

ASEAN defence security foresighting in the next two decades

Peace, cooperation, and development continue to be the mainstream in the region and the world in recent years. The political, security environment, however, continues to witness complex developments. Insecurity and unpredictability are the most prominent feature, reflecting a fierce competition between trends and power centres in shaping a new world order. Meanwhile, hot spots and security challenges continue evolving unpredictably. These, consequently, strongly impact on defence and security environment of Southeast Asian in which some main factors are as follows:

First, increasingly acute strategic competition between major powers. The Indo-Asia-Pacific region has become a focal point for global attention, which is the place for interest convergence and and strategic competition between major powers. Most of big powers within and beyond the region have increased their presence and deepened their involvement in the region with the aim of competing for influence and balancing against each other to establish their standing and shape regional order in their interests. Through economic cooperation and increased military presence, major powers seek to carry out the strategy of both cooperation and competition to create intertwined interests. This will not only bring about opportunities but also pose numerous difficulties and challenges. The risk of collision, or even confrontation between major powers may threaten peace and stability in the region. Their competition within multilateral mechanisms and impact on policies of regional countries may weaken these mechanisms and the solidarity of ASEAN.

Second, geopolitical shifts in the region. The U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy is looming more clearly, which reflects not only the strategic competition between major powers but also an inevitable trend in the increasingly deep and wide integration process. The extension of regional thinking may be followed by more diversified and complex security issues. The scope of cooperation and rivalry will be broadened and widespread. Participation of many nations and organisations in regional context and architectures places requirements to establish new institutions and rules in the region.

Third, multilateralism and multilateral institutions are facing a number of challenges. Pragmatic nationalism and power politics continue to spread in international relations. Many nations, especially the major powers, have adjusted

their policies in the pragmatic direction, which attaches importance to individual interests, maximises their interests by all means regardless of interests of other nations and the region, and is willing to renounce their commitments if they does not serve their interests. Additionally, the tendency toward to bilateral, trilateral, or quadrilateral arrangements in the region may undermine the role of multilateral mechanisms.

Fourth, nontraditional security issues continue to envision complex developments. Issues, including violent extremism, cyber security, transnational crime, food security, energy security, climate change, etc. remain huge challenges to global and regional security and exceed any single nation's capacity to address. More importantly, many nontraditional security issues are being exploited in favour of political, military plots, or becoming a pretext for military operations such as the financing of terrorism, cyber attacks, and so forth. In addition, scientific and technological progress in military field, which gives rise to modernised weapons and equipment, including military robots, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), etc., is posing great challenges to national security and sovereignty.

Southeast Asia lies in the centre of the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Consequently, its defence and security in the next two decades will be greatly influenced by regional upheavals and shifts, which include the following ones:

The risk of collision, confrontation, and armed race in the region is likely to escalate as a result of increased strategic competition between major powers and the inclination to use force and unilateral actions.

ASEAN's centrality is likely to cope with many challenges. Given its central role in Indo-Pacific region, ASEAN will continue to play a central role in the new regional architecture. Nevertheless, this role will be under new pressure and challenges due to rivalry between major powers, power politics, increasingly popular pragmatism in international relations, and influence of the formation of new regional architectures. ASEAN-centric mechanisms for defence and security cooperation, particularly the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), are likely to be influenced by new players in a wider region.

Additionally, some ASEAN member states may face domestic issues such as religious, ethnic conflict, and secession, and become more inward-

looking. Thus, ASEAN's centrality is likely to face a number of challenges, especially in the leading of regional forums and settlement of regional issues.

Maritime security will be probably one of the biggest challenges to ASEAN. Southeast Asia, which straddles important sea lines of communication (SLOC), may face many challenges to ensuring maritime safety and security. Despite recent progress, disputes over national sovereignty and interests at sea, especially in the South China Sea, will be still hard to be resolved fundamentally and comprehensively in the coming time. Besides, militarisation, increased military operations, dispute over natural resources, piracy, armed robbery at sea, etc., could continue to pose serious threats to maritime security in Southeast Asia.

Nontraditional security issues are likely to develop complicatedly and unpredictable developments, which will threaten peace and stability in Southeast Asia, notably terrorism, extremism, cyber security, food security, illegal migration and human trafficking, climate change, and environmental security. Achievements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution may be exploited, which gives rise to new challenges and escalate the risk of nontraditional security issues, including terrorism, cyber security, information security, financial security, epidemics, and so on.

Upheavals of political and security environment in the region and the world in recent times and the next two decades, on the one hand, will bring about opportunities to promote cooperation, development, peace, and stability in Southeast Asia, but on the other, they will also pose a number of difficulties and challenges to defence and security of each nation and of the whole region. Being small and medium-sized countries, ASEAN members states should unite with each other and make joint efforts to build an increasingly strong Community and consolidate ASEAN's centrality in the new regional architecture, which helps to safeguard our interests and enables us to respond effectively to increasingly complex defence and security challenges. Solidarity represents a vital factor and the key to success of each member state and the whole Community./.