



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



EAST ASIA EXPLORER OCTOBER 2024

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Volume II, Issue 10



Delhi Policy Group

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www.delhipolicygroup.org



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Vol. II, Issue 10

October 2024

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Cover Image:

Newly sworn-in President of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka officially assumed their duties for the 2024-2029 term on October 20, 2024. Source: [President of the Republic of Indonesia](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the 21st ASEAN-India Summit, held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on October 10, 2024. Source: [Narendra Modi Official Website](#)

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles, welcomed Indonesian Defence Minister and President-elect Prabowo Subianto to Australia on August 19, 2024. Source: [Richard Marles \(X/@RichardMarlesMP\)](#)

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Defence Pact Advances Australia-Indonesia Relations as Prabowo Becomes President

by

Pradeep Taneja

Australia attaches great importance to its relations with Indonesia, which is evident from the number of high-level visits to Jakarta by Australian leaders each year. So far this year, the then Governor General David Hurley and a bevy of ministers have visited Indonesia, some of them more than once. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was to attend the inauguration of President Prabowo Subianto on 20 October but had to cancel it because of the visit to Australia by King Charles. Australia was instead represented by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles.

From the Indonesian side, the then President Joko Widodo visited Melbourne in March and President-elect Prabowo was in Canberra in August. Several other Indonesian ministers have also visited Australia this year. The two countries elevated their bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2018 and the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement came into force in 2020.

Australia-Indonesia relations are underpinned by a network of bilateral and multilateral institutional arrangements in a host of areas, including economic and development cooperation, defence, counterterrorism, maritime security, education, and people-to-people contacts. While trade between the two countries is relatively underdeveloped – Indonesia is only Australia's 13th largest trading partner – the people-to-people contacts are growing rapidly. Australian tourists make up a big chunk of foreign tourists visiting popular holiday destinations in Indonesia such as Bali, while nearly a quarter of all Indonesian students studying abroad are in Australia.

But an important pillar of the bilateral relationship is defence cooperation, which was further enhanced by the signing of the Australia-Indonesia Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in August this year. This treaty-level agreement will come into force once both sides have completed the legal formalities. The new agreement will complement and build upon the other defence agreements between the two countries, such as the Lombok Treaty, signed in 2006, and is expected to facilitate practical cooperation and interoperability between the defence forces of the two countries.

Australian and Indonesian defence forces conduct around 20 joint exercises each year, including in areas such as maritime security, counter terrorism, humanitarian and disaster relief, logistics support, and education and training. Before leaving for Indonesia to attend President Prabowo's inauguration, [Richard Marles said](#) "there is no relationship more important to Australia than our relationship with Indonesia".

However, some [critics](#) accuse Australian politicians of a "positivity bias" and hyperbole when talking about relations with Indonesia. They argue that past defence cooperation agreements between the two countries have failed to live up to expectations and warn that the latest DCA is similarly unlikely to provide a significant boost to bilateral strategic cooperation.

It is hard to completely reject such criticism. It is true that Australian leaders are generally more enthusiastic about strategic cooperation with Indonesia than the Southeast nation's politicians and military leaders who still recall with some bitterness Australia's role in the independence of East Timor and, further back, its support for Malaysia in the Confrontation or "Konfrontasi" in the 1960s. West Papua also remains a potential source of friction between the two countries, especially around human rights.

But this has not prevented the two countries from engaging in defence and security cooperation. Australia sees Indonesia as part of a joint effort to uphold the rules-based international order along with the Quad and other Indo-Pacific partners. Indonesia is also an important security partner in both traditional and non-traditional security matters. Maintaining peaceful relations with its large northern neighbour is a high priority for Australia. Equally important for Australia is the right to safe passage for the Australian defence forces, especially the Royal Australian Navy, through the narrow straits in the Indonesian archipelago.

Australia has achieved some notable successes in gaining Indonesian support in countering terrorism and tackling people smuggling. In the aftermath of the Bali bombings in 2002, the Australian Federal Police and intelligence agencies worked very closely with their Indonesian counterparts in investigating the crimes and bringing the guilty before Indonesian courts. Likewise, Australia has also worked closely with Indonesian authorities over decades in trying to deter people smugglers from carrying out their deadly business with mixed results.

The election of the former Special Forces commander and, more recently, Defence Minister, Prabowo Subianto, as Indonesia's eighth President presents both challenges and opportunities for Australia-Indonesia relations. Prabowo's

blemished human rights record as military commander in East Timor is likely to continue to attract negative attention in the Australian media and Indonesia's treatment of human rights issues under his rule will be closely watched in Australia. Prabowo has also signalled that he will continue to pursue a policy of non-alignment by choosing to make China his first stop on a five-nation tour just a few weeks after taking office. Although Australia is unlikely to be too concerned about this, it does indicate that Indonesia's support for the Indo-Pacific strategy of constraining China's growing influence in the region cannot be taken for granted.

As part of his forthcoming five-nation tour, President Prabowo will also attend the APEC summit in Peru and the G20 summit in Brazil, where no doubt he will have the chance to further discuss Indonesia-Australia relations with Prime Minister Albanese. Australians know Prabowo well and will find a way to work effectively with his administration.

India's Participation in the East Asia and ASEAN-India Summits

by
Anshita Shukla

A flurry of diplomatic activity marked the Southeast Asian region in October, as Laos hosted regional and world leaders for the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summit and Related Meetings. The meetings were of great consequence as the region remains embroiled in escalating maritime assertions by China, leadership changes in Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore, growing revitalisation of US outreach through multilaterals and bilateral mechanisms, natural disasters like Cyclone Tyagi and, growing momentum of anti-coup forces in Myanmar. In these tumultuous times, ASEAN continues to bring together member countries and regional and global powers together to engage in regular dialogue and diplomacy. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the 21st ASEAN- India Summit and the 19th East Asia Summit.

ASEAN-India Summit

The 21st ASEAN-India Summit was convened in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on October 10, 2024. The meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, Sonexay Siphandone under the theme "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience"¹. The Summit was attended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leaders of the ASEAN member states and Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, Xanana Gusmão, as Observer. For the first time in three years, the Myanmar junta sent a senior foreign ministry official to represent the country to the ASEAN Summit meetings.

The 21st Summit marked a decade since the adoption of the 'Act East' policy, formerly known as the 'Look East' policy. This year is also critical as the anniversary of the 'Act East' policy coincides with the ten years of Narendra Modi's term as the Prime Minister of India. In his opening remarks², the Prime Minister stated that over the past decade the historic ties between India and ASEAN countries, have been infused with "renewed energy, direction, and momentum". Prime Minister Modi, characterising the 21st century as the "Asian Century", stressed the "utmost importance" of "friendship, coordination,

¹ Jow_Han. 2024. "Chairman's Statement of the 21st ASEAN-India Summit." ASEAN Main Portal. October 18, 2024. <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-21st-asean-india-summit/>.

² "Opening Remarks by PM at 21st ASEAN-India Summit in Vientiane, Lao PDR." n.d. https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-opening-remarks-at-21st-asean-india-summit-in-vientiane-lao-pdr/.

dialogue and cooperation between India and ASEAN". He highlighted the strides made by the India- ASEAN partnership in areas of trade, connectivity, fintech, people-to-people ties, and humanitarian relief. Through various funds, like the Science and Technology Fund, Digital Fund, and Green Fund, India has contributed over USD 30 million to these initiatives.

Keeping in line with the decade mark, PM Modi in his participation at the 21st ASEAN-India Summit proposed a 10-point plan³ to enhance cooperation between India and ASEAN. The following points were laid out in the action plan-

- i. India will commit USD 5 million and declare 2025 as the "ASEAN-India Year of Tourism."
- ii. Organise a variety of events between India and ASEAN countries to commemorate a decade of India's 'Act East Policy' such as a Music Festival, Youth Summit, Hackathon, and Start-up Festival as part of this celebration.
- iii. Annual Women Scientists' Conclave, under the "India-ASEAN Science and Technology Fund"
- iv. Twofold increase in the number of Masters scholarships for students from ASEAN countries at Nalanda University and launched a new scholarship scheme for ASEAN students at India's agricultural universities.
- v. Conclusion of the review of the "ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement" by 2025.
- vi. USD 5 million will be allocated from the "ASEAN-India Fund" for disaster resilience.
- vii. Proposed the institutionalisation of the ASEAN-India Health Ministers Meeting and invited two experts from each ASEAN country to attend India's Annual National Cancer Grid 'Vishwam Conference.'
- viii. Proposed the institutionalisation of a cyber policy dialogue between India and ASEAN.
- ix. Proposed organising workshops on green hydrogen involving experts from India and ASEAN countries.

³ "English Translation of India's National Statement at the 21st ASEAN-India Summit Delivered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi." n.d. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
https://www.mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/38399/English_translation_of_Indias_National_Statement_at_the_21st_ASEANIndia_Summit_delivered_by_Prime_Minister_Narendra_Modi.

- x. Urged ASEAN member countries to join the campaign, " Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" (Plant for Mother).

The Summit produced a comprehensive joint statement⁴. One of the key focus areas of the joint statement was digital connectivity, especially through fintech and digital payments. To that end, the joint statement announced the launch of the Fund for Digital Future, operationalized in 2024 to advance digital cooperation, especially in Digital Public Infrastructure and the establishment of the 'ASEAN-India Annual Financial Dialogue'. Other initiatives announced are the 'ASEAN-India Fellowship for Higher Education in Agriculture and Allied Sciences' and proposed for an 'ASEAN-India Workshop on Green Hydrogen', and an annual 'ASEAN-India Health Ministers' Meeting'. The year 2025 was also declared as the 'ASEAN-India Year of Tourism', as a way to promote the tourism sector for joint development.

East Asia Summit

The 19th East Asia Summit (EAS) was convened in Vientiane, Lao PDR on October 11, 2024⁵. Leaders of member countries and representatives from dialogue partners, like US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Premier of the State Council of China, Li Qiang, were in attendance. The most notable absence was of US President Biden, who skipped the second consecutive summit. In contrast to the absence of Chinese President Xi and Russian President Putin, the non-attendance by the US leader was of critical importance, as the United States under President Barack Obama had placed the EAS at the heart of the country's pivot to Asia strategy. This raised concerns about the USA's wavering faith in ASEAN centrality, as the US continues to engage proactively with the region through other institutions, like APEC and Quad, or bilaterally, hosted leaders of Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and Singapore at the White House.

Prime Minister Modi in his remarks⁶ at the 19th East Asia Summit, reiterated India's commitment to "pursue a development-based approach rather than one pivoted on expansionism". He highlighted the need for a free open, inclusive, prosperous and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific for peace and

⁴ Jow_Han. 2024. "Chairman's Statement of the 21st ASEAN-India Summit." ASEAN Main Portal. October 18, 2024. <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-21st-asean-india-summit/>.

⁵ Jow_Han. 2024. "Chairman's Statement of the 19th East Asia Summit (EAS)." ASEAN Main Portal. October 18, 2024. <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-19th-east-asia-summit-eas/>.

⁶ "Prime Minister's Participation in the 19th East Asia Summit." n.d. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38405/Prime+Ministers+participation+in+the+19th+East+Asia+Summit>.

development. On regional and international conflicts, PM Modi underscored the disproportionate impact borne by the Global South and urged a path of “dialogue and diplomacy” for their resolution. The Prime Minister took the opportunity to invite EAS countries for a Heads of Higher Education Conclave to be held at Nalanda University, an important cornerstone of India’s ‘Act East Policy’.

The Summit concluded with the release of a Chairman’s Statement⁷. The statement highlighted the primary areas of cooperation for the next five years as climate resilience, sustainable energy, health, and disaster management. In a first, the meeting laid emphasis on mental health cooperation and are finalising an EAS Joint Action Plan on Mental Health Cooperation for advancing mental health initiatives across member states. During the meeting, Russia put forth a proposal to establish a ‘Regional Mechanism of Emerging Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control among EAS Participating Countries’, which is currently under consideration. The 19th EAS statement marked a significant departure from the 18th EAS, emphasizing the practical implementation of green energy systems, with support for cross-border projects such as the ASEAN Power Grid and sustainable infrastructure initiatives. Additionally, the latest summit iteration introduced new collaboration areas, including adaptive social protection frameworks. The statement reaffirmed the 18th EAS’s positions on developments in the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, the Myanmar issue, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the situation in the Middle East.

Conclusion

India’s leadership participation in the ASEAN-India Summit and the EAS Summit reaffirms its unwavering support for ASEAN centrality. While New Delhi continues to actively engage with the region bilaterally, its involvement in ASEAN-led mechanisms strengthens India’s position as a significant regional player. Indian leaders, in their statements at ASEAN forums, have consistently underscored the shared interests and concerns between India and Southeast Asia. This engagement is crucial as it offers Southeast Asia an alternative for collaboration amid rising great power competition in the region. Conversely, given the uncertainties in India’s immediate neighbourhood, the Southeast Asian region is vital for securing India’s interests and building strategic partnerships.

⁷ Jow_Han. 2024. “Chairman’s Statement of the 19th East Asia Summit (EAS).” ASEAN Main Portal. October 18, 2024. <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-19th-east-asia-summit-eas/>.

Prabowo Subianto's First 10 days as Indonesia's President

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

Following his victory in the February elections, Prabowo Subianto was officially sworn in as Indonesia's eighth president on October 20. The former general along with his running-mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka won more than 58 percent of the nationwide vote. This election result follows Prabowo's previous unsuccessful attempts against former President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo in the elections of 2014 and 2019; as well as an unsuccessful vice-presidential bid in 2009. His inauguration signifies a notable shift in Indonesian politics, marking the first major transition in a decade.

Dignitaries from 33 countries flew in to attend the ceremony, including Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Timor Leste's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, Vietnam's Vice President Võ Thị Ánh Xuân, China's Vice President Han Zheng and Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles.⁸

As Prabowo, recognised for his authoritative leadership style endeavours to adopt a more conciliatory approach to his tenure, everyone's eyes are on Indonesia. With projections indicating that Indonesia's economy will become the world's sixth largest by 2027, the archipelago is positioning itself as a significant player in the international arena, driven by this expanding economic heft and strategic geographic proximity to critical trade waterways. As Indonesia moves away from its historical tendency of economic protectionism and relative isolationism to adopt a more globally oriented strategy, as pledged by Prabowo, it is imperative to monitor the unfolding developments within the country.

⁸ "Speech of the President-elect of the Republic of Indonesia at the Plenary Session of the MPR RI for the Inauguration of the President and Vice President-elect for the 2024-2029 Period". President of the Republic of Indonesia, October 20, 2024.
<https://www.presidentri.go.id/transkrip/pidato-presiden-republik-indonesia-terpilih-pada-acara-sidang-paripurna-mpr-ri-dalam-rangka-pelantikan-presiden-dan-wakil-presiden-terpilih-periode-2024-2029/>

Prabowo's Inaugural Speech

In a speech described as “fiery” and “wide ranging”⁹, Prabowo delivered his inauguration speech at the Nusantara Building Parliament Complex, in Jakarta on October 20. In his speech, President Prabowo committed to leading Indonesia with full responsibility, to serving the country and the nation, and to prioritising the interests of all the people of Indonesia.¹⁰ Additionally, despite the questions looming regarding democracy backsliding and subversion of democratic institutions especially during the February elections, Prabowo made it clear that while Indonesia will pick a “democratic life”, the democracy in Indonesia will be a democracy that is unique to Indonesia.¹¹ He also said Indonesia's democracy must be “a polite democracy, a democracy where differences of opinion must be without hostility”.

On the policy front, Prabowo reaffirmed Indonesia's tradition of continuing its free and active foreign policy and that Indonesia will have good relations with all countries without joining any military bloc.¹² However, Prabowo was clear that while Indonesia will continue its non-aligned policy, it will “not have the attitude of an ostrich that when it sees something unpleasant, it buries its head in the ground”¹³. Considering Indonesia's history of oppression, racism, and colonialism, Prabowo stated that the country will “defend the oppressed people in this world,” specifically highlighting Indonesia's support for the independence of the Palestinian people. Through his speech, Prabowo emphasized how Indonesia intends to operate on the world stage, with a primary focus on prioritizing the nation's needs and interests, aiming for Indonesia to become a “Golden Indonesia”.

⁹ Strangio, Sebastian. “Prabowo Subianto Sworn in as Indonesia's Eighth President.” *The Diplomat*, October 28, 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/prabowo-subianto-sworn-in-as-indonesias-eighth-president/>

¹⁰ “Newly Sworn-in President Prabowo Delivers His First Speech.” Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, October 22, 2024. <https://setkab.go.id/en/newly-sworn-in-president-prabowo-delivers-his-first-speech/>

¹¹ “Speech of the President-elect of the Republic of Indonesia at the Plenary Session of the MPR RI for the Inauguration of the President and Vice President-elect for the 2024-2029 Period”. President of the Republic of Indonesia, October 20, 2024.

<https://www.presidenri.go.id/transkrip/pidato-presiden-republik-indonesia-terpilih-pada-acara-sidang-paripurna-mpr-ri-dalam-rangka-pelantikan-presiden-dan-wakil-presiden-terpilih-periode-2024-2029/>

¹² “President Prabowo Calls for National Unity.” Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, October 21, 2024. <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-prabowo-calls-for-national-unity/>.

¹³ “Speech of the President-elect of the Republic of Indonesia at the Plenary Session of the MPR RI for the Inauguration of the President and Vice President-elect for the 2024-2029 Period”. President of the Republic of Indonesia, October 20, 2024.

<https://www.presidenri.go.id/transkrip/pidato-presiden-republik-indonesia-terpilih-pada-acara-sidang-paripurna-mpr-ri-dalam-rangka-pelantikan-presiden-dan-wakil-presiden-terpilih-periode-2024-2029/>

Indonesia's Red and White Cabinet

Following his speech, Prabowo announced his Cabinet and called it the 'Red and White Cabinet', representing the colours of Indonesia's flag. In an unexpected move, Prabowo swore in 109 officials for the next five years, with 48 ministers, 5 ministerial-level officials and 59 vice ministers.¹⁴ This is the largest cabinet of any administration since founding President Sukarno selected a 132 member cabinet in 1966.¹⁵ Prabowo's cabinet is vastly different from his predecessor Jokowi's cabinet with 34 ministers.¹⁶ The new cabinet is large and diverse with significant representation from all major Indonesia parties underscoring the new president's willingness to accommodate all factions and promote political cohesion. Prabowo has managed to incorporate eight of the nine parliamentary parties into his coalition, reducing the chances of friction in the government and smooth passage of Prabowo's agenda.

Prabowo's cabinet appointments signal his initial priorities. Firstly, the reappointment of seventeen officials from Jokowi's cabinet, with twelve of them holding the same positions in the ministries they held before. For example, Airlangga Hartarto, as the Coordinating Minister for the Economy and Dr. Sri Mulyani Indrawati as the Minister of Finance, have returned to serve at the positions they held under Jokowi.¹⁷ Many observers assert that this action serves as a reward to Jokowi for his contributions to Prabowo's electoral success. However, it is also plausible that Prabowo is employing this strategy to attract significant figures in Indonesian politics to his faction by establishing himself as their patron. Another notable appointment is the appointment of Sugiono as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Sugiono, the Deputy Chair of Gerindra Party was a military officer and served as Prabowo's personal secretary prior to the establishment of the party. He is widely recognised as Prabowo's most trusted associate and is often been described as "Prabowo's ideological child" due to his intelligence and closeness to the president.¹⁸ Sugiono's appointment to the highly prestigious post, usually reserved for

¹⁴ "President Prabowo Subianto Announces 'Red and White' Cabinet Lineup." Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, October 21, 2024. <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-prabowo-subianto-announces-red-and-white-cabinet-lineup/>

¹⁵ Borsuk, Richard. "Can Indonesia's Big Cabinet Deliver on Prabowo's Promises?" RSIS, October 25, 2024. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/can-indonesias-big-cabinet-deliver-on-prabowos-promises/>.

¹⁶ "Here Is the Line-up of President Jokowi's and Vice President Jusuf Kalla's Working Cabinet Ministers." Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, November 5, 2014. <https://setkab.go.id/en/here-is-the-line-up-of-president-jokowis-and-vice-president-jusuf-kallas-working-cabinet-ministers/>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ "Sugiono, the new helmsman of Indonesia's diplomacy". Antara. October 23, 2024. <https://en.antaranews.com/news/330845/sugiono-the-new-helmsman-of-indonesias-diplomacy>

professional diplomats has two implications. Firstly, his background as a military officer suggests he will adopt a defence-oriented perspective in shaping foreign policy. Secondly, the choice of an individual known as "Prabowo's ideological child" underscores Prabowo's intention to assert a more direct influence in the management of Indonesia's diplomatic initiatives and international relations.

The presence of a military perspective within the cabinet became increasingly evident when it was reported that the newly established cabinet was flown to Indonesia's military academy for a boot camp on October 25. During this event, the ministers engaged in morning exercises and command drills while attired in matching camouflage uniforms and spent the night in tents.¹⁹ Numerous analysts assert that this boot camp is the first indication that Prabowo has not fundamentally changed and continues to embody a strong military persona.²⁰ Notably, Prabowo's military uniform, which he had set aside during the election campaign to project a more approachable image, has resurfaced. The images depicting Prabowo and his ministers in coordinated camouflage attire further illustrate concerns regarding the country's potential future direction of governance.

While Prabowo has stressed the need for a robust administration through a comprehensive cabinet, as many analysts have cautioned, a 'fat' cabinet like his could pose risks to the coherence and efficiency of policymaking, potentially bloating the bureaucracy. The inclusion of diverse political and ideological backgrounds in the cabinet is a primary challenge to its efficiency, potentially leading to conflicts and difficulties in implementing the new president's policy agenda.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Prabowo's first ten days have proven to be significant, offering a clear understanding of his priorities and leadership style. As suggested by previous engagements as president-elect, he will actively collaborate with international partners, with foreign policy emerging as a primary focus of his administration. This approach contrasts with Jokowi's approach. Even Jokowi's inaugural overseas trip, encompassing a three-nation tour of China, Myanmar, and Australia for multilateral meetings contrasts with Prabowo's first overseas trip where he is scheduled to conduct bilateral meetings in China, the

¹⁹ "Yes Sir: A Bizarre Initiation Ritual for Indonesia's Cabinet." *The Economist*, October 31, 2024. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/10/31/yes-sir-a-bizarre-initiation-ritual-for-indonesias-cabinet>.

²⁰ Ibid

United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Peru.²¹ This deviation in strategy highlights a distinct approach to foreign policy, further accentuated by the appointment of his close ally as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, while Prabowo will uphold Indonesia's free and active policy, he is anticipated to adopt a proactive stance in international relations.

As Prabowo commences his tenure and evaluations of his first 100 days in office are conducted, it is important to note that his initial 10 days have already indicated a transformation in Indonesia's political environment. While he has opted to retain many ministers from the previous administrations, he is utilising a different political approach. Prabowo is seeking to assemble a larger and more diverse cabinet to safeguard his agenda from potential opposition. This framework allows the ministers to dedicate their attention to daily administrative matters, thereby enabling Prabowo to focus on overarching strategic goals for the nation. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how much of Prabowo's previous persona will shape his leadership style. A crucial element to consider in the ongoing analysis of Indonesia is Prabowo's strong nationalist inclination, which underscores his commitment to prioritising the interests of his country.

²¹ Strangio, Sebastian. "Indonesia's Prabowo to Visit China, US on First Foreign Trip." *The Diplomat*, October 30, 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/indonesias-prabowo-to-visit-china-us-on-first-foreign-trip/>

" The "ASEAN, China, US and India

by
Biren Nanda

ASEAN has for many years been grappling with a series of regional issues including the civil unrest in Myanmar, the maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea, and the potentially catastrophic fallout of the US-China tensions in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's failure to develop a consensus approach in dealing with these issues is the major cause for concern for peace and stability in the region.

ASEAN centrality remained the cornerstone of the regional security architecture in East Asia. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the arrangement worked well with the US providing regional security and ASEAN focusing on economic growth. The rise of China and its territorial assertions in the South and East China Seas upended all these assumptions and expectations for regional security and economic growth.

Today, there are maritime disputes in the South China Sea and there is contestation between the US and China in Southeast Asia as China challenges the US and aspires to be its peer competitor in the region. Negotiations with China on a "Code of Conduct" in the South China Sea have dragged on for too long. The Code of Conduct is nothing but a derogation from international law and the UNCLOS. What purpose can it serve if it seeks to merely legitimize the status quo? In any case, it is highly unlikely that ASEAN will push back on Chinese assertions in the South China Sea.

A major failure of ASEAN has been its inability to address the Myanmar crisis. The military junta has failed to commit to ASEAN's 'Five Point Consensus'. If ASEAN fails to address this, it will create new opportunities for external powers who wish to insert themselves in regional affairs. Meanwhile, Myanmar's internal divisions threaten to spiral out of control.

Supply chain resilience has emerged as a policy priority of all countries. The issue of supply chains has also raised the profile of emerging economies that offer possible alternatives to China as production platforms for multinational firms. All major emerging economies are attempting to take advantage of this new focus on supply chain resilience, while (to varying degrees) balancing the economic security risks posed by China's rise. The challenge is to craft trade, investment, and technology policies in ways that promote mutual economic security and enhance international economic "rules and norms".

After the global financial crisis of 2007-08, American dominance of world affairs was an immediate casualty. China began testing the limits of American strategic patience in Asia and the national security environment for India underwent a change. Chinese troops made aggressive incursions across the LAC and began a creeping aggression and occupation of land features in the Spratlys in the South China Sea.

Two major trends are defining the future of Asia in this century – the economic and the geopolitical. At the core of both trends, is the relationship between the United States and China. China's assertive behavior has created a new environment for neighboring Asian countries. The US has conveyed through its pivot to Asia, the notion of rebalancing and its Indo-Pacific Strategy that it intends to continue to play a key role in Asian security matters.

The potential danger of these developments is demonstrated by the tensions that arise periodically over maritime territorial disputes between the Philippines and China and between China and Japan. Whether the US will be drawn into these conflicts by its allies or whether it will renege on its alliance commitments to maintain a viable relationship with China heightens insecurities amongst its allies in Asia.

The United States and China are presently engaged in a contest for a long-term effort to reshape global order²². In the words of an Australian scholar-

"This struggle co-exists with a vast amount of still mutually beneficial trade and other economic activity. But the world the [this] represents is also one of partial de-coupling and fragmentation²³, of national economic sovereignty, "trusted" supply lines and divided technology realms. The net result is a complex new duality of simultaneous competition and interdependence, with higher degrees of risk."

When Prime Minister Modi rhetorically replaced two decades of India's 'Look East' policy with the 'Act East Policy', the purpose was to show greater intent in realizing what had long been an aspiration for India: to become an integral part of Asia. The greater urgency implicit in the shift in terminology is largely an outgrowth of Indian concerns regarding China's rise and the upsetting of Asia's delicate balance of power. In addition to the development of military and dual-use Chinese infrastructure in India's neighborhood and the Indian Ocean, India's concerns are three-fold: the risk of Chinese assertiveness on the

²² Maude, Richard (February 9, 2022) How to understand the Quad- a short guide for Australian business. Asia Society
<https://asiasociety.org/australia/how-understand-quad-short-guide-australian-business>

disputed border, the possibility of Chinese primacy in the Indo-Pacific region, and an uneven economic playing field.

India has strengthened bilateral defense and security cooperation with Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia at a time when these countries are seeing rising tensions and territorial disputes with China. India's bilateral defense cooperation with individual ASEAN countries has been institutionalized through the signing of bilateral defense cooperation agreements or MOUs. Three forms of cooperation have gained momentum – cooperation between Navies, the maintenance and supply of equipment, and assistance for training.



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