

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION (RTD) REPORT

TALK BY PROF. DAVID ARASE

**ON “MARITIME EAST ASIA: FUTURE GEOPOLITICAL SCENARIOS AND
OUTLOOK”,**

NMF, 6 SEPTEMBER 2017

Professor David Arase, Professor of International Politics at Hopkins-Nanjing Centre, China delivered a talk on “Maritime East Asia: Future Geopolitical Scenarios and Outlooks”. His talk was broadly divided into two parts, the first describing the possible models of regional order and strategic alignments in the Pacific-Asia, and the second part focusing on geopolitical developments in the region. The following were the salient points:

- The world order is transitioning from a unipolar triangle, with the US as the hegemonic great power, and China and Japan (US ally) as the lesser powers, to a bipolar triangle with China emerging as a competitive great power.
- A multilateral governance architecture in the Asia-Pacific is unlikely to work because of the differences among the states in terms of values, interests and ambitions.
- The most likely scenario in the short term is that of Chinese assertiveness leading to quasi-containment against it, where China will remain a great land power while US will retain naval superiority, and there will be no regional hegemon.
- With respect to the geopolitical scenario in the region, China seeks great maritime power status. China is trying to control the coastal seas using “sea-dragon” tactics, ADIZ and construction of artificial islands.
- China advances its claims in the region by isolating rival South East Asian states, by trying to turn the DOC into COC, increasing its presence in the region through coast guard patrolling, maritime militia, etc.
- China’s aims include the occupation, use and disuse of South China Sea and East China Sea, creating a new status quo, gaining legal recognition through bilateral agreements, and gaining sovereignty over the South China Sea.

- Scarborough Shoal and Senkaku Islands, as the focus of Chinese takeover efforts, should be seen in the context of China trying to break the first island chain containing it.
- The conundrum of the South China Sea states lies in the fact that they lack a unified stance despite having shared basic interests, and shared threats of Chinese claims. Their options include appeasing China, bandwagoning, building their own capacity to deter, appealing to international community or seeking aid for capacity-building.

The presentation was followed by discussions, wherein Prof Arase also answered questions from the audience.