

US PIVOT IN ASIA PACIFIC AND THE ROLE OF ASEAN

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the impact of the US rebalancing strategy in Asia Pacific and the role of ASEAN in maintaining peace and stability in the region. To further elaborate the issue, this article examines the modern and post-modern state approaches as the frame of analyzes. It utilizes states' official documents as well as other related library references as the data sources. The US performs its intention to strengthen its influence in the region as Pacific maritime has shown a significant economic development and fragile relationship between Pacific states. Yet, its support towards conflicting states with China, in addition to joint military exercises with its allies inevitably provoke tension with China. This leads Chinese government to establish a new "Asian security concept" excluding the US from the proposal. As one of regional associations in Asia Pacific, ASEAN should take its position and play a greater role to promote prosperity, peace and stability. However the institution needs an internal consolidation while monitoring the enforcement of bilateral and multilateral agreements in the region. This paper concludes that a solid regional association will be capable to bring major powers and its members to collaboratively maintain peace and prosperity in the region.

Keywords: US pivot, ASEAN's role, Asian security concept, post-modern states, Pacific maritime

Introduction

The US rebalancing strategy in Asia Pacific region has provoked various responses from Pacific states. Some states may gain benefit by the presence of the US in the Pacific waters. But some other questions, if not rejected, pertains to the US foreign policy and its actions. The US authorities confirm that their strategy is to take a greater role in Pacific region. This is mainly directed to maintain peace and stability in the region as well as to ensure its freedom of navigation in Pacific maritime for the sake of its economic and military interests. The strategy subsequently allows the US government to strengthen partnership with its allies such as the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Australia, and to have joint military exercises.

The US joint military operations in Pacific maritime may promote the participants' capability in dealing with any threats, both traditional and non-traditional. They may also have opportunity to share information, to enhance the intelligence capacity and to transfer technology that enable all member states to build such proficiency. However, the US support towards conflicting states with China, to a greater extent irritates Chinese government. This is true as in the case of US' support towards Japan, since the management of East China Sea between Chinese and Japanese government remains problematic. Consequently, China is exercising a counter-balance strategy coupled with its friend nations. The so-called "Asian Security Concept" is introduced by excluding the US from the proposal.

Therefore, this article will examine whether the US pivot strategy in Asia Pacific is promoting peace and stability in the region, or on the contrary exacerbating the existing tension between the US and China and accordingly will evoke instability in the region. The paper will also further elaborate how Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN) can take part in maintaining peace, prosperity and stability in the region in the recent situation. Indeed, the willingness to promote security collaboratively between its members and other Pacific states has been initiated in 1994, when ASEAN conducted its 27th Ministerial Meeting and agreed to hold ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). It is a forum where all members may have dialogue and consultation on common political and security issues as well as significantly contribute towards confidence building and preventive diplomacy in Pacific region.

Furthermore, all ASEAN leaders have committed to establish ASEAN Community in 2015, in which security community has become one of the three pillars. As agreed in Bali Concord II in 2004, the establishment of ASEAN Security Community not only to assure that all member states live at peace but also to explore cooperation regionally and internationally to further promote security and stability, including in Asia Pacific region. In this regard, ARF with all of its mechanisms remains the main forum for security dialogue between ASEAN and its Pacific allies. This is also to confirm that ASEAN must become the primary driving force institution that is responsible to maintain peace, prosperity, security and stability, particularly in Asia Pacific region.

To elaborate the US' and China's defense strategy as well as ASEAN's mechanism in implementing its roles, this paper utilizes modern and post-modern state approaches as the frame of analyses. This research uses multi-data collection methods such as those collected from library and official document sources. This article is divided into five sections. First section discusses introduction, the significance of the article, and methodology. Second section briefly explains the concept of post-modern states and how it applies to the issue. Third section elaborates the US strategy in Asia Pacific followed by China's response and the implication to the region. Fourth section explains the role of ASEAN in maintaining peace and stability in the region by utilizing post-modern states approach. Eventually, this article comes to conclusion, which also suggests a recommendation for a better ASEAN.

Modern and Post-Modern States in Asia Pacific

By looking at the economic and military activities aspects, some international relations scholars divide the world's states into three categories; pre-modern, modern and post modern states.¹ Yet this article will elaborate more on the characteristic of modern and post-modern state. In essence, modern states are more characterized by the so-called "Realist" perspective that believes in a self-help system and balance of power in maintaining peace and stability. These states focus more on their self-interests and to promote influence as well as power, so that they are economically and militarily competitive.

On the other hand, post-modern states are those who are economically and institutionally efficient as they develop cooperative system in the contemporary globalization era and realize that they need an openness and mutual dependence. This type of states concerns more on mutual interests and is confident that they need to cooperate for maintaining regional and international peace and security. These states perceive that in the globalization era, security should be based on transparency, mutual openness, interdependence and mutual vulnerability. They also reject the use of force

¹ Geoffrey Till, 2009. *Seapower, A Guide for the Twenty First Century, Second Edition*, Oxon, Routledge, pp. 1-6. Till describes pre-modern states are agricultural, weak and failing states, as they have limitation in the economic interdependence and insufficient surpluses to invest in further development. These states are characterized by poor standards of governance, lawlessness and communal strife that make security, economic and social progresses are slow to achieve.

for resolving disputes and consequently they codify their self-enforced rules of behavior.²

Using above theoretical frame, this article argues that most of Asia Pacific and ASEAN member states perform a blend of modern and post-modern states. Some states such as China, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippine, and Vietnam are well aware of their mutual threats, which disturb the globalization process. Globalization is important for them, as they perceive that a free flow of goods significantly promote their economic development. Therefore they support the establishment of joint mechanisms to deal with those non-traditional threats, such as terrorism, transnational crime organizations, piracy, natural disasters and diseases. Furthermore, since a free flow of goods depends on the sea route, some Pacific states also concern with their maritime security. Therefore they put a lot of efforts to enhance their naval capability to protect their waters. Certainly, they develop their sea power in accordance with their economic progress, such as in the case of China in the last two decades.

Nonetheless, a state's drastic rise in economic and military power can be perceived differently by other states. China's "Peaceful Development" coupled with its defense strategy, which allows a significant increase of its military expenditure,³ is considered a threat by Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. It is clearly seen in Japanese White Defense Paper, stating:

"On the military front, China has been modernizing its military forces, backed by the high and constant increase in its defense budget. China appears to give particular priority to the Taiwan issue as a core issue of national sovereignty. For the time being, it will probably aim to improve its military capabilities to prevent Taiwan's independence in its military modernization. **In recent years, China has also been actively trying to acquire capabilities for missions other than the Taiwan issue...**"⁴

Japan perceives China's arms build-up particularly in navy capabilities as a threat since they remain to settle the East China Sea dispute. Accordingly, Japanese government arranged a New Defense Program Outlines (NDPO) starting from 2001 which mainly prepares JSDF (Japan Self-Defense Forces) to support the US campaign in the war on terrorism and United Nations Peace Keeping Operation. The strategy also allows JSDF to own power projection capabilities and shift their land forces into mobile forces in order to protect its territory and to counter China's aggressive activities in Senkaku/Diayou. Similarly, since Vietnamese government views a military competition around the world has led to the risk of arms races. it has also developed its defense capacity, particularly its naval power. The government increased its military budget 20,89% from USD 781 million to USD 988 million in 2006. It was then increased 28,85% in 2007 and became USD 1,4 billion. It was slightly decreased in

² Robert Cooper, 2002. "The Post Modern State," in Mark Leonard (ed.), 2002, *Reordering the World*, London: The Foreign Policy Centre, pp. 11-20.

³ Based on China's National Defense White Paper in 1998 – 2010, its military budget is increasing 11.7 – 20.3 percent annually. China's White Defense Paper can be accessed from www.gov.cn/english/official/2005-08/17/content_24165.htm

⁴ Japan's White Defense Paper 2013, Chapter 1, Part 1, Section 3, p. 31, can be accessed from http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2013/11_Part1_Chapter1_Sec3.pdf

2008, but then dramatically increased to become USD 2,6 billion in 2011 and USD 3,4 billion in 2013.⁵

Like Vietnam, the Philippines has also transformed its defense strategy since 2003. Initially, along with the US, the defense reform is directed to respond the 9/11 terrorist's attack. Yet, the program is also specifically containing a mission to protect the Philippines national territory and its Exclusive Economic Zone from external aggression and transnational threats. Essentially, this strategy allows the Philippines to perform an assertive stand towards China who claims Scarborough Shoal as part of its territory. The countries' white papers confirm their "modern state" characteristic, which intrinsically is competitive and protecting self-interests. However, their intentions to cooperate with others are due to common concern and the willingness to collaboratively counter any threats against mutual peace, security and stability in the region has brought them into a notion of "post-modern state."

US Pivot in Asia Pacific and Its Implication

Lawrence S. Prabhakar, concludes the Asia Pacific region has currently emerged as the center of strategic maritime.⁶ Yet, as he argues, the economic growth and cooperation in the region is also hampered by an increasing numbers of transnational threats, which particularly happen at sea. The Chinese government also confirms this security dynamics and moreover mentions about a diverse and complex security challenges. This situation encourages Pacific states to deal not only with the non-traditional threats but also traditional threats.⁷ To deal with this issue, the US government has recently performed its intention to play a greater role and a more active engagement in the region.

President Obama initially declares about the US pivot strategy in Asia Pacific when he for the first time attended the East Asia Summit (EAS) in November 2011. In front of Asia Pacific leaders, Obama specifically asserts the vital role of Pacific maritime for the US interests, in particular for its economic development.⁸ Obama re-emphasizes the US pivot in Pacific maritime by establishing the US military base in Darwin in 2012. He confirms that the 2500 marines deployment in Australia is mainly aimed to strengthen the US security ties with one of its closest allies. The US Department of Defense justifies the action as a mutual cooperation that is important for the maintenance of peace, stability and free flow of commerce.

The US views Asia Pacific as an important region for at least four reasons. First, Pacific Ocean contains huge natural resources. Based on the US Geological Survey (USGS) estimation in 1997, South China Sea region has oil reserves at about 7.5 billion barrels. This supply provides China government with oil production of over 1.3 million

⁵ Vietnam military budget 2005-2008 can be seen from 2009 Vietnam National Defense Paper p. 38, in <http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/wcm/connect/caadf77c-2fb4-48c1-8f20-8d3216ad2513/2009eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=caadf77c-2fb4-48c1-8f20-8d3216ad2513> and Vietnam military budget from 2009-2013 can be seen from <http://www.globalfirepower.com/defense-spending-budget.asp> accessed on 5 July 2014.

⁶ W. Lawrence S. Prabhakar, 2006. "Maritime Strategic Trends in the Asia Pacific: Issues and Challenges," in Lawrence, Joshua Ho, and Sam Bateman (eds.), *The Evolving Maritime Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific, Maritime Doctrines and Nuclear Weapons at Sea*, Singapore: Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, NTU, pp. 35-68.

⁷ China's National Defense in 2010, Part I, "The Security Situation," http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_3.htm accessed on 5 July 2014

⁸ The White House, 2011, "Fact Sheet: East Asia Summit," in <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/19/fact-sheet-east-asia-summit> accessed on 5 July 2014.

barrels per day.⁹ This is not to mention the abundance fisheries and other marine products. In 2004, for example, China's total fisheries production reached 47.5 million tones from its EEZ (Economic Exclusive Zone), an increase of 7.5 million tones from 1999.¹⁰

Secondly, in this globalization era state's prosperity most likely depends on the free trade system, which is supported by sea as a vital medium of transportation and trade.¹¹ Sea is the medium in which 90 percent of world trade is transported.¹² Pacific Ocean, covering also the Strait of Malacca, is becoming very important since it is the main entrance and the shortest sea route for vessels that brings oil and petroleum from Persian Gulf to East Asia and more than 60,000 vessels, carrying various cargoes pass through the strait every year. Therefore a safe and secure sea-lane as well as freedom of navigation in Pacific waters have become the core of US interest.¹³

Thirdly, the number of economic cooperation in Asia Pacific has increased due to its attractiveness to states' economic development. Pacific states achieve their economic growth through cooperation, as they believe that trade liberalization are positively contribute to national welfare.¹⁴ This cooperation is articulated and implemented in bilateral and multilateral economic and free trade agreements such as APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area), CAFTA (China – ASEAN Free Trade Area) and TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership).

Finally, the economic advantages in the region are constrained by traditional and non-traditional threats, which mostly happen at sea. Some of traditional problems are related to sea territorial boundaries like South and East China Sea disputes. The desire to protect their sea territories leads claimant states to commit arms dynamics, which is supported by their economic growth, as in the case of China, Japan, and Vietnam.¹⁵ This, in turn, brings the region into arms races and security dilemma. In addition to these traditional problems, the region also suffers from non-traditional threats such as piracy attacks, natural disaster and epidemic diseases.

The economic attractiveness coupled with the vulnerability of Pacific waters drive the US to apply its rebalance strategy and urge friend nations to collaborate against comprehensive threats that comes from both states and non-state actors. With such strategy in mind, the US Department of Defense in 2012 justifies the US military authorities to continue the US leadership in promoting security globally, in particular Asia Pacific region.¹⁶ Besides, they support their naval to build stronger partnership

⁹ "South China Sea, Oil and Natural Gas," in <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/spratly-oil.htm> accessed on 1 August 2014.

¹⁰ "FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profile: The People's Republic of China," in <http://www.fao.org/fishery/facp/CHN/en> accessed on 1 August 2014.

¹¹ Geoffrey Till, *op. cit.*

¹² Sam J. Tangredi, 2002. "Globalization and Seapower: Overview and Context," in Sam J. Tangredi (ed.) *Globalization and Maritime Power*, Washington DC: National Defence University, pp. 1-24.

¹³ John F. Bradford, 2011. "The Maritime Strategy of the United States: Implications for Indo-Pacific Sea Lanes," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 183–208.

¹⁴ Peter Lloyd, 2011. "Free Trade and Growth in the World Economy," in *The Singapore Economic Review*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 291-306.

¹⁵ Angel Damayanti, 2013. "Sino-Japan Action Reaction: Towards Cooperation or Competition in Asia Pacific?" in *Jurnal Global & Strategis*, Juli – Desember, vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 169-181.

¹⁶ US Department of Defense, 2012, "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," Washington: The White House, January, in http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf accessed on 5 July 2014.

with its allies and to have joint military exercises, which initially launched in 2005.¹⁷ This strategy reassures that the presence of US military personnel in the region will maintain peace, stability and the freedom to access the global waters not only for the US but also for other states.

Although Obama did not overtly mention about countering China, the 2012 US Defense Strategic Guidance confirmed that the rebalance strategy in Asia Pacific is in relation to Beijing's increasing military power.¹⁸ The US pivot in Asia Pacific might become a reaction to counter China's naval ambition and her assertiveness on East and South China Sea disputes. Yet, the US concern is mainly to secure and protect its vital interests in Pacific maritime as well as its allies', as confirmed in its Defense Strategic Guidance. The strategy is aimed to protecting their commercial activities and securing Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) for their economic and military access.

Nevertheless the active engagement of US in Pacific maritime, which partly is also performed by joint military operations, provokes China to counter-balance the strategy. As Chinese government is still locked sea border disputes with Japan and four of ASEAN members – Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia – President Xi Jinping firmly declared his disapproval of the involvement of external powers. In the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) last May, President Xi Jinping proposed a new “Asian Security Concept” which argues the Asian problems to be resolved by Asian people and Asian security to be protected by Asian people “...it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia. The people of Asia have the capability and wisdom to achieve peace and stability in the region through enhanced cooperation.”¹⁹

The Role of ASEAN

The rising tension between China and the US in Pacific region due to US pivot strategy, its support for its allies namely Japan and the Philippines which have tension with China, US lack of confidence on China's military transparency, coupled with China's Asian security proposal, are likely to endanger peace and stability in the region. This is not to mention the unresolved problems regarding Senkaku/Diayou management between China and Japan, as well as the overlapping claims on South China Sea between the Chinese government and four members of ASEAN, namely Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Nevertheless, this also indicates a mutual concern among the involved parties. Ultimately, the US and its allies, China as well as ASEAN member states need a peaceful and stable region for the sake of their national security and economic progress.

Despite their different standing-positions, both the US and China essentially have performed their attribute of post-modern states. They believe that cooperation in order to maintain regional as well as international peace and stability is vital in the globalization era. Although both states concern with their self-interests, the US and China perceive a cooperative and comprehensive integrated action as well as a series of

¹⁷ Admiral Robert F. Willard. 2009. “Regional Maritime Security Engagements: a U.S. Perspective,” in *Realising Safe and Secure Seas for All: International Maritime Security Conference 2009*, Singapore: RSIS, pp. 75-77.

¹⁸ US Department of Defense, 2012, “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” *op. cit.*

¹⁹ “New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml accessed on 5 July 2014

confidence-building measures and self-restraint in terms of military activities are needed to achieve mutual interests. Both countries are confident that a safe and stable regional environment will promote their national interest and economic development.

In its 2010 Defense Paper, Chinese government confirmed, “*Military confidence-building is an effective way to maintain national security and development, and safeguard regional peace and stability.... In recent years, China has held extensive strategic consultations and dialogues with relevant countries in the field of security and defense to enhance mutual understanding and trust, and to strengthen communication and coordination.*”²⁰ Similarly, the US’ authorities mentioned, “*We seek the security of our Nation, allies and partners.... Indeed, as we end today’s wars, we will focus on a broader range of challenges and opportunities, including the security and prosperity in Asia Pacific.... We are joining with allies and partners around the world to build their capacity, to promote security, prosperity and human dignity.*”²¹

In line with this post-modern notion, ASEAN, as one of regional associations in Asia Pacific region whose aim is to promote regional peace, prosperity and stability, has a great opportunity to facilitate and accommodate both major powers’ as well as its member states’ interests in a collaborative way. Although ASEAN was established to enhance the economic, social and cultural cooperation among its members as written in its 1967 Bangkok Declaration, security has greatly remained at the core of its existence.²² Indeed, the former Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew also mentioned in his memoirs that in its development, ASEAN was banding together more for political objectives, stability and security.²³

The issue of South China Sea is one example. As a contending issue between four ASEAN members and China, its overlapping claims have threatened the regional peace and stability. This situation justifies claimants to enhance their military activities, in the name of territory and jurisdiction protection. As far as regional peace and stability is concerned, ASEAN has played its role by discussing the issue in many summits and dialogues, including in ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In 1990, the first workshop initiated by Indonesia was conducted to manage potential conflict in the South China Sea. And afterwards, the issue of South China Sea and its management has been discussed every year in ASEAN’s leaders joint communiqués and Chairmen’s statements.²⁴

Initially, Chinese government refused the internationalization of South China Sea issue and insisted to manage the issue on a bilateral basis with other claimants.²⁵ However, ASEAN as a united posture succeeded to bring China to sign the 1992 Declaration on the South China Sea and the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties on the South China Sea. Both agreements essentially called for a peaceful resolution of

²⁰ China’s National Defense in 2010, Part IX, “Military Confidence-Building,”

http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-03/31/content_1835499_11.htm accessed on 5 July 2014

²¹ US Department of Defense, 2012, “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” *op.cit.* p. 3.

²² Rodolfo C. Severino, 2006. *Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community: Insights from the former ASEAN Secretary-General*, Singapore: ISEAS, p. 161.

²³ Lee Kuan Yew, 2000. *From Third World to First – The Singapore Story: 1965 – 2000*, Singapore: Times Media Private Limited, p. 370.

²⁴ “Documents on ASEAN and South China Sea,” in <http://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Documents-on-ASEAN-and-South-China-Sea-as-of-June-2011.pdf> accessed on 1 Aug 2014

²⁵ Epsey Cooke Farrel, 1998. *The Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Law of the Sea: An Analysis of Vietnamese Behavior within the Emerging International Oceans Regime*, Cambridge: Kluwer Law International, p. 282.

jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to force, the exercise of self-restraint, possible cooperation in maritime safety, marine environmental protection, search and rescue operation, action against transnational crimes and the application of the principles of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation as the basis for a code of conduct for the South China Sea dispute.²⁶

However, there are three main problems that the ASEAN as a regional institution have to face when it needs to be more actively engaged in Asia Pacific region. *First*, dialogues and discussions obviously improve mutual understanding, trust and confidence amongst all parties. The dialogue can also initiate an arrangement for further comprehensive strategic partnerships. Yet, as confirmed by Jason Hutchinson, the dialogues and renunciation of the use of force such as in South China Sea management between China and ASEAN member states, lead its member states to conflict prevention rather than conflict resolution.²⁷ In addition, a slow progress on the making and agreement on Code of Conduct in the South China Sea will let the military exercises in disputed waters persist and tension between claimants continue.

Secondly, the contention between four ASEAN members on South China Sea claims, coupled with China's economic and military support towards some ASEAN members on one hand and the US's support on the other hand, lead ASEAN member states to division. This internal dissension accordingly has failed the "ASEAN Way" to reach consensus, as has happened in ASEAN summit in Phnom Penh, July 2012. As far as South China Sea is concerned, a united action amongst ASEAN members is needed, as confirmed by Indonesian foreign minister Marty Natalegawa.²⁸ The unity of all member states is important to enhance the capacity of ASEAN as an association when it negotiates with external powers, mainly with China as well as the US.

Thirdly, unlike the European Union that is equipped by supranational authority, ASEAN has neither legal formulations nor mechanism to ensure its member states' compliance. In the case of South China Sea, the absence of any kind of supranational bodies might limit the ASEAN role in conflict management as it has to uphold the multilateral mechanisms and to ensure that any bilateral joint developments in disputed area will neither provoke other claimants nor constrain other countries to utilize their freedom of navigation in the waters. Without a solid and consolidated ASEAN, this organization will slightly contribute to the regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Therefore, this article proposes that with the inclination of post-modern state's characteristic within ASEAN member states, all parties should realize that in this globalization era, they must focused more on the mutual interest as it will improve their national interests and the elimination of any disturbances to these mutual interests. A safe and stable regional is in line with ASEAN member states economic development. Accordingly, all states should protect this condition collaboratively from any disturbances. This might come from traditional threats but ASEAN states must understand that the domestic socio-political instability and transnational crimes

²⁶ The 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, <http://cil.nus.edu.sg/rp/pdf/1992%20ASEAN%20Declaration%20on%20the%20South%20China%20Sea.pdf> and The 2002 ASEAN Declaration on the Conduct of Parties of South China Sea, <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/china/item/declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea>, both accessed on 1 August 2014.

²⁷ Jason Ray Hutchinson, 2004. "The South China Sea: Confusion in Complexity," in *Critique: A worldwide Student Journal of Politics*, Spring, pp. 103-125.

²⁸ "ASEAN unites to condemn rising South China Sea tensions" in <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/10406-asean-unites-to-condemn-rising-south-china-sea-tensions.html>

organization such as terrorism, radical movements and illegal trafficking are more dangerous to their national development and economic welfare than the traditional ones. This is in addition to natural disasters and any contagious diseases that harm the human existences.

With regard to this, ASEAN should be able to put a strong foundation of “we-feeling” despite its member states’ diversity. The vision towards ASEAN Community by the end of 2015 should bring all parties; the governments both central and local instances, private sectors and all people, to unity, togetherness and have common perception on political-security, economic and socio cultural issues, by exercising various ways. Ultimately, a solid association will positively enhance ASEAN’s role in maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in Asia Pacific and accommodating its member states interests in the relationship with external powers particularly in Asia Pacific region.

Conclusion

The attributes of Pacific maritime as a source of enormous natural resources and economic welfare as well as vital medium for transportation and trade have attracted many parties to actively engage in the region, including the US. The existence of external major powers can be an advantage and disadvantage at the same time. However, a post-modern strategy exercised by the US and China as well as a blend of modern and post-modern notion of ASEAN member states in maintaining regional peace and stability is a positive entrance for ASEAN to collaboratively pursue its aims and to play a greater role in the region. In this respect, the 2014 Myanmar’s Chairmanship theme, “Moving forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community,” should be truly embodied.

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