

Book Launch - *Asia Alone: The Dangerous Post-Crisis Divide from America*

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Remarks delivered by Professor Tommy Koh at the Book Launch of

Asia Alone: the Dangerous Post-Crisis Divide from America

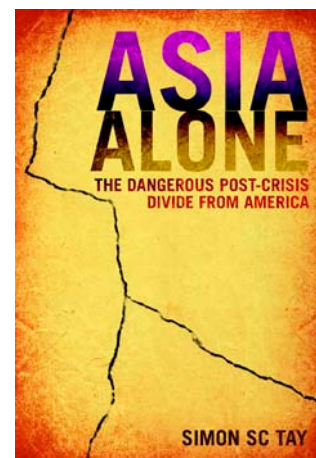
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Talking Points

1. Simon has written an important and timely book.

2. Speaking in Washington, DC, last year, MM Lee Kuan Yew said that the most dynamic and promising region of the world is Pacific Asia. In view of this, he urged the US to stay engaged with the region, arguing that the future of the world will be determined by what happens in the Pacific. Simon Tay is, therefore, right to focus his book on the future of the relations between the US and Asia. Within Asia, he is also right in stating that the most important country for the US is no longer Japan but China. During the 1980s, the much admired US Ambassador to Japan, Senator Mike Mansfield, used to say that America's most important bilateral relationship was that with Japan. No one disagreed with him. The world has changed radically in the last 30 years. One of those changes is the rise of China.



3. This book was written during the year Simon Tay spent at the Asia Society in New York, as the Bernard Schwartz Fellow. 2009 was a traumatic year for the world. It was a nearly fatal year for the US. Wall Street collapsed. Some of the corporate icons of America fell like the Twin Towers did in 2001. The American economy teetered on the precipice. It was saved from disaster and from plunging the world into a second Great Depression. Watching this American drama in New York, it is perfectly understandable that Simon should form the impression that America is a declining power. I also understand why Simon agrees with Fareed Zakaria's thesis that we live in a post-American world.

4. I am an optimist about America. Having lived over 20 years of my life in America and being a student of American history, I am struck by two things. First, by America's ability to bounce back from adversity. This has happened time and time again in American history. The past is, of course, not necessarily a predictor of the future. The sceptics may be right that this time, America's decline is irreversible. But, I don't think so for the following reason. Second, my optimism about America is based upon a number of her strengths: her ability to attract and retain global talent; the excellence of her top universities and research institutions; her culture of innovation and creativity; and the unique mix of cultural diversity and intellectual freedom.

5. I, therefore, do not regard the US as a declining power. I also think Fareed Zakaria is premature in declaring that we now live in a post-American world. The US is no longer a hegemon but her total power and influence is unmatched by any other power or combination of powers. President Obama's convening power was on display in April this year. He invited 48 of the world's leaders to attend a Nuclear Summit in Washington, DC. 47 leaders accepted Obama's invitation.

6. I would also give the Obama Administration credit for getting its Asia policy right. Secretary Clinton declared that America was back in Asia. This was a slight exaggeration because the US never left Asia. Her first foreign trip was to Asia. During his first year, President Obama has visited Japan, China, Singapore and South Korea. Declaring himself as America's first Pacific President, he attended the APEC Summit in Singapore and held a historic summit with the 10 ASEAN Leaders, including the PM of Myanmar. He has signed the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. The US is currently hosting the second negotiating meeting in San Francisco of the TPP, consisting of the following 8 members of APEC: Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, Singapore, Australia, US, Vietnam and Peru. My conclusion is therefore that, notwithstanding the problems of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama Administration's no. 1 foreign policy priority is Asia.

7. But, what about the Asian side of the equation? Simon Tay suggests that Asia has 3 options: (i) Asian Bloc; (ii) Asia Pacific Century; and (iii) Global Asia. I think the best way forward for Asia is a combination of (ii) and (iii). What does this mean? It means strengthening the ties between the US and Asia across the Pacific. We should, therefore, continue to attach great importance to institutions and arrangements such as APEC, TPP, as well as our bilateral FTAs, with the US. ASEAN is currently considering whether to expand the EAS, to include the US and Russia, or to follow the ASEAN Defence Ministers' lead in creating a new configuration, ASEAN+8. At the same time, I agree with Simon that we should strengthen our institutions, such as, ASEAN, ASEAN+3, and the East Asia Summit. The rise of Asia should be accompanied by Asian integration and community-building. In this way, we can unite our strength and expand our influence and, at the same time, ensure that relations between the major Asian countries, China, India and Japan are rational and cooperative. ASEAN plays a critical role as the region's convenor and facilitator.

8. Let me conclude by quoting, with approval, the following passage from Simon's book: "The relationship between the US and Asia is changing and must necessarily change The new balance of relationships between the US and Asia will shape, for better or for worse, the coming years not only for Asians and Americans but, in tandem, for the post-crisis world."

9. Thank you.

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