The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due recognition to the authors and RSIS. Please email to Editor IDSS Paper at RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg.

No. 015/2021 dated 11 November 2021

Integrated Security for a Changing Climate

Alistair D. B. Cook



System change versus climate change: what we need and what we do not want.

Photo by Scott Evans on Unsplash.

SYNOPSIS

Climate security has been part of regional security discussions since the turn of this century, yet action remains inadequate. Militaries have focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) as their contribution to this security challenge.

Their efforts only scratch the surface of what needs to be done. Climate security highlights the need for more integrated approaches to security, and that needs a shift to a more strategic mindset.

COMMENTARY

Militaries across the Indo-Pacific have long been prominent first responders to natural hazards, from typhoons and cyclones to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Human-induced climate change will very likely cause more intense and frequent cyclones and typhoons, as noted in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. This will mean that militaries will be more frequently deployed in these events unless we change the way we organise our lives.

The IPCC report is virtually certain that hot extremes have become more frequent and intense. These will affect communities in our region in new ways and change the conditions under which militaries and civilian entities will be deployed. Militaries, in particular, would need to assess whether their assets, personnel, equipment and training are fit for purpose. Although militaries will absorb the expenses incurred through their normal recapitalisation programmes spread over decades, they will require trade-offs with other modernisation priorities.

We will also experience more flooding in the Indo-Pacific region, affecting coastal cities and surrounding areas. Bangkok, Dhaka, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, Manila, Mumbai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Tianjin are among the cities that will be affected. Without adaptation and the development of adequate civilian capabilities, militaries are likely to be increasingly called upon to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in such settings. But this approach is unsustainable; droughts and floods will last for extended periods, requiring longer responses on each occasion.

Systems Thinking

The new climate realities of more intense and frequent weather events, extreme heat, drought and flooding are only a part of the considerations that will increasingly impact decision-making. This is because these events could occur concurrently in our disaster-prone region and could intersect with other shocks, as the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated.

In 2018 we witnessed a series of devastating disasters, from an earthquake in the Southern Highlands province of Papua New Guinea in February, a heatwave in Karachi in May, a dam collapse in the Champasak province of Laos and floods in Japan in July, an earthquake in Lombok and Bali and floods in India's Kerala state in August, the triple disaster of an earthquake, tsunami and soil liquefaction in Sulawesi in September, and a tsunami after the collapse of a crater at Anak Krakatau on the western coast of Java in December.

ASEAN has benefited in disaster management from the framework established under the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), which facilitates regional cooperation through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management. But the regional system is stretched and has demonstrated its current limits in facilitating response to concurrent and sequential disasters. These limitations highlight the need to invest more in disaster preparedness now to face the new climate reality.

The past two years have shown the intersection of climate events and a global pandemic, and the resulting <u>impact on disaster relief</u>. Evacuation centres in the Philippines had capacity capped at 50 per cent during the typhoon season. During the cyclone season in the South Pacific, fears over the spread of Covid-19 through relief items saw some customs clearance take three days, which slowed down the relief effort.

Not all pandemic impacts were negative, though. The disruption of global supply chains forced responders to adapt by sourcing items locally and investing more in incountry teams. It caused individual sectors to implement more holistic responses, working across sectors. Whether these adaptations will remain are far from certain in post-pandemic Southeast Asia. For the region to be better prepared for future disasters, investment in developing cross-sectoral responses needs to be prioritised in strategic planning.

Strategic Foresight

One of the greatest challenges we face in the region is the ability to plan *from* the future, which will allow for the development of near-future alternative scenarios and longer-term future projections. An investment in systems thinking now will facilitate disaster preparedness and the development of optimal capacity. Much of this is imaginable under our current ways of working. The real challenge is to ensure that investment in strategic foresight is targeted at the most appropriate level, with the building of capacity sitting astride individual line ministries, militaries and the humanitarian community. We also see that 10–20-year projections resonate with strategic planners; projections beyond that time frame do not.

Avenues do exist for developing strategic foresight, such as the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination. The RCG was the product of the Asia-Pacific Conferences on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations in the 2000s and was launched in Singapore in 2014. It serves as a forum to bring together civilian agencies, regional organisations, militaries and the humanitarian community on an annual basis to facilitate networking and the building of relationships ahead of disaster relief operations. Such a forum provides an avenue to develop scenarios, run them and prepare for the response challenges ahead, and it should be exploited to do just that.

Within Southeast Asia, working across the ASEAN community is a necessity, and so establishing a strategic foresight component within the ASEAN Secretariat that sits above the Political-Security, Socio-Cultural and Economic pillars is needed. This component will need to consider near- and longer-term trends. These efforts need to be cross-sectoral in nature to build upon the niche capabilities of individual sectors within a consolidated larger picture. If implemented well, such a component will give ASEAN leverage to maintain its centrality, not just in HADR but in other areas as well where cross-sectoral thinking is critical.

Data Platforms

For such avenues to work effectively it will require a shift from the dominant "need to know" mindset to a "need to share" mindset. This is most evident in data collection and data sharing. The region is home to multiple data-sharing platforms, but all suffer from the same malaise. The individual country or organisation that hosts a platform encourages others to invest in it but is less willing to participate in the platforms hosted by others.

In Southeast Asia, the remedy is to look towards ASEAN to provide such a data platform. ASEAN is an entity trusted by most Southeast Asians and will address concerns some have in other less formal and loosely aligned options. An ASEAN-based platform will go some way towards advancing data-driven, evidence-based decision-making. Such informed decision-making is lacking currently although its benefits are self-evident. With a considered investment by its member states in such an arrangement, an ASEAN data platform can not only facilitate working across sectors but also serve to engage ASEAN's dialogue partners, both as contributors to the region and as partners to expand the coverage of the platform beyond its member states.

All Hands on Deck

As signalled in the latest IPCC report and our experience over the past two years demonstrates, there is a need for a mindset shift — the need to adopt a strategic approach to managing intersecting security challenges. We need to take a holistic view of climate security, thinking not just about the direct impacts of climate events but also their indirect impacts. And, such thinking cannot just be the activity of any one ministry. Strategic foresight encourages more dynamic thinking but it must run across government ministries and also involve civil society organisations. More systematic data collection and sharing can provide the grounding for policy choices. That said, the suggestions here are no panacea for addressing the security and stability of countries in the region. They do attempt to offer some tangible ways we can move towards more holistic policy choices fit for more integrated security in a changing climate.

Alistair D. B. COOK is Coordinator of the HADR Programme at RSIS and Senior Fellow.

This article is of a series published with the <u>RSIS Virtual Roundtable on "Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Implications for Defence and Foreign Affairs"</u>, organised by IDSS and the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies of RSIS, 25 October 2021.