

Battle Of Powers In The Zone

How the battle of the super powers, China and the United States, plays out in coming years will

be one of the most closely watched issues in the Indo-Pacific Asia region, according to experts at

today's In the Zone event at The University of Western Australia.

The Hon Stephen Smith, former Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Director of the Perth

USAsia Centre, said the rise of China would continue to be an international focus point.

"How will the world respond to the rise of another great power? Then we will have to grapple

with the rise of India – three super powers," he said. "As a great power rises, there are inevitably

going to be tensions, and we are already seeing military flashpoints."

Mr Smith said that while comparisons were made to the US-Soviet battles of the past, the key

difference between US-China issues now was that the US and Soviet had had next to no

economic engagement.

"Now we have the reverse. We have a highly sophisticated economic relationship between China

and the US," he said. "There are dialogues occurring on many levels."

Mr Smith said there had been a number of subtle but highly relevant changes to the Indo-Pacific

Asia regional architecture in recent years that were prompting the US and China to work

together more closely.

He said the single most important change in a regional sense had been the admittance to the East

Asia Summit of the US. Globally, the introduction of the G20, the premier forum for international economic cooperation and decision-making, had been a significant initiative.

"There are now multiple occasions where leaders get together and try to work through their

differences, towards achieving greater security and prosperity," Mr Smith said, adding that the

failure of US President, Barack Obama, to attend the last East Asia Summit and APEC Leaders'

Meeting last year had been a significant error by the US.

Mr Yoichi Kato, National Security Correspondent The Asahi Shimbun, said while there was

increased likelihood of a clash between the US and China, both countries were reasonable

enough to avoid conflict.

Professor Linda Jakobson, Visiting Professor United States Studies Centre, said China would

need to accept the need to share power, and prove its ability to stay on track with reform

processes.

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In the session, which was focused on security and rights of passage issues in the region and moderated by Dr Bates Gill, CEO of the United States Studies Centre, other identified risks

included the North Korean and Iran nuclear programs.

Mr Smith described North Korea as “the masters of provocation” who had, over time, been good

at getting the international community to reward bad behaviour.

Professor Kim Tae-Hyo, former Senior Secretary for National Security Forces in Korea, said he

was confident the rules of engagement between North Korea and Korea would minimise the

likelihood of future clashes between the two countries. However, he said that inconsistent

approaches to North Korea by the international community created challenges.

Maritime and territorial tensions and disputes, such as those between China and the Philippines,

were often small in terms of territory, but would continue to have serious international implications.

Mr Smith said a new agreement reached in April at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium in

China that would ensure miscommunication between naval vessels did not develop into conflict

was a very positive step.

Mr Smith said there was strong potential for Australian companies to continue to grow the

Australian presence in Asia, but offered some advice for large businesses seeking to have a

presence in the new and emerging super powers of China and India: “If you are not in China

already, then you are 30 years too late. But you can get in on the ground floor in India. Look

west, look India.”

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