

## ASEAN-US Relations: What are the Talking Points?



The ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC) organised a workshop on “ASEAN-US Relations: What are the Talking Points” on 16 July 2010 at ISEAS, bringing together representatives from the policy, business and academic communities, partly in preparation for an expected summit meeting between the US President

and ASEAN leaders. Discussions touched on the US military presence in the region, cooperation on maritime security, strategic issues such as US-China relations and the recent US policy shift towards Myanmar, and progress in economic and technical cooperation. Workshop discussions will be distilled into a policy paper.

The workshop acknowledged the importance of ASEAN and the US to each other. Both the US and ASEAN are interested in freedom of navigation, and in keeping the trade links and sea lanes open. Although trade holds a special place in ASEAN-US relations, perceptions exist that ASEAN may be declining in economic importance to the US because the region is not as integrated as envisioned. However, the participation of some ASEAN member states in the TransPacific Partnership might help bridge the gap between bilateral free trade agreements and the objective of global free trade.



Strategically, as well as economically, ASEAN is intertwined with a complex relationship between the US and China. ASEAN’s own relationship with the US has its complexities in the Myanmar issue, which is seen as largely inflamed by domestic political lobbying in the US. Progress can be seen in the steady advance in the scope and breadth of ASEAN-US cooperation programmes over the years since dialogue relations were established in 1977. The US Administration’s increasing attention to its partnership with ASEAN indicates new opportunities for deeper engagement, especially in working together on challenges that transcend national boundaries.