

## ANXIETIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE U.S. IN ASIA

HONOLULU (March 3, 2011) -- Improving the sluggish U.S. economy is clearly the top concern of American leaders right now, but U.S. relationships with Asian nations are also of great interest—producing a complex mix of unease and opportunity, according to Dr. Satu Limaye, Director of the East-West Center in Washington. The links between globalization and the rise of China, and related economic, political and security implications, are among the subjects that trouble many American policy-makers, Limaye said during a keynote address at the East-West Center's International Graduate Student Conference in Honolulu on Feb. 17. (Click [here](#) to watch a video of Limaye's speech.)

"I'm sometimes worried that people see the U.S.-China relationship as unlinked from other relationships. It's not. It's not done in a vacuum or against anyone else," Limaye said in his speech, titled "America's Asian Anxieties: A View from Washington."

Increased U.S. attention to Southeast Asia in recent years has been remarkable, he said, and there are important opportunities now to build stronger ties with such nations as Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Cambodia.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visits to Cambodia and Malaysia in November 2010 are strong indications of the U.S. commitment to the region, and it seems possible that President Barack Obama will become the first U.S. president to visit Malaysia since the late 1960s, he said.

"For the first time in perhaps a generation, we are re-engaging in both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia," Limaye said.

The one clear exception is Burma, but some element of engagement with Burma may be possible as new opportunities become more clear to Washington, he said.

U.S. accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2009, and the institutionalization of the U.S.-ASEAN Summit are other key indicators, said Limaye, who has headed the East-West Center in Washington since early 2007.

The U.S. relationship with Japan is quite resilient, although various elements do need attention, said Limaye, who has also served as director of research at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies and as head of South Asia programs at the Japan Institute of International Affairs in Tokyo.

Japan's internal problems with debt and depopulation are certainly sources of concern—but perhaps too much concern, he said.

"Japan is a remarkably rich, cohesive and advanced country," Limaye said. "It is possible to overstress the difficulties that Japan faces." Allegations of a damaged U.S.-Japan security alliance have also been much overstated, he said.

Management of security issues regarding North Korea have required constant attention, and South Korea remains very important to America, Limaye said, noting that it is also a rising source of foreign students and investment.

U.S. relations with India are also good but have much room to grow, and there is an increasing realization of India's regional importance, he said. There is also a growing recognition that the geographic area traditionally linked most closely with Asia has now expanded to include the Indian Ocean and the east coast of Africa, with its important oil reserves. Some analysts now commonly refer to the larger "Indo-Pacific Region" when they might have earlier focused more narrowly on Asia or the Asia-Pacific, he said.

Limaye said there is also growing unease among some traditional U.S. allies as their economies become more strongly tied to China while the U.S. remains a much closer security partner.

"There is a certain sense that every Asian country will now have China as its leading economic partner and the U.S. as the backstop for political and security affairs," he said. "The question is: how do you bridge this? Because if the U.S. is not engaged economically, then this divide can be a cleavage between our relations with Asia, and we need to be very careful of that, particularly Asian efforts to have exclusive economic organizations in Asia which exclude the United States."

"In my view, this would be terribly prejudicial to the ability of America to maintain its commitment to forward security," he said.

Noting that a preponderance of material strength does not necessarily equal leadership, Limaye said his assessment is that "there is no other country either willing or able to exercise the leadership on a demand and supply basis than the United States."

The U.S. is now better balanced across a range of engagement in Asia -- including security, human rights, democracy, governance and economics -- than in previous years, he said. The American security presence in Asia is also better balanced, though not perfect, he added.

"I think we are at an interesting point where almost every country in the region wants the U.S. to supply security in the Asia-Pacific," he said.

There is also good balance between concerns over what has often been referred to as "entrapment" of allies into American objectives and "abandonment" of those whose importance to the U.S. has waned, he said.

"Unlike during the Cold War, our relations with Asia are not just about ideology and strategy," Limaye said. "They are really whole-society relations."