

Russia-ASEAN Summit: Posturing or Power Play?

By [Tony Cartalucci](#)

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Earlier this year, despite immense fanfare, the US-ASEAN Summit held in Sunnylands, California ended in a fizzle rather than a bang. Little of substance emerged from and admittedly “symbolic” summit, and the US even went as far as criticizing guests as they departed – lecturing them regarding “democracy” and “human rights.”

Coupled with this send-off designed to humiliate, was the US State Department’s various funded media fronts operating in each respective ASEAN state, mocking and denigrating ASEAN leaders who have fallen from Washington’s favor.

Far from another step toward fostering better relations between Washington and Asia as prescribed by the US “pivot to Asia,” it was instead a transparent attempt to empty out the resources of the region via compromising and coercive free trade agreements – more specifically, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – and line up an unwilling Southeast Asia [as an adversarial proxy against Beijing](#) – a notion none save for Washington attending the summit found appealing.

In reality, a summit can only bear equitable outcomes for all involved when a balance of power and leverage exists between all parties in attendance, thus making concessions possible, even desirable and above all beneficial to all.

Washington represents special interests with an enormous, lopsided amount of power and influence, backed in turn, by networks set up in each respective ASEAN member by US special interests to undermine and coerce each government to capitulate to US demands. Entire political fronts underwritten by Washington through the US State Department and an extensive network of faux-nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) exist to pressure and eventually overrun each state, creating for all intents and purposes a region of client regimes representing Washington, not the people they actually rule over.

Under such conditions, events like the US-ASEAN Summit represents a bully lining up his victims in an uncomfortable public display designed to make coercion look like cooperation.

Could a Russia-ASEAN Summit Provide an Alternative?

Later this month Russia is to host its own version of a joint ASEAN summit. In addition to the Russia-ASEAN Summit, there will be various bilateral meetings between Russian leaders and respective ASEAN states, [including Thailand](#).

Russia, unlike the US, does not possess extensive extraterritorial networks of NGOs dedicated to subverting and coercing foreign governments. It has no historical or current presence in Asia militarily, unlike the US who is permanently occupying Japan, building

bases in the Philippines, and regularly provokes security crises in the South China Sea. Russia spends a fraction of what the US does on its military overall, and cultivates a multipolar, non-interventionist worldview in direct contrast to America's "intentional order" it places itself atop.

In reality, Russia represents for ASEAN a much more equitable partner to deal with, not only directly for mutual economic and political benefit, but also as a means of balancing stronger relations and alternative economic opportunities against uncompromising hegemony imposed by Washington.

Stronger ties with Russia could offer ASEAN the ability to leverage more from the US, if not offer an exit to inequitable impositions altogether.

What ASEAN Could Benefit From

In many ways, Russia represents a nation emerging out from under the shadow of Western special interests, after struggling for years to stand back up after the collapse of the Soviet Union and an age of exploitation and malaise that followed as Western interests stripped off former Soviet territories, subverted Russia internally, and flooded the nation with marauding financial criminals.

Today, Russia is capable of defending itself from the full-spectrum of Western coercion, whether it is economic sanctions, military might, sociopolitical subversion, or even amid the global information war. These are all areas currently ASEAN states struggle with immensely and could benefit equally as much in by partnering with Russia.

For Russia and its vision of a multipolar future, standing up ASEAN just as it itself has against unipolar hegemony, is essential in realizing this multipolar future.

Cooperation in security, media, and economics, based on the success Russia has already had in establishing itself in the face of Western hegemony could be what makes the Russia-ASEAN Summit a success where the US-ASEAN Summit was a failure.

What Could Emerge from the Russia-ASEAN Summit

Among just the [Thai-Russian bilateral meetings](#) planned just ahead of the summit later this month, economic trade proposed by Thailand as well as defense acquisitions of Russian hardware are planned. Should Thailand agree on procuring Russian T-90 main battle tanks or Russia agree on importing Thai agricultural products, the entire summit will have yielded more of substance than Washington's "symbolic" summit earlier this year.

It would be important for both Russia and nations like Thailand, to prove that real progress can be made when nations cooperate constructively as planned for the upcoming summit in Russia, rather than act coercively as the US did in Sunnylands, California.

Details regarding "consultations" between ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are likely to emerge after the meetings and could add further to substantive gains from the summit.

What is essential for Russia and its multipolar vision of the future, as well as for ASEAN's sovereignty versus Washington's recent hegemonic inroads into the region, is to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen each state not only in relation to regional and

international partners, but also strengthen them from within.

Paramount to Russia's ability to weather Western hegemony is its internal military, technological, economic, and media strength. The emergence of alternative media networks originating in Russia aimed at countering Western domination over the flow of information internationally could be further augmented by standing up similar capabilities across ASEAN. This would help ASEAN find more leverage against the West directly, and help further dilute Western domination of the information space globally – which would mutually benefit both Russia and ASEAN.

Fostering greater military and economic independence from Western interests across ASEAN could likewise dilute Western domination over geopolitics.

What could emerge from a Russia-ASEAN Summit? Perhaps another piece of the multipolar world Russia is championing for alongside the rest of BRICS.

Tony Cartalucci, Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook"](#).

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