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Asia Pacific Security Issues: Challenges and Adaptive Mechanism

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Our region today is facing with both traditional and non-traditional security issues. As far as traditional security is concerned, we are still experiencing various conflicts relating to the territorial sovereignty (both land and maritime border), military build up and modernization (in East Asia alone, the military expenditure grew 56 per cent from 1999 to 2008), ultra-nationalist movements in some countries that can damage good neighborhood, and strategic competition between and among superpowers in the region that can make small developing countries to be more vulnerable to taking side. Regarding the non-traditional security issues, our region is facing with environment related security (such as food scarcity, diseases, environmental refugees, natural disasters), poverty (mainly caused by environmental degradation, unfair distribution of wealth/income, and weak institution), terrorism (mainly caused by poverty and extremist ideology), pandemic diseases (such as SARS, H1N1, HIV/AIDS), international organized crimes, and human and drug trafficking.

Looking at the strategic challenge in the Asia Pacific Region, there is concern relating to the rise of China and the fall of the US. Whether China can change the US centric security architecture status quo is still a work in progress. Whether the new security order in which China can have larger strategic space can maintain peace and stability is still unknown but history shows that China has never invaded other countries in the region except a short border war with Vietnam in 1979. What we really know is that the region is changing so fast in a rather unpredictable manner and the security is getting more complicated and multidimensional.

Some people look to China for economic and strategic interests while others still stick to the US. Since, as a human nature, change is not widely acceptable due to the high level of uncertainty. It is therefore logical to say that most of the regional leaders prefer to see the status quo of security architecture in the Asia Pacific Region in which US is the hub of

security provision. But it is impossible to preserve the status quo since China needs to strategically outreach to the wider region in order to get necessary resources especially energy and raw materials to maintain her economic growth in the home country. It is understandable that China needs to have stable high economic growth of about 8 percent GDP growth per year for her own economic and political survival. Widening development gap and employment are the two main issues facing China. Without China, the world will not enjoy peace, stability, and development. China is the locomotive of global and regional economic development and contributes to global and regional peace and stability.

It is understandable that China is struggling to break the so-called containment strategy imposed by the US since the post Cold War. Whether this tendency can lead to the greater strategic division is still unknown. Nevertheless, many observers agree that whatever changes may take place, a multi-polar world and multilateralism prevail. The reasons or logics supporting multilateralism are mainly based on the fact that no one country can really address the security issues embedded with international dimension, no one country has the capacity to adapt and adopt to new changes alone, and it needs cooperation and coordination among the nation states and relevant stakeholders including the private sector and civil societies.

Large scale interstate war or armed conflict is unthinkable in the region due to the high level of interdependency and democratization. It is believed that economic interdependency can reduce conflicts and prevent war. Democracy can lead to more transparency, accountability, and participation that can reduce collective fears and create more confidence and trust among the people in the region. In addition, globalism and regionalism are taking the center stage of national and foreign policy of many governments in the region except North Korea. The combination of those elements of peace is necessary for peace and stability in the region and those elements are present and being improved in this region.

Lets' take a step back and reflect on the strategic challenges caused by the rising China and falling US. China and US can be regarded as the two main strategic competitors for regional influence but at the same time both countries also improve their bilateral strategic partnership and cooperation. They believe that only through such partnership the region can stay in peace and development. China and US cannot be separated given the two countries are so much interconnected and interdependent on each others. US is still the main market for Chinese export while China is the main recipient of US' Foreign Direct Investment.

Regional security architecture in the Asia Pacific region has been developed in many layers in which ASEAN is by and large stays at the center. ASEAN are regarded as the successful regional institutions in providing peace, stability, and development to the region. However, we must not ignore the current and potential security threats around the world and especially in the region. What we need to do is to keep strengthening regional and global institutions together with national capacity building to cope with security risks.

Although trust and confidence have been improved and collective fears have been reduced, the state's foreign policy is still strongly dominated by domestic political changes which can lead to conflict if self-regarded nationalism is applied to get domestic political support. It is therefore necessary to have a strong and effective regional system that can bind nation states together and constraint political attitudes of national leaders from damaging regional cooperation and interests.

At the national level, strong and effective institution with good governance has to be in place to check and balance political leadership from violating national and regional interests. The stronger people participation in national and regional policy is necessary in this regard.

ASEAN Charter paves the way for the people of ASEAN to actively engage in regional integration process through awareness and voices. The People of ASEAN have to right to be informed and get involved. The States have the responsibility to facilitate this engagement process especially through the Member of Parliament and relevant ministries and agencies.

Regarding the ASEAN Political Security Community, we are still facing with several challenges such as the lack of effective and responsive mechanism to deal with especially inter-state conflicts over sovereignty and territorial integrity. To implement the rules based regionalism with democratization is still at very slow pace.

The ASEAN Summit and other related meetings hosted by Vietnam in 2010 have proven to be more action oriented approach. The summit focused on accelerating the realization of the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community and implementation of the ASEAN Charter; promoting ASEAN connectivity; enhancing cooperation to deal with global challenges affecting the region; strengthening ASEAN's external relations and ASEAN's role; exchanging views on regional and international issues of mutual concern.

Also at the Summit in Vietnam, ASEAN has shown proactive role in pushing regional integration and ASEAN community construction through concrete action plans and efforts. It was said that the Summit has proven ASEAN role with certain political willingness and cautionary steps in extended and open regionalism in the Asia Pacific region. ASEAN continues to play a relevant role as the driving force in shaping regional architecture in the Asia Pacific region.

Dispute Settlement Mechanism for ASEAN Charter is one of the most important documents for ASEAN to deepen its security cooperation and conflict resolution. The signing of the Protocol to the ASEAN Charter on Dispute Settlement Mechanisms signifies the determination of ASEAN in transforming ASEAN into a rules-based organization. In addition several other important documents were produced including ASEAN declaration on sustainable recovery and development and the declaration on responses to climate change.

ASEAN has shown its political commitment to reduce the development gap between the rich and poor countries in the region especially to assist Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar in poverty reduction and sustainable macroeconomic performance. The limitation for this is the lack of necessary resources especially financial and technical resources to help poorer ASEAN member countries. It is strongly recommended that ASEAN Development Foundation should be created for this Endeavour.

Stronger cooperation between the executives and legislatives in ASEAN member countries are encouraged. AIPA can play a significant role in realizing ASEAN Community. It is within the vision of people oriented ASEAN when the members of parliament of ASEAN actively engage in ASEAN community building process. The Member of Parliament is the bridge between ASEAN at the regional and national levels to grassroots level.

In this region, we have two important regional mechanisms to deal specifically with regional security issues namely: ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus.

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

ARF was established in 1994. Now it has 28 member states (Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, United States, Vietnam).

The objectives of the ASEAN Regional Forum are outlined in the First ARF Chairman's Statement (1994), namely:

1. To foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern; and
2. To make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

The 27th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (1994) stated that "The ARF could become an effective consultative Asia-Pacific Forum for promoting open dialogue on political and security cooperation in the region. In this context, ASEAN should work with its ARF partners to bring about a more predictable and constructive pattern of relations in the Asia Pacific." At the tenth year of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ARF Ministers met in Phnom Penh on 18 June 2003 and declared that "despite the great diversity of its membership, the forum had attained a record of achievements that have contributed to the maintenance of peace, security and cooperation in the region."

Although ARF creates a regional platform for security dialogue, it has been criticized to be just a mere "talk shop" which implies that ARF is not effective when it comes to solve security issues and conflict. The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) observes that the ARF is an under-achiever. It has not achieved its mandated

evolution established at the outset in 1994. While ARF has been able to undertake many confidence building measures (phase one of its mandate), it has been reluctant or unable to move to preventive diplomacy (phase two) and conflict resolution (phase three). Unless the ARF is able to move forward, its relevance will be questioned, thereby opening the way for other options and bodies to be considered for this role.

CSCAP further notices that the ARF risks irrelevance if it did not address the security challenges confronting the region because of the inability and reluctance of its members to move towards meaningful preventive diplomacy. The challenge for the ARF is that if it is unable to reenergize and rebuild itself because of the continuing grip of sovereignty-protectionist logic in traditional security concerns, then it can shift its focus from overarching regional security architectures to focus on more “as-needed” ad hoc multilateralism on specific issues. The ARF could consider making itself relevant by shifting to focus on functional cooperation on a range of essentially non-traditional security issues from climate and environmental change to natural disasters and food security among other issues.

ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM Plus

In order to meet dynamic security challenges, the Defense Ministers of ASEAN gathered first time in Kuala Lumpur in 2006 to create an independent track to report directly to ASEAN heads of state/government. It is the belief among ASEAN Defense Ministers that only through constructive, open, and practical cooperation among the security sector, the region can stay at peace and deal with emerging security issues effectively. Security here refers to both traditional and non-traditional security.

As an “open, flexible, and outward looking” regionalism, ADMM Concept Paper calls for the establishment of ADMM Plus to engage with dialogue partners in the region. The objectives of ADMM Plus are:

- To benefit ASEAN member countries in building capacity to address shared security challenges, while cognizant of the differing capacities of various ASEAN countries.
- To promote mutual trust and confidence between defense establishments through greater dialogue and transparency.
- To enhance regional peace and stability through cooperation in defense and security, in view of the transnational security challenges the region faces.
- To contribute to the realization of an ASEAN Security Community which, as stipulated in the Bali Concord II, embodies ASEAN’s aspiration to achieve peace, stability, democracy and prosperity in the region where ASEAN member countries live at peace with one another and with the world at large.
- To facilitate the implementation of the Vientiane Action Programme, which calls for ASEAN to build a peaceful, secure and prosperous ASEAN, and to adopt

greater outward-looking external relation strategies with our friends and Dialogue Partners.

ADMM Plus raises some concern relating to the duplication work with the ASEAN Regional Forum or even can make ARF less relevant in terms of security dialogue mechanism.

In addition to these two permanent security dialogue mechanisms, we have ad hoc special security working groups or committee to deal with specific issues such as Six Party Talk. Such ad hoc security dialogue and negotiation can play an important complementary role to the overall regional mechanism. It is more effective and expeditious when it comes to reach consensus and conclusion due to the smaller number of concerned countries. However, the ad hoc security mechanism will never be able to replace the existing permanent one.

Allow me to share some thoughts on how to solve the three main traditional security issues in the region.

Korean Peninsular

- Security confidence between the two Koreans needs to be restored through different means including unofficial communication channels especially environmental and economic cooperation in the Demilitarized Zone.
- Justice for the victims of Cheonan is required and appropriate actions have to be taken.
- Six Party Talk needs to be resumed.
- ARF and ADMM Plus should create a special working group to discuss on the issue.

Cambodia-Thailand

- ASEAN needs to create special working group to deal with the political crisis in Thailand and ASEAN Troika is an option.
- Domestic politics in Thailand needs to be resolved first before having any fruitful bilateral or multilateral negotiation on Cambodia-Thailand border conflict.
- People relationship and economic interactions between the two countries need to be preserved and even strengthened in order to create a peaceful environment.
- Thailand should resume high level diplomatic mission to Cambodia so that diplomatic communication and friendship can be improved.

South China Sea

- The concerned states need to adhere to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties to The South China Sea done in Phnom Penh 2002.
- The guidelines on the implementation of the DOC needs to be concluded expeditiously in order to have a more binding regional code of conduct in South China Sea.

- Joint development with fair share of profits among the concerned states should be pursued.
- Bilateral dialogue and trust building between China and concerned state need to be further nourished.

As we are living in an unstable and uncertain world, we have to build our capacity to adapt to changes and deal with new challenges. As conflict is mainly caused by the lack of confidence and trust, collective fears, poverty, extremism, and weak institutions, we have to cope with these causes in a holistic and integrated way in which it includes multi-track diplomacy, education, and international partnership for sustainable development and good governance.

Traditional and non-traditional security issues are increasingly posing threats and damages to us at different level and in a multidimensional way. We (nation state and people) need to join hands and heads together to address those security issues in a timely and effective manner.

We need to strengthen global and regional institutions, and state capacity to cope with the issues. To do that, we need to calculate our national interest as a function of regional and global interest. We need to prevent self-regarding nationalism and accommodate each others' interests. To realize this, regional citizenship and leadership is needed.

A multi-polar world with international cooperation and interdependency will definitely bring peace, stability, and prosperity to human kind. Global-Regional-National Partnership is the cornerstone of peace and stability while its principle and method lies on trust, confidence, openness, transparency, and accountability.