



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



EAST ASIA EXPLORER AUGUST 2023

Authors

Pradeep Taneja

Prabir De

Biren Nanda

Anshita Shukla

Jayantika Rao T.V.



Volume I, Issue 8

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

East Asia Explorer

Vol. I, Issue 8

August 2023

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

Authors

Pradeep Taneja, Non-Resident International Fellow, Delhi Policy Group

Prabir De, Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)

Ambassador Biren Nanda, Senior Fellow for Act East Diplomacy, Delhi Policy Group

Anshita Shukla, Research Associate, Delhi Policy Group

Jayantika Rao Tiruvalloor Viavoori, Research Associate, Delhi Policy Group

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.

Cover Image:

US President Joseph Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at Camp David for the Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), and the United States trilateral meeting on August 18, 2023. (Source: [President Biden/Official Twitter Account](#))

Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in Singapore on August 11, 2023. (Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore/Official Website](#))

Vice President OF India, Jagdeep Dhankhar, at the 19th ASEAN-India Summit with other ASEAN leaders in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on November 12, 2022. (Source: [Indian Mission to ASEAN, Jakarta/Official Website](#))

© 2023 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

www.delhipolicygroup.org

East Asia Explorer

Vol. I, Issue 8

August 2023

Contents

Australia's New Foreign Aid Policy Promises "Respect" to Counter Chinese Influence

Pradeep Taneja 1

What can we expect the 20th ASEAN-India Summit to deliver?

Prabir De 4

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's three-nation Southeast Asian tour

Biren Nanda 11

The Camp David Summit: Restrengthening the US-South Korea-Japan Trilateral

Anshita Shukla.....16

A New Trajectory for Thai Politics or An Echo Of The Past?

Jayantika Rao T.V.....19

Australia's New Foreign Aid Policy Promises "Respect" to Counter Chinese Influence

by

Pradeep Taneja

In early August, the Australian government [released](#) its new International Development Policy for a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific. The policy – the first in nearly a decade – aims to deploy all elements of Australian state power to shape its neighbourhood. In launching the report, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Penny Wong, described the current strategic environment as “the most challenging” in many generations.

The policy recognises a link between development and stability and argues that a prosperous and stable region is in Australia's national interest. The underlying message of the new policy is unmistakable: Australia is the natural development partner of its immediate neighbours, and outside powers – no matter how deep their pockets – cannot replace Australia as the partner of choice of its Pacific neighbours.

The new policy does not significantly change the focus of Australia's development program, which will remain on the Indo-Pacific, particularly the Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asia - in that order. The bulk of its foreign aid will continue to go to its Pacific Island neighbours. In a clear dig at China's foreign aid program in the Pacific, which has often been described as opaque and not responsive to local needs, Senator Wong said: “we will deliver a development program that is transparent, effective, and accountable.”

In fact, despite China's foreign minister signing a spate of development assistance deals with almost a dozen Pacific nations in June last year, China's development assistance to the region has been declining since reaching a peak in 2016. Several states have either already cancelled China-funded projects or are re-evaluating them, according to the Indo-Pacific Development Centre at Lowy Institute in Sydney.¹

There are both supply-side and demand-side reasons for the slowdown in Chinese development assistance to the Pacific. On the supply side, as China's economy has slowed and some of the largest recipients of Chinese foreign assistance in the form of loans have got themselves into financial difficulties,

¹ Alexandre Dayant et al, 'Chinese aid to the Pacific: decreasing, but not disappearing', 25 January 2023. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinese-aid-pacific-decreasing-not-disappearing>

China has begun to take a much more cautious approach to financial risk. On the demand side, the Pacific nations are also less willing to accept large loans as their own government revenues have declined, thus making loan repayments even less affordable.

It is China's security-related assistance to the Pacific nations – more than the loans – that worries Australia and its Western allies. It sees the extension of China's aid in the military and policing domains in the Pacific as an unwelcome and destabilizing factor for the region's security. The 2022 security agreement between China and the Solomons Islands, for instance, raised serious concerns in Australia's security community and the media. China has also provided "combat-oriented" equipment to several of the Pacific island states.

What is significant about Australia's new international development policy is that it emphasises a more respectful approach to development assistance provision in the region. The word "respect" appears about 15 times in the 34-page document. Despite China's assertions that it attaches no political strings to its foreign aid, and that it seeks "win-win" outcomes, the authoritarian East Asian giant's engagement with some of the smallest states in the world can often come across as too state-centric and inattentive to the needs and opinions of the local communities.

Australia's new policy seeks to project Australia as the opposite of China – an empathetic, helpful and authentic development and security partner to the Pacific nations. As Senator Wong said in her foreword to the new policy, "We will offer genuine partnerships based on respect, listening, and learning from each other. We will support local leaders to create local solutions while contributing our own strengths – our economy, our institutions, and the connections and knowledge of Australians."

The government of former Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, had attempted to counter China's growing influence by portraying Australia as a member of the "Pacific family", with the implication that China was an "outsider" muscling into the region's affairs. He and his ministers repeatedly used that trope to assure the Pacific nations that Australia was not a boorish and overbearing partner, but a member of the family. In reality, however, his government's diplomatic manoeuvres were less than convincing and his bombastic style did not sit comfortably with the "Pacific Way" of doing things.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government has not altogether abandoned the use of the family trope, but it is developing a much more nuanced approach to its neighbourhood, of which the new development policy is an integral part.

In addition to offering respectful interactions, the new policy will also make investments in tackling regional challenges like climate change, poverty, economic development, healthcare, infrastructure and gender equality. It stipulates that by 2028-29, 80 per cent of the Australian government's regional investments of more than 3 million Australian dollars will have climate change and gender equality objectives.

It would be in the interest of India to work closely with like-minded countries such as Australia, France, Japan and the United States to develop a more coordinated and synergistic approach to development assistance in the Indo-Pacific.

What can we expect the 20th ASEAN-India Summit to deliver?

by

Prabir De

Introduction

On September 6, 2023, the 20th ASEAN-India Summit is going to take place in Jakarta. Beginning in 2002 in Cambodia, the ASEAN-India annual summit process is going to complete a fruitful two-decade partnership. ASEAN-India relations have grown from strength to strength and the two sides have never been so close, with growing trade and investment flows, friend-shoring, and growing people-to-people contacts.

The Indian Prime Minister will participate in several key summits, including the East Asia Summit and the 20th India-ASEAN Summit next week. The Indian PM's presence underscores the continuity of India's proactive engagement with ASEAN and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

For the first time, ASEAN will host the maiden ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF).² The US Vice President is scheduled to attend the first ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF), to highlight the importance of the region and the bloc's ongoing efforts to implement the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)'. Three major issues will be highlighted: green infrastructure and resilient supply chains, digital transformation and the creative economy as well as sustainable and innovative financing. The forum has lined up heads of governments from ASEAN dialogue partners, including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Canada. India is yet to confirm its participation.

Why is it so important for a Head of State to attend the summit meetings? The summit meetings hold high significance as they offer opportunities for leaders of participating countries to meet and gain from dialogue and interactions. Since 2002, India has not missed a single ASEAN-India summit.

*Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, e-mail: prabirde@ris.org.in. He is also the Founder Head of the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS. Views are the author's own. Usual disclaimers apply.

² Refer to, Indonesia Foreign Ministry's statement, available at <https://events.kemlu.go.id/aipf>

ASEAN-India Regional Engagements

ASEAN and India share both land and maritime borders. They are civilizational partners. India has been leveraging its strategic location, democracy, market size, natural resources, access to the coast, and the advantage of a young population. So also the ASEAN. ASEAN and India together account for 7 per cent of the world's GDP and 26 per cent of the world's population. Their combined strength is, therefore, phenomenal. ASEAN is currently India's 4th largest trading partner, and India is ASEAN's 7th largest trade partner.

ASEAN has truly become a global economy, where FTAs have played a key role in the integration process. In the post-pandemic period, ASEAN and India have been witnessing the best phase of their relations. The bilateral trade between them was just US\$ 9 billion when they held their first summit way back in 2002, and now the trade is likely to cross the US\$ 150 billion mark by the end of 2023. Some of the ASEAN member states like Malaysia and India have agreed to trade in their currencies. The gross cumulative investment flows between ASEAN and India exceeded US\$ 100 billion during the period 2000-2022.

In an integrated regional block, what matters is the strength of connectivity. Weak connectivity nullifies the advantages of having an FTA. India has come up with a series of physical and digital connectivity initiatives with ASEAN member states such as the "Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project", the "Trilateral Highway" project, and the establishment of a digital payment arrangement with Singapore, to mention a few. Several flagship connectivity projects are also in the pipeline. Impressive achievements have been observed in the case of people-to-people contacts in the fields of higher education, tourism, etc.. ASEAN has also shown deep interest in science and technology cooperation with India.

ASEAN and India celebrated the 30th anniversary of their dialogue partnership last year and the relations between them have been elevated to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) level. ASEAN and India have agreed to establish an ASEAN-India CSP that is meaningful, substantive, and mutually beneficial.³ India and ASEAN have reaffirmed the importance of maintaining ASEAN Centrality in the evolving regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific and deepening dialogue and coordination through existing ASEAN-led mechanisms and fora, including the ASEAN-India Summit, the East Asia Summit (EAS), the Post Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1),

³ Refer, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dt1%2F35876%2FJoint_Statement_on_ASEANIndia_Comprehensive_Strategic_Partnership

the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF). ASEAN and India are also committed to cooperating in initiatives to support and contribute to the ASEAN Integration and Community-building process.

The last twenty years of annual summits represent energetic engagements between India and ASEAN, which have transformed the relationship steadily and in a sustainable manner across the Indo-Pacific region. India and ASEAN advocate a free, open, rules-based and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, and call for the peaceful resolution of disputes while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations. Both sides have agreed to continue to work on shared interests and aspirations in ensuring regional peace, security, and stability.

Activities in the Last Year⁴

The year after the Commemorative Summit till date has been full of activities. Soon after the Summit held on 12 November 2022, India and Cambodia co-chaired the maiden India-ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting in Siem Reap on 22 November 2022, followed by the 9th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus on 23 November 2022. The ADMM Plus is an annual meeting of Defence Ministers of ten ASEAN countries and its eight dialogue partner countries, viz., India, USA, Russia, China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. Almost at the same time, the second edition of the ASEAN-India Music Festival was held from 18 to 20 November 2022 in New Delhi.

Next, India along with Australia and Singapore co-hosted the EAS Hackathon on "Combating Marine Plastic" on 13-16 December 2022 in Jakarta. In parallel, the 4th ASEAN-India Workshop on the Blue Economy was held in New Delhi on 15-16 December 2022. ASEAN and India also organised the 3rd Grassroots Innovation Forum, 2022 on 19 December 2022 in Phnom Penh.

ASEAN countries joined the 'Voice of Global South Summit', hosted by India on 12-13 January 2023. The 4th ASEAN-India Youth Summit was held in Hyderabad on 12-16 February 2023. Thereafter, the ASEAN-India and EAS Senior Officials' Meetings were held in Jakarta on 7 March 2023. The 25th ASEAN-India Senior Officials Meeting (AISOM) was an important mechanism to discuss strategic issues of common interest and concern between ASEAN and India. ASEAN and India reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen

⁴ Based on press releases as outlined at https://www.indmissionasean.gov.in/press_india_arch

their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the 25th AISOM. The meeting also discussed ways to further strengthen cooperation in several areas of mutual interest including maritime activities, transnational crimes, cyber-security, science and technology, transport and connectivity, digital economy, fintech, tourism, agriculture, environment, sustainable development, and public health.

The 1st ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise 2023 was held in the 1st week of May 2023. The maiden ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise successfully culminated in the South China Sea on 8 May 2023. Approximately 1400 personnel manning nine ships participated in the Sea Phase of the multilateral naval exercise with ASEAN naval ships from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. This was another remarkable milestone achieved by ASEAN and India in 2023.

The ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with India (PMC+1) was held in Jakarta on 13 July 2023. This PMC saw the adoption of the Annex to the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity (2021-2025) to ensure that the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will be substantive, meaningful, and mutually beneficial. On 20 July 2023, the 1st ASEAN-India Conference on Traditional Medicines was held in New Delhi. Thereafter, the 20th ASEAN-India Economic Ministers' Meeting (AIEMM) was held in Semarang on 21 August 2023, which was perhaps the last major interaction before the 20th ASEAN-India Summit. The 20th AIEMM followed up the progress of the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) and endorsed the Term of Reference of the AITIGA Joint Committee, the Work Plan of the AITIGA Review Negotiations, and the Negotiating Structure for the AITIGA Review. The Meeting reiterated its commitment to make the AITIGA more user-friendly, simple, and trade facilitative for businesses to increase ASEAN-India trade as well as support sustainable and inclusive growth.

Some Critical Challenges⁵

What are the major critical challenges that India faces in ASEAN? First, ASEAN is not a single market. Second, barriers are very high in borders and NTMs have been rising. An increase in NTMs could raise trade costs, inhibiting trade expansion. Besides, there are restrictions on the movement of professionals,

⁵ Some of these challenges were well explained in De, Prabir (ed.) (2024) *Thirty Years of ASEAN-India Relations: Towards Indo-Pacific*, Routledge, New Delhi, Forthcoming, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Thirty-Years-of-ASEAN-India-Relations-Towards-Indo-Pacific/De/p/book/9781032617473>

capital, and goods. Well, some of them are not India-specific, but some discriminate against India over other partners. On the other hand, ASEAN too faces high barriers to trade in India. ASEAN is not comfortable with the CAROTAR rules, which were imposed by India in September 2020. India may consider removing the CAROTAR, which has impacted trade relations. The CAROTAR is also a major constraint to GVC formation between the two trading partners. Besides, ASEAN too faces rising tariffs and domestic protections in India.

The Way Ahead

Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar said, "ASEAN is a crucial pillar of India's Act East policy and its vision for the wider Indo-Pacific. A strong and unified ASEAN plays an important role in the emerging dynamic of the Indo-Pacific. India firmly supports ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific."⁶

ASEAN and India have agreed to collaborate on the Indo-Pacific. AOIP's convergence with the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) provides a strong basis for the next phase of ASEAN-India cooperation. As comprehensive strategic partners, we look forward to working with the ASEAN in further expanding the partnership to include newer areas while strengthening existing cooperation. Needless to say, the outcomes of the forthcoming G20 summit may provide the future direction for ASEAN-India relations. For example, the digitalization of trade documents, enhancing information access to MSMEs, a framework to map global value chains, best practices on mutual recognition agreements for professional services, and a standards dialogue were the five outcomes of the G20 Trade and Investment Ministers Meeting (TIMM). The outcome document also has three annexes, namely, G20 Generic Framework for Mapping GVCs, Jaipur Call for Action for enhancing MSMEs' access to information, and High-Level Principles on Digitalisation of Trade Documents.⁷ Both ASEAN and India have already made good progress on these five fronts.

ASEAN and India should also work together to forge green infrastructure and resilient supply chains, explore cooperation on the Single Window platform to enhance trade facilitation and integration and promote the development of

⁶ Refer to the Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the opening session of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with India in Jakarta, Available at https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/36791/Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_opening_session_of_the_ASEAN_Post_Ministerial_Conference_with_India_in_Jakarta

⁷ Refer, refer the outcome document, available at <https://www.g20.org/en/>

MSMEs and start-ups. The areas that offer high prospects are pharmaceuticals, health, cyber, financial, and maritime security domains. India's International Solar Alliance (ISA) or the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the One Sun, One World, One Grid, the One Earth One Health, and the Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) offer many solutions to ASEAN's changes. As India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S. Jaishankar said during the B-20 Summit held in New Delhi "Progress and prosperity can only be lasting when they are shared both within societies and between them," EAM reminded.⁸

Doing things on time is the key to gaining from regional engagements. When we look at Table 1. We learn that India has started late and missed the early opportunities. Winners begin early. Nevertheless, there is ample opportunity to bridge the gap since the global order has been changing in favor of India.

In the next round, both ASEAN and India should focus on quality trade and resilient production networks and supply chains. The implementation of services and investment agreements is long overdue. Concluding the negotiation of the AITIGA review may take time, but ASEAN and India may intensify their efforts to achieve a substantial conclusion even before the new deadline of 2025. After the completion of the summit meetings, the ASEAN chairmanship will transfer from Indonesia to Lao PDR, thus providing another opportunity to conclude a substantial part of the review in 2024.

Table 1: China, India and Korea in ASEAN

	China	India	Korea
Total goods trade with ASEAN (US\$ billion), 2022	979	133	207
Framework Agreement for Goods Trade signed in	2002	2004	2005
FTA in goods implemented in	2005	2010	2010*
Framework Agreement services signed in	2007	2014	2005
FTA in services implemented in	2007	2019	2007
Investment Agreement implemented in	2009	2019	2009
FTA review completed in	2019	Not yet	Not yet

*Implemented partly in 2006

Sources: Author's own based on the IMF DOTS and ASEAN Secretariat

⁸ Refer, Remarks by EAM, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the B20 Summit, available at https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37055/Remarks_by_EAM_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_B20_Summit

In parallel, both India and ASEAN need to add momentum to the implementation of the 'ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Region'. Under the AOIP framework, there are four areas of priority: maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and economic cooperation. There are several common areas of cooperation between ASEAN's AOIP and India's IPOI. India and ASEAN should scale up their engagements in implementing the AOIP-IPOI projects. It is expected that the upcoming summit may provide a direction to India's engagement with ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific.

Today, tensions between countries over trade and investment are undermining growth and trust. ASEAN and India may further intensify their cooperation to stabilize the global order. The World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos in January 2023 focused on the theme of 'Cooperation in a Fragmented World'. The Director-General of the World Trade Organization called for a bolstering of global cooperation, and a move towards "reglobalization" as opposed to trade fragmentation and friendshoring. "A friend today may not be a friend tomorrow," the DG of WTO warned⁹.

To conclude, India has witnessed remarkable progress in its dialogue partnership with ASEAN and there is substantial scope for further progress. Unlike some other partners, India has carved out its place in ASEAN and so also has ASEAN in India and the relationship is truly irreversible. Given India's strong leadership, the coming 20th ASEAN-India Summit is expected to bring significant decisions adding further momentum to ASEAN-India relations.

⁹ Refer, <https://www.reuters.com/world/davos-2023-be-careful-friend-shoring-wtos-ngozi-warns-2023-01-19>

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's three-nation Southeast Asian tour

by
Biren Nanda

FM Wang Yi's visit to Singapore

Wang Yi visited Singapore from August 10 to 11, 2023¹⁰. Singapore was the first stop in a tour that included Malaysia and Cambodia. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said that it was a chance to “strengthen strategic communication” with the three countries. In Singapore, Wang called on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong¹¹ and Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong. The Chinese Foreign Minister held bilateral consultations with Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

According to the readout from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the meetings resulted in pledges for further cooperation in trade and investment, cultural exchanges and tourism. The two sides also agreed to resume direct flights that previously linked the two countries before the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic.

The two Foreign Ministers¹² reaffirmed the two countries’ “longstanding and substantive relations” which were upgraded to an ‘All-Round High-Quality Future-Oriented Partnership’- in April 2023. The decision to elevate bilateral ties was taken by Prime Minister Lee and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the former’s visit to Beijing. PM Lee said he looked forward to closer China-ASEAN relations and affirmed the “importance of building an open and

¹⁰ Hancock Adam. August 11, 2023. Chinese FM Holds Talks with Singapore Leaders to Strengthen Ties and Trade. VOA
<https://www.voanews.com/a/chinese-fm-wang-holds-talks-with-singapore-leaders-to-strengthen-ties-trade/7221240.html#:~:text=Wang%20met%20with%20Prime%20Minister,as%20cultural%20e%20xchanges%20and%20tourism>.

¹¹ (August 11, 2023) Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong meets with Wang Yi. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202308/t20230811_11126003.html#:~:text=Singaporean%20Prime%20Minister%20Lee%20Hsien%20Loong%20Meets%20with%20Wang%20Yi,-2023%2D08%2D11&text=On%20August%2011%2C%202023%20local, and%20Foreign%20Minister%20Wang%20Yi.

¹² (August 11, 2023.) Singapore and China reaffirm upgraded bilateral relations during Wang Yi's visit. CNA
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singapore-china-bilateral-relations-wang-yi-visit-lee-hsien-loong-mfa-3693361#:~:text=SINGAPORE%3A%20Singapore%27s%20Prime%20Minister%20Lee,which%20were%20upgraded%20in%20April>.

inclusive region”.

Singapore is a major economic partner of China and the largest foreign investor in China. Singapore continues to try and strengthen relations with China and tip toe around US-China tensions. The deteriorating relations between China – Singapore’s major economic partner - and the United States – its major security partner is the greatest foreign policy challenge for Singapore today.

During FM Wang Yi’s meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, the two leaders reviewed the progress of bilateral cooperation and particularly the three government-to-government projects in Suzhou, Tianjin and Chongqing. Deputy Prime Minister Wong also expressed in-principle support for China’s interest in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPPTP).

Wong welcomed China’s application to join the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA) – a pact between Singapore, Chile, and New Zealand to facilitate digital trade and create a framework for the digital economy.

Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan hosted a dinner in honor of Wang Yi on August 10, 2023¹³. The two ministers reaffirmed strong bilateral ties and reviewed “multifaceted cooperation” between Singapore and China. They agreed to work together for an increased flow of business and people between Singapore and China. They also agreed to collaborate in sustainable development and digital economy.

About three-quarters of Singapore’s population consists of ethnic Chinese. On one hand, this strengthens cultural links between the city-state and China – on the other hand, this subjects Singapore to the hazards of being exposed to Chinese influence operations. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2022 found Singapore in a minority of countries with a positive view of China.

Chinese influence operations in Singapore seek to persuade Singaporeans to be more sympathetic to mainland Chinese concerns and policies. In 2017, Singapore expelled Huang Jing on suspicion of working for China. In June 2022, a Singaporean citizen Dickson Yeo studying at the prestigious Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy was arrested for having worked as a paid agent of

¹³ Singh Keval. (August 11, 2023) Vivian, Wang Yi discuss ways to further bilateral ties during China Foreign Ministers Singapore visit. The Straits Times.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/vivian-wang-yi-discuss-ways-to-further-bilateral-ties-during-china-foreign-minister-s-s-pore-visit>

a foreign state – China. To counter foreign interference, Singapore passed the foreign interference law on July 7, 2022¹⁴. The law specifically covers hostile information campaigns.

Wang Yi reserved the strongest criticism for the United States during his call on the Singapore Prime Minister:

“Out of its motive to maintain unipolar hegemony, the U.S. does not want to see the development and revitalization of China and other emerging countries. On the one hand, the U.S. connives at and supports “Taiwan independence” forces in soliciting U.S. support for independence, which crosses China’s red lines. On the other hand, the U.S. tears open its pretense of fair competition and coerces other countries to engage in unilateral protectionism against China. These retrogressive acts will only damage its own credibility and prove to the world that the U.S. has become the biggest destabilizing factor in the world.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Malaysia

On August 11, 2023, during his visit to Malaysia, Wang Yi called on Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim¹⁵ and held bilateral consultations with Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abd Kadir¹⁶.

Anwar described China as a “reliable and good friend” of Malaysia. The two leaders discussed a number of topics including economy, trade, investment, people-to-people and cultural exchanges and tourism. Wang Yi highly appraised the role of BRI in enhancing bilateral ties. He observed that the “East Coast Rail Links” and “the Twin Parks” had achieved good economic and social results.

¹⁴ Koswanage Niluksi (August 21, 2022) Singapore Warns Against Foreign Actors as US-China Ties Fester. Bloomberg

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-21/singapore-warns-against-foreign-actors-as-us-china-ties-fester>

¹⁵ (August 12 2023) Malaysia Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim Meets with Wang Yi. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202308/t20230814_11126322.html#:~:text=Malaysian%20Prime%20Minister%20Dato%27%20Seri%20Anwar%20Bin%20Ibrahim%20Meets%20with%20Wang%20Yi,-2023%2D08%2D12&text=On%20August%2011%2C%202023%20local.city%20to%20pay%20a%20visit.

¹⁶ (August 12, 2023) Wang Yi holds Talks with Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zambri Abd Kadir. Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202308/t20230814_11126324.html

The two Foreign Ministers noted that the current year marked the 10th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China. BRI continued to be a major theme in Wang Yi's articulations during the visit. Apart from highlighting BRI projects in Malaysia, Wang Yi said that China was ready to deepen cooperation between the two countries in agricultural technology and food security. China was also willing to import high-quality food products from Malaysia.

FM Wang Yi's visit to Cambodia

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Cambodia from August 13 to 14, 2023. In Phnom Penh he called on Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Prime Minister-designate Gen Hun Manet and had meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Hor Namhong, Deputy Prime Minister Designate Sun Chanthol, Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn¹⁷ and Foreign Minister designate Sok Chenda Sophea.

Hun Sen expressed thanks and appreciation for China's support for Cambodia. He apprised Wang Yi about the outcome of the recent elections in Cambodia, which had elected a new Generation leadership¹⁸. Hun Sen also made specific references to a number of BRI projects¹⁹ including the "diamond hexagon", "the industrial development corridor" and the "fish and rice corridor." Assuring continuity in Cambodia's policy towards China, Hun Sen said:

"Cambodia views China as a true strategic safeguard and strong strategic supporter, and will not waver in its resolve to consolidate and deepen Cambodia-China solidarity and friendship. The new Cambodian government will continue to strengthen strategic mutual trust with China and carry forward traditional friendship. Cambodia thanks China

¹⁷ (August 14, 2023) Wang Yi meets with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202308/t20230816_11127513.html#:~:text=On%20August%2013%2C%202023%20local,and%20International%20Cooperation%20Prak%20Sokhonn.

¹⁸ Narin Sun and Meyn Colin. (August 14, 2023) Cambodia's Hun Manet Signals Unchanged China Policy Ahead of Succession. <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-s-hun-manet-signals-unchanged-china-policy-ahead-of-succession/7224836.html#:~:text=Hun%20Manet%20assured%20Wang%20Yi,the%20Cambodian%20leader%27s%20Facebook%20page.>

¹⁹ (August 13, 2023) Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen meets with Wang Yi. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202308/t20230814_11126329.html#:~:text=Cambodian%20Prime%20Minister%20Samdech%20Techo%20Hun%20Sen%20Meets%20with%20Wang%20Yi,-2023%2D08%2D13&text=On%20August%2013%2C%202023%20local,and%20Foreign%20Minister%20Wang%20Yi.

for its valuable support for the country's development"

Wang Yi thanked Hun Sen for his historic contribution to building the "China-Cambodia community with a shared future". Gen Hun Manet – who is the eldest son of Hun Sen who is to succeed Hun Sen as Prime Minister – reaffirmed Cambodia's commitment to a "One China" policy. He also accepted the invitation to participate in the BRI forum in China in mid-October 2023.

Gen Hun Manet is a West Point Graduate and may have a better appreciation of western perspectives on foreign policy, security, and economic issues. Despite this, there can be little expectation of a shift in Cambodian policy towards a more equidistant stance between China and the West. Sam Rainsy, a long-time Cambodian opposition leader presently residing in France, averred that the notion that the west can pull Hun Manet away from China is an "illusion".

Conclusion

What exactly did Foreign Minister Wang Yi set out to achieve in his three-nation tour of Southeast Asian countries?²⁰ First, he sought to signal the strengthening of cooperation and building stronger ties with Southeast Asian countries. Second, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said he hoped the visits would strengthen "strategic communication" with the three ASEAN countries. Third, Wang Yi expressed a desire to achieve solid progress in building a community with a shared future with Malaysia and Cambodia and deepen "high-quality" BRI cooperation. Fourth, Wang Yi conveyed that China was ready to work with all three countries to implement the "Global Development Initiative (GDI)", the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the "Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI)".

²⁰ Wang Qi (August 10, 2023) Closer, deeper cooperation expected a Wang Yi Kicks off Southeast Asia tour amid US creating division. Global Times
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1296065.shtml#:~:text=Wang%27s%20visit%20also%20comes%20against,discord%20sowed%20by%20the%20US>.

The Camp David Summit: Restrengthening the US-South Korea-Japan Trilateral

by

Anshita Shukla

Camp David has been a venue, well known through history, for forging new diplomatic partnerships and strengthening existing ones. It has been reserved only for the “most important and significant meetings”²¹. As the Biden administration hosted its first Camp David Summit with leaders of South Korea and Japan on August 18, it ushered in “a new era of trilateral cooperation”. The meeting between US President Joseph Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was the first standalone trilateral summit between the three alliance partners.

The meeting produced a “Statement of Principles”, a “Joint Statement” and a “Fact Sheet” highlighting the enhanced cooperation between the three countries in the face of converging security concerns. A critical outcome of the meeting was the leaders’ “commitment to consult” each other to coordinate their responses to regional challenges threatening collective interests²². To further facilitate this, the countries have announced the creation of a three-way security hotline for effective crisis management. The meeting institutionalised regular dialogue by establishing annual trilateral Leaders’ meetings; annual meetings between Foreign Ministers, Defence Ministers, Commerce and Industry Ministers, and National Security Advisors; and an annual trilateral Indo-Pacific dialogue.

To counter an increasingly fraught geopolitical neighbourhood, the Summit focused on institutionalising and strengthening security cooperation. The three leaders have agreed to activate a data-sharing mechanism to exchange real-time missile warning data and operationalise it by the end of 2023. The allies agreed to regularise multi-domain trilateral exercises, resume maritime interdiction exercises and anti-piracy exercises, and expand trilateral cooperation in disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. To counter the mutual security threat arising from DPRK’s illicit revenue generation and malicious cyber activities, the three countries have instituted a trilateral working group to monitor and coordinate efforts through intelligence sharing.

²¹ Biden’s call for ‘new era of cooperation’ with Japan and South Korea likely to ramp up tensions with Beijing, [CNN](#), August 19, 2023

²² FACT SHEET: The Trilateral Leaders’ Summit at Camp David, [The White House](#), August 18, 2023

The Joint Statement indicates a conscientious effort to also enable economic and development cooperation between the three allies²³. The three have agreed to enhance trilateral development finance cooperation and adopted a trilateral maritime mechanism to synchronize partner capacity building in Southeast Asia and Pacific Island countries. A Supply Chain Early Warning System (EWS) Pilot has been launched to rapidly share information on disruptions to critical supply chains for identified priority products. In addition, Japan and South Korea have agreed to reduce energy dependency on Russia. The countries have also reinstated their commitment to promote global health security through joint research and data sharing.

The Camp David Summit comes at a time of an increasingly adverse threat environment in Northeast Asia, new leaderships in the two US allies, and rising domestic polarization within each of the three countries. As the war between Russia and Ukraine wages on, the threat perception in East Asia grows acute in over Chinese territorial assertions in the South and East China Seas and rising tensions in the Taiwan Straits. The region has been further destabilised by North Korea's expanding nuclear and missile programmes. However, the geopolitical environment has proven conducive for smoothening over the creases in the bilateral relationship between South Korea and Japan and facilitating trilateral security cooperation between the USA's Northeast Asian allies.

The US-South Korea- Japan trilateral cooperation has been further enabled by the emergence of new political leaderships in both Japan and South Korea, and especially the proactive leadership of Yoon Suk Yeol. However, this growing trilateral partnership remains most vulnerable to potential changes in the political leaderships at the national level in a scenario where there is an absence of adequate domestic support for these policies in the future. Such changes could threaten to impede or reverse the progress made in bilateral and trilateral relations through initiatives like the Camp Davis Summit. To safeguard and develop the trilateral partnership, the Camp David Summit was an attempt to institutionalise regular dialogue, improve information sharing and expand trilateral defence exercises. The significance of Camp David and the commitments made by the three countries will help make the partnership more resilient and harder to undo in the future.

The commitments made at the summit and explicit opposition to the actions of China and North Korea have elicited strong condemnation from the latter two countries. Beijing expressed "strong dissatisfaction and resolute

²³ The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States, [The White House](#), August 18, 2023

opposition" to the Camp David Summit accusing it of being "a deliberate attempt to sow discord between China and its neighbours". This was stated by Wang Wenbin, the Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of China²⁴. China urged the United States to "stop smearing China's image and harming China's interests" through revitalization of its alliance networks. North Korea characterised the developments in the Camp David Summit as a "nuclear war provocation". The commentary released by the North Korean news agency, KCNA, stated that if the agreements of the meeting are carried out then "the possibility of outbreak of a thermonuclear war on the Korean peninsula will become more realistic". In response to the recent developments, North Korea has also instructed its military to "take the initiative in offensive and overwhelming actions for a war"²⁵.

The three-way cooperation faces further challenges ahead. The commitment towards supply chain cooperation invites scepticism as firms of the three countries often compete in high-tech industries like semiconductors²⁶. Additionally, the lack of domestic consensus in South Korea over the rapprochement with Japan, given the unresolved historical disputes, remains a point of concern for the stability of this partnership. This aspect is further exacerbated by South Korea's potential entrapment in Japan's security issues with China, further destabilising Seoul's relations with Beijing. The vehement opposition against the Camp David Summit also ignites concerns about potential retaliation by China and North Korea.

Despite the challenges, the Camp David Summit will be etched in history as a monumental breakthrough for trilateral cooperation within the USA's alliance network in Northeast Asia. The expansive scope of the Camp David meeting extended beyond security cooperation to include commitments towards the provision of public goods in the Indo-Pacific. While the grouping is bound to face domestic and neighbourhood challenges, the meeting effectively signals an intent to cooperate and jointly address regional challenges, even in the face of bilateral differences.

²⁴ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on August 21, 2023, [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China](#), August 21, 2023.

²⁵ North Korea says Camp David agreements raise possibility of 'thermonuclear war', [Reuters](#), August 22, 2023

²⁶ The Camp David U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit: An Exchange among CSIS Japan and Korea Chairs, [CSIS](#), August 23, 2023

A New Trajectory for Thai Politics or An Echo Of The Past?

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

Thailand's future had been uncertain since the May 14 elections, wherein the "Move Forward Party" (MFP) became the largest party in the lower house of Thailand's Parliament. It was only after more than 100 days since the announcement of the election results and following two unsuccessful attempts by Pita Limjaroenrat leader of the "Move Forward Party" to become prime minister, that Srettha Thavisin of the populist Pheu Thai Party²⁷ (PTP) (which came in second after winning 141 seats as compared to MFP's 152 seats) became the new Prime Minister of Thailand.

The election victory of Pita Limjaroenrat and his political party, the MFP, was considered a game changer in Thai Politics, with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra acknowledging their success in harnessing the power and disruptive potential of social media in the election campaign. The unexpected victory of the MFP signalled a new progressive era in Thai politics, highlighting the popular desire for institutional reform. However, while Pita's progressive platform was attractive to many Thais, he faced resistance from the conservative members of the Senate and the House, who prevented him from becoming the prime minister, describing his repeated renomination "against parliamentary rules"²⁸. As per the military-imposed constitution of 2017, both houses of the parliament, including the unelected senators, jointly vote in the elections for the office of the prime minister. This arrangement is designed to safeguard the interests of the conservative military-backed rule.

After his second nomination was denied, Pita was suspended as an elected member of the House of Representatives by the Constitutional Court, citing undisclosed shareholding in iTV, a media company, which the 2017 Thai Constitution prohibits.²⁹ For many Thais, Pita's suspension was eerily like that of the now dissolved "Future Forward Party's" leader Thanathorn

²⁷ The Pheu Thai Party is a major Thai political party and is the third incarnation of a Thai political party founded by former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. It is the current majority ruling party of Thailand - ruling along with other parties in a coalition.

²⁸ Phoonphongphiphat, Apornrath. (August 16, 2023). "Thailand court rejects petition on Pita's renomination for PM" Nikkei Asia. Accessed from, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Thai-election/Thailand-court-rejects-petition-on-Pita-s-renomination-for-PM>

²⁹ (July 19, 2023). "Charter Court Suspends Pita". Bangkok Post. Accessed from, https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2614193/charter-court-suspends-pita?view_comment=1

Juangroongruangkit's disqualification in October 2020. As a political commentator put it aptly, "...It's the same drama using the same script, like what happened with Thanathorn and the Future Forward Party"³⁰. Even during Juangroongruangkit's case, having shares in a media company was cited as the reason for disqualification.

Owing to the constant political roadblocks against his victory, before his second bid, Pita Limjaroenrat said he would give way to a nominee from the PTP if his bid failed again. Despite being a novice in politics, and having taken the plunge into electoral politics only in 2022, Srettha was the frontrunner for the office of Prime Minister and eventually assumed office as Thailand's 30th prime minister. Although PTP had other nominees like Chaikasem Nitsiri, who was a former attorney general and the Pheu Thai's chief strategist, and daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, many felt that Srettha would be the more palatable choice for the military and the establishment. This view was borne out by subsequent events with Srettha getting 482 votes from the elected MPs and military-appointed senators, which was noticeably larger than the 375 votes required to become Prime Minister.

Strikingly, 152 of these votes came from the military-appointed Senate. Thailand's Senate is believed to be divided into two camps – Team Prayut associated with former prime minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha, who also took over as Prime Minister after former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, (Pheu Thai) demitted office and Team Prawit controlled by the seemingly more accommodating General Prawit, (leader of the PPRP). While it was expected that Team Prawit would back Srettha, it was the larger Team Prayut that backed his nomination. The 'inter-bloc 11-party coalition' is a peculiar one comprising 314 MPs from both sides of the political spectrum, including two with direct links to the military – the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP, affiliated with Gen. Prawit) and the United Thai Nation Party (UTNP affiliated with Gen. Prayut).

After an extended period of stalemate, during which other parties refused to accept MFP's staunch refusal to change its proposal to abolish Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code (also referred to as the *lèse-majesté* rule), which bars criticism of the monarchy, Pheu Thai prioritized forming a government over fulfilling its campaign promises. During his election campaign, Srettha had promised to decline the prime ministerial post if the military was part of the government. He stated, "The idea of me working with them (military-backed

³⁰ Regalado, Francesca. (July 20, 2023). "Thailand's pro-democracy coalition mulls next steps without Pita". Nikkei Asia. Accessed from, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Thai-election/>

parties) in the same government, sitting in the same Cabinet. I can't see myself doing that."³¹

Although the 11-party coalition agreed to consider Pheu Thai's policies like increasing the minimum wage to 600-baht and drafting a new constitution to serve the public's best interest, there is still scepticism about the effectiveness of their collaboration. Pheu Thai is generally seen as a moderate party that is not inclined towards significant institutional changes like MFP. Through an optimistic lens, by working with all the different political parties, there is a high chance that the collaboration might yield great results. However, the country's history mitigates against such an optimistic outlook, especially with Pheu Thai at the helm. Their history with the military has made them a historic adversary, with lawmakers advocating for a decrease in military influence in the past. Therefore, the question remains: Can they push for a new democratic-constitution with two military-backed parties holding 76 seats and benefitting significantly from the current one?

Pheu Thai's new alliance with the military has received considerable criticism. For almost two decades, Pheu Thai (including its previous iteration, the Thai Rak Thai Party) has been recognized as a party that advocates for democracy and economic equality in Thailand. However, the Shinawatra family, which has played a crucial role in Pheu Thai (including the Thai Rak Thai Party), has had a long and contentious history with the military. At the political level, the military was instrumental in ousting the governments of Thaksin and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra, in 2006 and 2014, respectively. General Prayut (UTNP) is known as a staunch opponent of Thaksin Shinawatra and led the military coup against the government of Yingluck Shinawatra and assumed control of the country. At the level of the civic society, the voters of the PTP have faced violence perpetrated by the military, as recently as 2022. Additionally, the Red Shirts who have supported TRTP's and its successor PTP's lawmakers and ideology also have a complicated history with a government that supports the military owing to the massacre of 2010 that remains fresh in their minds. Moreover, even Pheu Thai voters and lawmakers are angered by the new alliance, who say it has abandoned its "democratic values it is supposed to represent"³².

³¹ Munjal, Diksha. (August 27, 2023). Srettha Thavisin – With the Generals' Blessings. The Hindu. Accessed from, <https://www.thehindu.com/>

³² Ratcliffe, Rebecca. (August 22, 2023). Why Has Thaksin Shinawatra Returned To Thailand And What Happens Next? The Guardian. Accessed from, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/22/thaksin-shinawatra-thailand-what-happens-next>

However, with the two sides uniting in this unusual alliance, especially Pheu Thai collaborating with the military, there may be some deal behind these developments. The day Srettha was set to be voted into office, also saw the dramatic return of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra from his self-imposed 15-year exile. Thaksin is considered the founder of Pheu Thai and its' de-facto leader. While Thaksin has remained the power behind the throne for the Pheu Thai during his period of exile, and as such the dominant force in Thai politics, it is almost certain that his return was strategic and an outcome of negotiations and a clear understanding that he would either not be jailed on his return or face a shorter sentence. This was borne out on September 2, 2023, when Thailand's king commuted former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's eight-year prison sentence to one year. This development was carried in the royal gazette the day after Thaksin submitted a request for pardon.

In view of this development Thaksin is likely to play a more active role in Thailand's politics. However, he is more likely to influence political developments as the power behind the Pheu Thai government.

Despite Pheu Thai's recent partnership with the military, their alliance may face significant obstacles with Thaksin's increasing involvement in politics. Thaksin is not an ideologically rigid politician but he will remain a political force to be reckoned with. More than Thaksin's policies or beliefs, his image as a 'saviour of the poor' against a corrupt establishment will play a crucial role. Thaksin's legacy can serve as a driving force for those who desire institutional change in Thailand, particularly those who feel marginalized by the government.

Thailand is facing the reality of having a prime minister, Srettha Thavisin, who was not elected by the people, but is in power nevertheless. The political landscape is divided between the growing desire for institutional change amongst the people of Thailand and the military's insistence on maintaining their hold on power. This divide increases the likelihood of political unrest in the country, similar to what has happened in the past. Therefore, while there is a new trajectory for ideology in Thailand, the political game remains an echo of the past.



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org