

Summary for CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Presentation by Mr Henrick Z. Tsjeng, Associate Research Fellow, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Mr Henrick Tsjeng felt that due to the still evolving major power rivalry and uncertainty over their contest for dominance, it will be more realistic to consider a shorter timeframe for ASEAN defence security foresighting for the next five years, and to be reviewed later. For ASEAN, the primary concern is to avoid being drawn into major power rivalry and focus on promoting peace and stability and regional economic development, as well as the three pillars of cooperation in ASEAN.

Mr Tsjeng highlighted the geopolitical shifts in the region, including the implications of major power rivalry. President Donald Trump's policies have resulted in uncertainty domestically and abroad. The US-China trade war brings major risks of escalation. China's continuing rise and its growing influence is viewed by the US as a challenge to its global dominance. The Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, as well as China's technological advancements, can be viewed as part of a rising China and its growing influence. Meanwhile, Japan will seek to enhance its military capacity and attempt to become a major regional power, adding complications in its engagement of Southeast Asian countries. The Korean Peninsula faces much uncertainty, and will further draw in the major powers of the US, China, Japan and Russia, with a risk of Southeast Asia getting dragged into this issue.

Mr Tsjeng underscored that these major shifts will adversely affect ASEAN. As the major powers assert themselves in the region, they might urge ASEAN or individual ASEAN Member States to take sides, that can have major impacts on ASEAN unity and centrality. Nonetheless, there have been calmer waters in the South China Sea. ASEAN will need to navigate these evolving developments carefully and engage all major powers for economic benefits for all ASEAN Member States. ASEAN should maintain unity when dealing with the external powers.