

Drivers of sustainable security in Southeast Asia

The world and region have been witnessing a period of upheavals and uncertainties, when each nation and individual have to face constant threats to their own security and safety. Security and sustainable security have become the common goals pursued by each individual, nation and the whole international community.

There have been not a common concept of sustainable security so far. However, there are two popular approaches to sustainable security. First, sustainable security seeks to compromise short-term security needs with long-term goals of developing a legitimate and feasible security system. In other words, it is a process to identify and address root causes of insecurity. Second, sustainable security is a harmonious combination of people's individual security and safety and security of nations, regions, and the whole world.

Southeast Asia is situated in an area which connects the Indian Ocean, Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Due to its position of strategic importance, peace, stability, and security of the region are not only of benefit to regional countries but also to those in the Indian Ocean, Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Nevertheless, regional security continues to witness many complex developments, which potentially threatens sustainable security in Southeast Asia. These factors are as follows:

First, power politics focusing on power, the use or threat use of force, and increasing unilateral actions continues to be threats to global peace and stability. In fact, national interests do not always coincide with those of the whole region and the world. Some nations with superior power and influence take unilateral actions regardless of law. Their actions have created bad precedents in ignoring law, threatening sovereignty and benefit of other countries and peace and stability of the region. Sustainable stability can only be established in the region and the world when inter-state relations are developed on the basis of equality, mutual respect and law. National interests harmonise with those of the region and international community.

Second, strategic competition between major powers in the region is increasingly fierce. Southeast Asia has become an area for geopolitical competition between major powers, especially between the United States and China. Major powers have ceaselessly enhanced their presence and competed for influence in the region by all means, including military. Military presence of

major powers in the seas of paramount importance is likely to increase the risk of collision and confrontation, or even armed conflict at sea. Additionally, it is likely to weaken mechanisms for multilateral security cooperation, including ASEAN-led mechanisms.

Third, unresolved disputes over sovereignty and natural resources and existing divergences may cause tension in the region. Despite effort to settle disputes made by concerning parties through regional cooperative mechanisms, fundamental issues and root causes of disputes have not been addressed.

Fourth, nontraditional security issues, particularly challenges to human security, are witnessing complex, unpredictable developments, which exceed the coping capacity of a single nation. Terrorism and violent extremism; risk of religious and ethnic conflict; cyber security; environmental security; food security; and climate change are the biggest challenges. In addition, the growing gap between rich and poor, social inequality, and differences in the levels of development between countries are exerting a strong influence on sociopolitical stability in some nations and the whole region. Many people in the region, especially the most vulnerable groups, are not entitled to achievements, and face the risk of being left out of the developmental processes, thus driving them to extremism.

In order to establish sustainable security in Southeast Asia, ASEAN member states need to carry out a number of synchronous and comprehensive measures as follows:

First, upholding rule of law, opposing use or threat use of force in international relations, and creating a real convergence of national and regional interests and those of the international community.

Second, investing effort in resolving disputes and divergences by peaceful means on the basis of international law, and promoting conclusion of an equitable and effective South China Sea Code of Conduct.

Third, strengthening solidarity and consensus between ASEAN member states in the context of upheavals in the region and strategic competition between major powers, and firmly preserving ASEAN's central role in regional mechanisms for security cooperation, especially the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and East Asia Summit (EAS).

Fourth, enhancing cooperation in building an increasingly prosperous ASEAN Community, promoting cooperation in economic development to narrow the development gap between countries and regions, and spurring people-to-people exchange and cultural exchange with the aim of building a cohesive, tolerant community in diversification.

Fifth, deepening cooperation in coping with nontraditional security issues such as climate change, environmental security, food security, water security, and so forth.

Sustainable security is an aspiration and goal pursued by all nations. This is an enduring, difficult process, which can be only accomplished when all nations make joint effort on the basis of responsibility, equality, and mutual respect for the benefit of each nation and the whole region./.