

MEKONG FORUM 2017

NEW GEO-ECONOMICS: RESHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE GMS?

JULY 14, 2017 | PULLMAN HOTEL,
KHON KAEN, THAILAND



MEKONG
INSTITUTE



IDRC | CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international



What is the new geo-economics and how does it affect the GMS' position in the global economic battlefield?

Geo-economics is defined broadly as the economic effect of trends in geopolitics and national power. It is the relationship between a region's geopolitics—most evidently its security issues—and its economic development (for instance, business-driven cross-border integration of markets).

The current geo-economics shows some signals of protectionism and at the same time, stronger integration. This creates more opportunities, but may likewise cause some disturbances, affecting the GMS' socio-economic development. This reality merits a regional discourse among major stakeholders, which Mekong forum 2017 provides.

Caught in the middle of superpowers vying for global influence are the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) countries of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. The GMS economy, with a consumer and labor market of above 300 million and a combined GDP expected to exceed \$1 trillion by 2020, is on the rise.

Yet the region's potential extends beyond mere numbers. With more opportunities for trade and investment coming up, and foreign technical and financial assistance pouring in, the new geo-economics is already painting a picture of regional promise and prosperity. Add to this the increasing connectivity and greater economic integration happening along the Mekong Region and the GMS is set to enter a new era of growth and development.

WHY MEKONG FORUM 2017?

The world is becoming more multipolar. With this transition, great powers compete with each other through economic means, while regional powers play a larger neighborhood role. This sees a quest for political power between more-developed nations in the world, in what could be termed as the "new geo-economics."

But while the new geo-economics is expected to further contribute to this prosperity, it also poses some treats and threats for the region along the way. A more volatile geopolitical environment endangers the region's stability, with the increasing tension between the US, the established global power, and China, East Asia's rising power. Tensions are also simmering among Asia's three major players, China, Japan and India, where flashpoints are at seas and over natural resources.



With the US pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, and the UK preparing to exit the European Single Market, there is an obvious shift to protectionism and individualism by Western countries. On the other hand, **China's Belt and Road Initiative** and the **US-South Korea Alliance** is bringing Asian countries together like never before. This scenario of polar opposites and political imbalance puts GMS in a position of uncertainty, which may either expedite regional development or result in unfavorable socio-economic consequences.

While global and regional institutions are expected to manage tensions and contain conflict on trade and investment issues, they are largely absent on security matters in the region. **This leaves an unstable balance of power, risking to compromise along with them the GMS' economic growth.**

The challenge, then, is to **ensure continued economic advancement while undertaking effective political measures to lessen geopolitical volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.** In this period of rising global geopolitical tensions, addressing the interaction between geopolitics, international economic trends, and their political and security implications, is of critical importance to help foster continued regional prosperity.

It is in this reality that Mekong Forum 2017 is grounded. With the theme **"New Geo-economics: Reshaping the Future of the GMS?"**, this year's Mekong Forum aims to **enhance a shared understanding of major global transformations** and its effect to the GMS, to **tackle ways on improving risk management** for governments and businesses, and to **discuss the increasing importance of regional and international cooperation** in the light of the new geo-economics.

WHAT IS THE MEKONG FORUM?

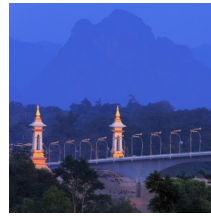
Initiated by the **Mekong Institute**, an inter-governmental organization in the GMS, the Mekong Forum:

- Brings together opinion leaders to discuss the most pressing issues facing the GMS;
- Is known as an annual gathering in Khon Kaen, a city in the northeast of Thailand;
- Is an integrated platform engaging business, academic and other leaders in collaborative efforts to shape the development agenda in the GMS; and
- Is now being used by leaders, international organizations and scholars as a neutral platform to exchange ideas and build networks across the GMS.

Mekong Institute has successfully organized **four Mekong Forums** in the past. Various topics have been propelled into the spotlight, such as **narrowing development gaps between the lesser developed ASEAN countries and other ASEAN states, enhancing regional cooperation and integration, and modernizing the GMS.** Last year, the Mekong Forum zoomed in to the **role of development partners in the region**, discussing their invaluable role and contribution in sharing lessons learned, identifying future priority needs, and suggesting ways to advance effective development cooperation in the GMS for the years to come.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Members of the GMS countries, development practitioners, stakeholders, and executives or senior officials of development organizations, particularly those who are engaged at [GMS/ASEAN] regional level, are highly encouraged to join. The forum also targets to invite governmental/intergovernmental, non-government/civil society, private and non-profit developments organizations, research institutes, and academic institutes as well as support agencies within the region.



EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The expected outputs are:

Forum proceedings;

Action-oriented ideas and proposed programs, including development initiatives for further development of the GMS; and

Networks of participants who are interested and/or knowledgeable in the new geo-economics and its effect in future regional development.



DATE & VENUE

Mekong Forum 2017 will be held at Pullman Khon Kaen Raja Orchid Hotel, Khon Kaen, Thailand on July 14, 2017.



REGISTRATION

To register in the forum, please **download** the registration form uploaded at <http://mekongforum.com/> and send the completed form via email to mekongforum2017@mekonginstitute.org. The registration deadline is on June 30, 2017.



COST

Participants are requested to pay for their own international and domestic travel expenses, as well as accommodation. MI will provide for meals (coffee breaks and lunch) during the forum, as well as during the Reception Dinner on July 13. Only the expenses of invited speakers and panelists will be shouldered by MI.



WHO TO CONTACT

For more information, please contact **Ms. Pornwilai Pumira**, External Relations Manager, Mekong Institute at telephone number + 66 (0) 43 202 268-9 ext. 4152 or fax 043 204 043.



PROGRAM SCHEDULE & AGENDA



JULY 13, 2017

18.30-20.30 Reception Dinner (Sala Thai, 4th Floor, Pullman Hotel)

JULY 14, 2017

08.30-09.00 Registration (Orchid Ballroom 1, 2nd floor, Pullman Hotel)

09.00-09.10 Welcome Remarks

Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, Mekong Institute Executive Director

09.10-09.35 Keynote Speech I: New Geo-economics: Reshaping the Future of the GMS?

Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of Mekong Institute Steering Committee

09.35-10.00 Keynote Speech II: The Rise and Fall of Protectionism: Opportunities and Challenges for the GMS

Datuk M. Supperamaniam, Former Malaysian Ambassador to the WTO

10.00-10.30 Group Photo, Coffee Break and Networking

10.30-12.00 **Session I: Dynamics of Geopolitics and Geo-economics:
Past, Present and Future**

Changes in geopolitics and geo-economics in the GMS have resulted into vast regional socio-economic transformation in the past, and the Mekong Forum provides a platform for development stakeholders to discuss ways on how to move forward and cope with yet another major shift in the global economic and political landscape.

- **Representative from the US Embassy (TBC)**
- **Prof. Dr. Hikari Ishido**, Professor of International Economics, Chiba University
- **Assoc. Prof. Xiong Bin**, Faculty of Management and Economics, Kunming University of Science and Technology
- **Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi**, Director General, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, India (TBC)
- **Dr. Soraphol Tulayasathien**, Executive Director, Macroeconomic Policy Bureau, Fiscal Policy Office, Ministry of Finance, Thailand

12.00-13.00 Lunch (Pavilion Café, 1st floor, Pullman Hotel)



This event is powered by Mekong Institute

123 Mittraphap Road, Muang District, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

Phone: +66 (43) 202411 to 2 | Fax: +66 (43) 343-131 | Email: information@mekonginstitute.org | www.mekongforum.com

PROGRAM SCHEDULE & AGENDA

- 13.00-15.00 **Session II: Re-assessing Impacts on Development Cooperation in the GMS**
This session highlights the implications of the new geo-economics in fostering development partnerships in the GMS. It also underscores the increasing importance of strengthening cooperation and coordination among GMS development partners in maximizing the opportunities brought about by the new geo-economics.
- **H.E. Rith Vuthy**, Deputy General Secretary, Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board
 - **Mr. Min Zar Ni Lin**, Senior Technical and Policy Analyst, Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Myanmar
 - **Mr. Zach Center**, Country Manager, PACT Cambodia
 - **Dr. Kensuke Yamaguchi**, Project Assistant Professor, Policy Research Unit, Global Energy Policy and East Asia, Policy Alternatives Research Institute (PARI), Tokyo
 - **Dr. Edgard R. Rodriguez**, Senior Program Specialist, International Development Research Center (IDRC)
- 15.00-15.30 Coffee Break
- 15.30-17.00 **Session III: Re-adjusting Trade and Foreign Direct Investment Strategies for the GMS**
With the new geo-economics signaling the rise of mercantilism and individualism among the world's superpowers, it becomes crucial for GMS development stakeholders to explore ways to adapt to new trends in global trade and investment, and ensure continued economic prosperity.
- **Dr. Zaw Oo**, Executive Director, Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Myanmar
 - **Ms. Pimchanok Vonkorpon**, Director General, Trade Policy and Strategy Office (TPSO), Thailand
 - **Mr. Viengsavang Thippavong**, Deputy Director-General, Economic Research Institute for Industry and Trade (ERIT), Lao PDR
 - **Dr. Piyaporn Aeirntitiwat**, Deputy Executive Director, International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD), Thailand
 - **Mr. Marc Proksch**, Chief of Business and Development Section, Trade and Investment Division, UNESCAP
 - **Mr. Chiruit Isarangkun na Ayuthaya**, President, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TBC)
- 17.00-17.30 Wrap-up and Way Forward