implement the five-point consensus that was approved by the 10 ASEAN leaders, including the junta – the junta itself that agreed to the five-point.

Our prime minister has there all the good decision to go to Myanmar in the aim that he's not trying to legalize – as some people criticize him, to legalize the regime. But I don't see when there was a hostage situation, the police is negotiating with the hostage taker, and then you criticize that we are siding with the – with the hostage taker. It doesn't mean that way because we have to talk to the person who have the gun in hand to stop them from shooting to the people, you see.

But to our dismay, when our prime minister was trying his best to talk to the junta, he came back, before even his plane landed they bombed the civilians. It's like slapping our – in the face. But we try our patience. We again set up our committee. We sent our special envoy to negotiate. Our special envoy has talked to seven of the 10 warring factions, and we also talk with both the SAC and the NUG. But we feel that all of them are, you know, with a mind to destroy each other. So it takes some time.

We understand that the conflict has rooted for the past 70 years. It's on and off, on and off, in Burma/Myanmar. But we tried to pave the way for them to go down and sitting because the ability of ASEAN, what we have done that some of the public has criticized, that ASEAN is only a talk shop, but we believe that when we talk people will not fight. But the problem we have to bring the warring – the conflict party to sit in the same table and then to talk to each other, that's how we are trying to do.

Before our main meeting in May, we – our prime minister has called the junta leaders to dissuade him from executing the political prisoners. We even sent official letter. And my foreign minister ask the special envoy also call the foreign minister of the regime in Naypyidaw to drop the case. But they executed the prisoner right before the meeting in August.

And again, you see now we are preparing for the summit. Then they dropped the civilian last week. And we issue a condemnation because in condemning them and we see that the issue is still strong headed. That's why when we meet in New York last September we initiate a special foreign minister meeting with Ambassador Kritenbrink just raised that they will – all the foreign ministers of ASEAN, excluding Myanmar, will meet in Jakarta on 28, meaning tonight in Washington they will meet. I can't say the result yet, but we all think that it's about time that we cannot be hostage to the Myanmar problem, so we have to find a solution to solve the issues. And then, after this, there will be a special leaders' meeting in Phnom Penh, a separate session on Myanmar alone, so that we can deal with the issue.

On Ukraine, the war in Ukraine, we – Cambodia has strongly condemned and we sponsored a resolution the invasion of Russia on Ukraine. Many people say that we changed our position, but we didn't because our position is to maintain the principle of the U.N. charters. We respect the core principle of noninterference, non-use of force against sovereignty of small states, and that we cannot tolerate these things because we are also a small state in this case.

And with the meeting in New York last September, ASEAN agreed to – for the accession of Ukraine into the TAC, the main agreement to – as a code of conduct in foreign relation in the Southeast Asia scene. We have 27-28, including now 28 contracting party to the TAC, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. And from that, then we step into cooperations after that agreement. And I'm happy to say that we have invite Ukraine foreign minister to sign the TAC in Phnom Penh in the next course of two weeks' time on the sideline of the meetings.

On the Korean issue, we strongly condemn the firing of missiles across the airspace of independent states, in this case Japan. But to us, if you fire

missile over territory of another space, it mean to physically threaten the peace and stability of that state. And that's how we condemned the North Korea threats.

So, all in all, coming back, that's what we have done. We have achieved – we have managed – as Ambassador Kritenbrink has just said, we have managed to put all the party to the tables. We have managed the issue on the table and discuss, and we succeed in signing 11 document(s) as a result of the negotiating for agreement after agreements.

And this year also the ASEAN-U.S. Summit and the EA Summit we are happy to declare the new level of comprehensive strategic partnership between ASEAN and the U.S. After the elevation of this level of partnership, then we are looking at making a plan of action on how to maximize cooperation between ASEAN and the U.S. in the region.

Cambodia, we stick to our permanent neutrality policies. And please don't get me wrong; when we say neutrality, it doesn't mean that we don't take sides. As a neutrality, we be friend to all sides and we make business we all sides. That's how we are. We are not partial to one or the other, and that's how we keep sending message to the U.S. that don't send us only criticism. Do something, you know? Do something. Make some concrete cooperations. And they got the message. And I'm happy that in this administration we have done quite progressively on making something more concrete in cooperation. We have three congressional visit to Cambodia this year alone and next year probably one or two congressional trip more, so that people can go and see what really happen rather than to hear feedback from only medias and so on.

So once again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to brief you on what we have done in ASEAN. And I'm happy to take a few questions as well.

Mr. Poling: Well, thank you so much, Ambassador.

So next we're going to hear from Dr. Lynn Kuok. Lynn is an old friend. Not quite as old as Dan and Victor, but old enough that when we first worked together CSIS was on K Street. Lynn is currently the Shangri-La Dialogue senior fellow for Asia-Pacific Security at the Institute for International and Strategic Studies in Singapore. She's also a visiting scholar at Yale's Paul Tsai China Center, senior research fellow at Cambridge, and has previous affiliations with Harvard, and Brookings and, as I said, most importantly, CSIS. Lynn.

Lynn Kuok: Thank you so much, Greg. Thank you for the invitation to speak here today. It's really great to be back. Wonderful to see everyone in the room in person. Thanks for the opportunity. Greg, you've asked me to look at what ASEAN

might hope to see at the summit. So let me broadly first speak about, you know, its broad positioning in the summit, and then specific issues that, you know, it might seek to deal with. And where hopefully – and hopefully I'd like to tie in, you know, where I see all of this fitting in.

So I think let's start off with broad positioning. I think that moves by the United States, as well as its non-Southeast Asian allies and partners, towards various multilaterals in the last couple of years – and so the Quad, AUKUS, et cetera – which are not ASEAN-led have – as well as China's increasing influence in the region – have led, or should be leading, ASEAN to conduct some serious soul-searching in terms of its relevance in the region, and whether it can remain relevant in the face of the defining challenge of our age, which is great-power competition.

I think we've seen lip service being paid to ASEAN centrality repeatedly, as well as in, you know, various U.S. national security documents, you know, the Indo-Pacific Strategy. And I think this administration in particular has engaged in serious efforts to engage with ASEAN. But I think the fact of the matter is that if ASEAN is not able to better demonstrate how it's able to deal with great power rivalry, its ability to shape developments in the region will be minimal. So it's going to be a bystander in its own region.

But I think its relevance is also being called into question not just by great-power rivalry, but also by developments in its backyard and its ability to deal with those problems. And of course, we've heard the issue of Myanmar being raised. The five-point consensus is being flouted. It's failed to achieve the cessation of violence in Myanmar. It's failed to achieve dialogue between all parties to the conflict, as well as to garner greater access for ASEAN in terms of humanitarian assistance to the region.

The Malaysian foreign minister has called for a serious review of whether or not this five-point consensus is actually still relevant or whether it should be replaced by something different. And, as we mentioned, you know, there's going to be a meeting tonight in D.C./tomorrow in Jakarta of the foreign ministers to ASEAN about whether or not, you know, this five-point consensus needs to be – to be replaced, and an indication of whether this will be the approach moving forward. We'll see that in this meeting. But I think by and large it will be quite difficult to find a replacement for a consensus that already so hard to reach last year.

So I think what we're likely to see in this summit in November in a couple of weeks is a likely reiteration of the importance of adherence to the five-point

consensus. We might also, as I understand it, see ASEAN leaders discuss and possibly reach a decision on excluding military-appointed political officeholders from representing Myanmar in ASEAN sectoral ministerial

bodies. I also understand that they will be working very hard to ensure that the Myanmar issue, as sad as it is in terms of a humanitarian perspective, does not paralyze ASEAN in terms of its ability to take action to move the grouping forwards, whether it's in terms of, you know, trade deals or even accession of non-Southeast Asian countries to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. So ensuring that the Myanmar issue does not impede or paralyze ASEAN moving forwards, which I think would be the other great tragedy of Myanmar if it were allowed as well to be – to prevent strategic engagement with the region.

ASEAN's credibility, of course, as we've heard, is also tested by developments in the South China Sea. And that, of course, has been a slow-burning issue for decades, as – and has contributed to Greg's great work at the CSIS. We often speak about how negotiations and the code of conduct are allowing China to stall for time as it seeks to change facts on the ground in the South China Sea, but I think we can also see that the negotiations and the code of conduct also help ASEAN in terms of demonstrating or suggesting a certain relevance in terms of managing the South China Sea dispute, even though the two-decades-long negotiations might be more show than substance as we see in the various – in the various iterations of negotiations.

The question, of course, to my mind is how long ASEAN and its member states can actually afford to be less forward-leaning in the South China Sea. So we've seen in the South China Sea Chinese activities that are – that have undermined the international rule of law and that undermine the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. I work closely on this issue. I actually teach a class on the international Law of the Sea and I do teach in politics at Georgetown School of Foreign Service. But I think the long and short of it is that there are no doubt – there is no doubt that China's actions – encroaching upon the exclusive economic zone of its neighboring countries as well as objecting to various U.S. and other assertions of freedoms of the seas in the South China Sea – are in direct contravention of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea as well as, you know, the U.N. tribunal ruling in the Philippines case against China in 2016 which the United States in the last couple of years has actually explicitly endorsed the merits of. It took some time, but at least it got there.

I think what we are seeing, which is event recognized in ASEAN communique, is – you know, the recent ASEAN foreign ministers joint communique talked about the uncertainty and rapid changes in Southeast Asia and beyond. And the Singapore prime minister was more blunt in his

recent National Day rally in causing – in calling out recent developments in the region as troubling. So I think ASEAN's desire to avoid choosing sides between the U.S. and China, while understandable at one level, sort of sidesteps or fails to grapple with some of the important issues it needs to

deal with. I think what it needs to – how it needs to think about the choices that face it is about – it's not about choosing between the U.S. and China, but it's about failing to – about actively taking steps to promote a rules-based international order. And this is important for at least three reasons.

First, of course, promoting the rules-based international order and the rule of law is perhaps the only guardrail against intensifying U.S.-China competition, you know, really rocking the region.

Second, it's also the foundation upon which Southeast Asia has built its security and its peace. So really, you know, when thinking about U.S.-China competition, it needs to take a firm stance in defense of the rules-based international order.

And of course, third, you know, very often we hear about ASEAN can't have a common position and it has difficulty in reaching a common stance because its interests are too diverse. But of course, there is one clear and enduring interest that ASEAN has, namely the interest in the principles that has allowed it to be stable and has allowed the region to prosper in the past decades. And I think there is much unity to be found in the principled position that frames choices before ASEAN member states as one between principles and a rules-based order or a region where might is right. So I think ASEAN needs to be far more firm about grasping the opportunity to support and defend the rules-based order.

And I think for this reason ASEAN's failure to condemn very clearly and unequivocally Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a shortfall. And it's important not necessarily because of what it can achieve or the difference it can make on the ground, but it is important because of how revealing it is of ASEAN in how it perceives its interests and priorities. I think they need to think – ASEAN needs to think about the rules-based order with international law at its heart as lying at the very core of its interests. Principles, in a sense, are not about idealism, though it should be. It's not completely about idealism per se, but they are squarely in the interests of ASEAN and its member states as they seek a buffer against great-power rivalry and an anchor on which they can build ASEAN unity.

And of course, there are other reasons why, you know, Russia's invasion of Ukraine does impact Asia. Very often we think about, you know, food and energy security, food and energy prices, but of course, it impacts, you know,

the already-eroding rules-based international order in the region. It also impacts alliances and partnerships in the region. We think about, you know, Russia and China and how that's going to impact the region; and you know, the close proximity between Russia and China, how that's going to impact the region; as well as, you know, what does it mean, you know, this division

of the world into ideological blocs. You know, what does that mean in terms of the ability of partners to forge strong partnerships in the region with countries in the region that might not all be democratic states?

So, you know, Russia and Ukraine does have clear and present interests or implications for Asia, and the sooner that ASEAN is able to take a strong stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine I think the better. So I'll stop there.

Mr. Poling: Thank you, Lynn.

And our closer will be Satu Limaye. Satu is the VP – the vice president of the East-West Center and the director of its Washington office here. He's also the founder of its Asia Matters for America series, which just released its most recent survey of American public opinion on Asia. And he's a senior advisor at the CNA Corp, which I will continue to call the Center for Naval Analyses whether they like it or not. (Laughter.) And with that, Satu?

Satu Limaye: Thanks so much for the invitation, Greg and CSIS. Great to see folks in person.

Yeah. So, at the end of a terrific panel with the country chair of ASEAN this year and Lynn's very – as usual, very insightful comments and the setup with Secretary Krittenbrink, a little hard. So I kind of rewrote my talk while Dan Krittenbrink was speaking from the text that I typed because I thought – and Victor taught me this a long time ago. One time I spoke to you, Victor, to your career program. I said to you: I don't know what you want me to do, Victor, because I think everything has been said on this. And you said to me: Yeah, but you haven't said it, so come over.

So I'm going to say a few things and start off by saying one thing that's always fascinated me about the Asian architecture effort, is all of the metaphors, similes, analogies, constructs to describe architecture. And having grown up in an engineering background and worked for engineering companies, my view about engineering and architecture has always been not what it is but what purpose it serves. And to me, I really like the new notions in architecture about passive design and active design. So think of that as the chapeau for my comments, is: How do you think about Asian architecture in terms of passive – passivity and in terms of activity?

So the first five points, I'll run through them very quickly. America's approach, which is what Greg asked me to speak about mostly, I think has the following characteristics now.

One, it's committed to ASEAN centrality, but ASEAN centrality is no longer the baseline or the – is now the baseline, not the end state of U.S. approach architecture.

Two, our ambitions have been tempered about ASEAN-led architecture for reasons I'll state in a moment, but they've been tempered in the sense that we are no longer trying to redefine, decide what the issues are, institutionalize, et cetera. And we could talk about that.

The third characteristic of America's approach is additive ambitions, that our aspirations and ambitions are now additive rather than default. Which means that we have things like allies, partners, and friends; AUKUS and Quad; coalitional arrangements of high-tech supply chains; not to mention what was mentioned earlier, the Mineral Security Partnership; and of course, Europe, which don't forget is the largest commercial partner in ASEAN as well.

So those are three things.

And the final thing is a motto that was recently coined by our national security adviser on Indo-Pacific affairs, the very esteemed Dr. Kurt Campbell, about nothing in the Pacific without the Pacific. I was thinking about the reformulation in the context of Asia, thinking that everything in the Indo-Pacific with allies, partners, and friends, plus ASEAN centrality. And so that's deliberately inverted.

Second point, the adaptive approach that I've described, which I would call an active approach rather than a passive approach to architecture, is extraordinarily necessary. It's necessary for essentially, I think, three arguments that I would make. One is strategic competition. We don't need to go to it, but it's obvious and not only against the assertiveness of China, in my view, but the quite naked aggression of Russia, which has been discussed, you know, often.

The second and more difficult – and I'm sure it'll come up in the APEC discussion to follow, is really a matter of degree as opposed to definitiveness. And that is the trend towards decoupling, decreasing support for globalization, diffusion of power, and systemic drift in the international system. You can choose your detail. You can choose your evidence base. But whether it's WTO, or 3 percent shaving off of globalization, or protectionism, or new venues, or the lack of market access support, you can

choose it – and I made a point of saying very clearly – it's about degree, not definitiveness. None of these things are going away. Globalization hasn't stopped. You can see the new FT data on this. But I think we're entering a very different stage.

And that is quite linked to the third driver of this adaptive activist approach on architecture, which is domestic nationalism and populism. So it is not

incident, and goes rarely remarked – and I’m so thankful, Greg, for your flagging. We just did a survey in our Asia Matters for America Series that takes elite versus public opinion at the state and local level across 50 U.S. states, to look at the articulation of how much Asia matters.

And we have an upcoming program, if you want to joint us, online called Does Asia Really Matter for Americans? Which inverts the issue that empirically and statistically it does, and yet that’s not the view. And I directly link this to the comment in the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the National Security Strategy which is, Indo-Pacific focus is supposed to be for everyday Americans. But in an environment of nationalism and populism, it’s not clear to me the degree of support for that element.

The third point I’d like to make is that in addition to these drivers of this activist and adaptive architecture that the United States is crafting is four other contests that are going on in the region which are obvious – over port power, over relationships, over order, and over narratives. And I’ve written a lot about this and published a lot about this. And basically, these four contests are playing across architecture. In other words, they are both mimicked in the architecture, but they are driving the architecture activism because, inevitably, the contest over power, order, relationships, and narrative demand – are a demand signal for the creation of new activist architecture. I’m not going to go into it.

So then the obvious question is I’ve set up kind of an argument that things have changed. So then the natural question is to ask, what hasn’t changed? Here’s what I think hasn’t changed about ASEAN and ASEAN-led architecture. One, the drivers of ASEAN continue to be government led and really about autonomy and sovereignty. Whatever else you want to say about it, it’s the fundamental core of ASEAN. Second, ASEAN still practices kind of what I called in an article, plays geopolitical Twister, which is the geopolitical version of that old game, at least my generation used to play. I don’t know, some of you looking at me, you’ve probably never heard of Twister. At least not in physical form. Maybe it’s online. (Laughter.)

You know, it’s about internationalization. You invite internationalization. Our good ambassador colleague here has said that you have, what, 28

dialogues partners in TAC, or whatever the number is. OK, so you invite internationalization, and you invite multi-polarity, for the reason of avoiding over-reliance on one to protect your sovereignty, autonomy, and navigating space, and to avoid competition. It’s perfectly reasonably geopolitical management.

The third is that ASEAN’s endurance rests of three other elements. One is that its – Southeast Asian governments want it. The U.S. and others aren’t

trying to kill it. And there's no acceptable alternative. So centrality comes as a result of these drivers rather than because of these drivers, right? There's not really a challenge.

So let me end with U.S. interests. What are U.S. interests here? U.S. interest in the ASEAN-led project, as I said, as a baseline remains quite important to my reckoning; one, because it's a pretty low-cost demonstration of U.S. commitment and presence, which is something most countries in the region seek. It's a demand signal to which we're replying, not a demand signal that we're creating.

Second, the aspirations – aspirational push for integrated ASEAN is good for U.S. business. The more ASEAN is integrated, and not only integrated within Asia but across the Pacific, is good for United States businesses – transactional costs, rules, et cetera, et cetera. And again, people like Bill Reinsch, a senior dialogue – a senior member for APEC at State and others can speak to this.

I also think ASEAN and ASEAN-led organizations are very important for the U.S. to make its case about rules, norms, values, and its approach to international relations, not least on Ukraine or Myanmar or anywhere else. I think it's a really important venue. And again, it involves some travel for our Foreign Service officers, our dedicated folks, and time to be sure, but it's not a huge cost to make those case(s) given the role that we play in the international system.

Finally, it includes U.S. allies and partners and friends, who also think ASEAN is important. Some of those 28 Treaty and Amity Cooperation dialogue partners are our allies and friends. In fact, many of you will recall that the historical record is that we signed on to ASEAN and the TAC in part because of the urgings and the discussions with our allies and friends, who made the case that the United States should not be outside of the framework of ASEAN as a TAC signatory.

And then the practical part of me just would say – end by saying that it's a U.S. interest because ASEAN and ASEAN-led organizations and architecture are a tool, not the only tool, of managing regional affairs.

Thanks.

Mr. Poling:

Thank you, Satu.

So we have a few minutes for questions. As you saw with the opening keynote, we'll be able to take questions both from the floor – we have a stand mic – and from online. So feel free to raise hands if you're here in the room

or type out questions if not. And while you all gather your courage, I'm going to make myself a liar and ask a question anyway.

So I think I'd like to ask each of you to weigh in on what may be a somewhat provocative question. I don't know if you had the chance to see an article written by our mutual friend Tidunan Ansudarak last week where I think he gave voice to the frustration of quite a number of people, not just in ASEAN but here in the States as well, which is that ASEAN has run out of energy, that ASEAN's high-water mark when it comes to its ambition was the ASEAN charter of 2008 and the years after that, and since then ASEAN has been stuck in reactivity to the South China Sea, to the Mekong, Ukraine, Myanmar. Even the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific was a reaction to the U.S. and the Japanese Indo-Pacific strategies.

Do you think that that is a fair assessment? Has ASEAN run out of ambition? Or does ASEAN still have more to contribute?

Maybe I could start with Ambassador Keo.

Amb. Keo:

Well, thank you for your questions. And I don't agree with the statement saying that we are running out of aspirations. Well, we maintain partnerships/relations, as Satu have just said. We maintain our ASEAN-led and ASEAN centralities because we tried to avoid hijacking of all those architectures by issues that arising because, as you know, that all the partners to those architectures, all the parties went to architectures, they all allied either to this side or to that side. But we mobilized them all to sit together.

So we have to get a good grip of managing the architecture, avoiding that you're pulling two factions fighting inside the architecture itself. And that's how we keep requesting for supporting of the ASEAN centralities and so on like that.

And you are right, as our main aim is to keep the region peaceful, stability, for the growth of economy, and well-beings. And we have seen too much war, too much conflicts, already. And despite of this now, it's still in the region.

In the South China Sea, we are trying to impose rules-based agreements. That is why the COC has been negotiated for the past two decades, because we don't want a rough – a runup to conclude the agreement which by the end nobody observed the rule and principle in the agreement itself. So that's why we – it takes some time for us until both sides agree to the rule in principle, and then we have to be a binding agreement which have to be observed by all sides, because we understand that a big country like China – and even I talk about U.S. and other major player in the region – they try to

assert power and influence in the region. And you can see now, in this world the only stable region for economic growth is only in the Asia-Pacific as a whole. The rest is a bit in pull here and there because of the conflicts around.

The war in Ukraine does affect us very much on energy security, on food security as well, despite that people say in Asia we eat rice, so what to do with wheat in Ukraine and Russia. But then you see only the war in Ukraine started, our beer production has dropped drastically because beer produced from wheat, and then the can imported from Russia – the aluminum is imported from Russia every stop. So it's affect our economy as well.

And then the oil price hike up, it create problem for our production chain, our transport and everything, so the living standard also going down, we – caused us really alarming. And that's why we are trying our best to strengthen our cooperation with partners all around, in this part of the world and Europe as well, because these are the things that we are working on to move up our economies and our living standards.

Mr. Poling: Thank you, Ambassador. Lynn, are ASEAN's best days behind it?

Dr. Kuok: I don't think ASEAN has run out of energy or ambition. What I do think, though, is that it's using that energy and ambition perhaps – investing that energy and ambition perhaps in an area that is not the most productive.

So in another – what I think is that it probably is so afraid of rocking the boat, so afraid of offending the great powers, that it's worried about doing the things that it really should be investing its energy and ambition in. So, for instance, in terms of engagement with middle powers so that it creates greater opportunities and options for ASEAN – you know, Europe, for instance – it was doing quite a good job, I think, of engaging Europe to be more interested in the Indo-Pacific in developments there. And we saw a

flurry of Indo-Pacific statements coming out of Europe and the European Union, and I think that was a positive sign.

However, since the Ukraine war, I think ASEAN, perhaps, has not thought carefully through how it can continue to keep Europe engaged in the region to create options for it – Europe and other middle powers, Japan, et cetera, Australia, but particularly Europe as well – in terms of how it can keep Europe continuously engaged in the region. And it's not helping by saying, OK – and the Indo-Pacific matters to Europe because of the rules-based order – where it's undermined in one part of the world, it's also undermined elsewhere.

But they're not coming out in the same way to support – to strongly condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Because, obviously, if the rules-based order is undermined there, it's also undermined in the Indo-Pacific, which has implications for the Indo-Pacific as well.

And of course, the other thing that ASEAN needs to focus more heavily on – instead of worrying about causing consternation amongst the great powers, is – of course, focusing on what it needs to support and defend the rules-based order, and I've talked about that earlier, so I'll refrain from doing that again now.

Mr. Poling: Thanks.

Satu, I want you to weigh on this too, but let's package it with a question we just got online, because I think they dovetail nicely with some of your remarks. So the Thai Ambassador and Permanent Rep to the U.N. Suriya Chindawongse said, what alternatives to an ASEAN-centered architecture would be sustainable and accepted by all major powers? And you addressed a little bit whether or not there is any such alternative.

Mr. Limaye: Yeah, let me link the questions. It is always worth reading Thitinan and then we have a question from the Thai ambassador and permanent rep to the U.N. So it's always worth reading Thitinan's work. I haven't read this particular case, what case he makes for it. I believe that – I don't know about ASEAN's aspirations in the secretariate and within, but I'll make the following comments and get myself into a lot of trouble.

One, we've probably reached peak ASEAN, in part because of two factors. One, because the context in which ASEAN operates is fundamentally different than the period of its heyday. That's not ASEAN's fault. The conditions of international relations have changed from the peak. Second, the constituent elements of ASEAN have different priorities. There have

been massive changes in the component countries of ASEAN, in their directions and views, et cetera.

So my short answer to the question, which is a very good question, is: No, there isn't ASEAN-centered – alternative to an ASEAN-centered architecture that would be sustainable and accepted by all majors, in part because the situation of international relations doesn't make that possible to create now. Again, not ASEAN's fault, but the nature of what's happened in terms of Russian aggression, in my view, and Chinese assertiveness, in my view.

So it's quite natural to me that the question to be asked – again, I would return to what I started out with – is I wouldn't worry about all major powers being on the platform of architecture as much as I would be

interested in an architecture that meets the designs and the comfort levels that you seek. And that's for others to determine. My own view is that we should have multiple architectures.

And for me, friends, allies, and partners – allies, friends, and partners, combined with coalitional arrangements – whether it be on supply chains, or minerals, or high technology – combined with global structures which are still very important particularly for ASEAN, have to have some sort of mix. And that will lead to the kind of results we want to live in, rather than the exact shape of the house that we build.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

So, Lynn, I'll welcome your thoughts on that too. Let me take the last question. Then we'll wrap here. We'll come back down the row. I'll let you speak to it, and then end with Ambassador Keo.

So Drake Avila from the East-West Center asks: What threat does the crisis in Myanmar pose to ASEAN credibility and ASEAN centrality? I'll skip Satu, because it's always dangerous to ask the boss a question in a format like this. (Laughter.) Lynn.

Dr. Kuok: I just wanted to touch on something you said about the context for ASEAN having changed. And I think that's a very important point, because I think the context for, you know, ASEAN has changed from its heyday, yes. But I don't see that much urgency in terms of how ASEAN is seeking to respond to that changing context. There is a sort of – and I don't say this as across the board or across all ASEAN countries.

But we see it, for instance, in the Indonesian defense minister's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue earlier this year, when he said, you know, ASEAN has

always – the region has always managed its problems very well, and it will continue to do so without, you know, outside interference. And it can continue to do so without outside interference. And of course, you know, the last few decades haven't seen, you know, great-power rivalry in the – to the intensity that we're seeing today.

And, you know, ASEAN hasn't managed to handle issues on its doorstep, like the South China Sea, particularly well without, you know, support from the outside. We also have the question that was asked from the audience about the Myanmar crisis, and how that affects ASEAN credibility and centrality. And of course, if ASEAN isn't able to handle a problem that's, you know, in its neighborhood, of course, this casts into question its centrality or even its relevance moving forward to handle bigger issues, like great-power rivalry.

There is, of course, also the argument that, you know, no power, in a sense, will be able to handle the Myanmar crisis. And we've seen that with the extent to which other major powers have been able unable to get any movement in the Myanmar crisis as well. So, you know, perhaps we shouldn't be measuring ASEAN credibility and centrality only on the issue of Myanmar, only on the issue of the South China Sea, but perhaps we need a more holistic approach to seeing whether ASEAN is best able to serve the collective interests of its members and partners. And I think that was what we need to work for moving forwards.

Mr. Poling: Thank you.

Ambassador Keo, the last word is yours.

Amb. Keo: I'd like to add a little bit that on the Myanmar crisis, it's not very right to say that it's both – of course, to some certain opinion there's the one issue to be solved overnight. But as I said earlier, the issue has been deep rooted a very long time ago. So in our chairmanship has a special – our special envoy has done is to coordinate with all the three entity for the humanitarian relief to make sure that the relief, it go to – right to the needy people. That's what we have done.

And then we try to talk with all the – all the warring factions and even the main opposition, the NUG and then the SAC itself. But we feel that there is still a strong habit in the destroying yet. So I think the issue have to be solved by ASEAN and have to be solved by all warring faction. You cannot live with it. And we believe that the problem cannot solve by battle of guns; it have to be solved through negotiating tables. And the issue now is how to bring all the parties to sit down together, and then we start negotiating.

So I can't say more before the outcome of the meeting tonight in Jakarta. And then the issue will be raised to the level of the leader next week in Phnom Penh. There will be a special session by all the leader on Myanmar issues. And so I cannot say the result beforehand, so let's see together what it come out. But I believe that we will find a way to deal with that issues.

Mr. Poling: Thank you, Ambassador.

All right. We're going to take a brief break and let Bill Reinsch come up and set up the next panel on APEC. But first, please join me in thanking all of our panelists. (Applause.)

(END)