



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



EAST ASIA EXPLORER SEPTEMBER 2023

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ABOUT US

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Cover Image:

U.S. President Joe Biden with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong in Hanoi, Vietnam on September 10, 2023. (Source: [President Biden/Official Twitter](#))

The 20th ASEAN-India Summit was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, with the attendance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and all the member states of ASEAN on September 7, 2023. Source: [Narendra Modi/Official Twitter](#)

Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese and President of the Philippines, Ferdinand R Marcos Jr. signed the 'Strategic Partnership' in Malacañang on September 8, 2023. Source: [Office of the President of the Philippines](#).

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The 20th ASEAN-India Summit: Key Takeaways

by

Prabir De

This September witnessed a flurry of activity in Jakarta and Delhi. While Delhi was the host of 18th G20 Summit on 9 – 10 September 2023, Jakarta organised the 43rd ASEAN Summit and related meetings under the Chairmanship of Indonesia with the theme “ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth” during 5 - 7 September 2023. The Indian Prime Minister attended the 20th ASEAN-India Summit on 7 September 2023. Leaders reviewed the progress made and reaffirmed their commitment to development and integration of the ASEAN region and further strengthened ASEAN’s relations with the rest of the world while continuing to serve as an epicenter of growth and prosperity for the region and beyond. They reiterated the importance of maintaining an ASEAN-centred, open, inclusive, transparent and resilient regional architecture that upheld international law and rules that strengthened ASEAN members’ engagement and cooperation with Dialogue Partners and external partners, including through existing ASEAN-led mechanisms, to promote peace, stability, security, and development.

Commencing in 2002 in Cambodia, the ASEAN-India annual summit process has completed an eventful 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 people-to-people contacts. ASEAN and India celebrated the 30th anniversary of their dialogue partnership last year and the relations between them have elevated to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).

Putting the aforesaid developments in perspective, let me briefly present the major outcomes of the 20th ASEAN-India Summit.

First, leaders accepted the adoption of the Annex to the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (PoA) to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2021-2025). This will certainly encourage ASEAN and India to implement the activities under the PoA, its Annex and other existing initiatives with ASEAN.

Second, the leaders welcomed the progress of the ‘Review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement’ (AITIGA), with the objective to make the AITIGA more user-friendly, simple, and trade facilitative for businesses in order to

increase ASEAN-India trade as well as to support sustainable and inclusive growth. Leaders encouraged the AITIGA Joint Committee to intensify their efforts in the Review of the ATIGA and tasked them to complete the revision in 2025.

Third, ASEAN and India adopted the ASEAN-India Joint Leaders' Statement on Strengthening Cooperation on Food Security in Times of Crisis that will complement ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Response to Crises, adopted by ASEAN Leaders during the 43rd ASEAN Summit on 5 September 2023. Leaders encouraged ASEAN and India to strengthen and deepen collaboration in the priority areas under the Medium-Term Plan of Action for ASEAN-India Cooperation in Agriculture and Forestry (2021-2025), including on food security and resilience of agri-food systems. In this connection, leaders emphasised the need to promote sustainable agriculture through India's support in the implementation of the ASEAN Regional Guidelines on Sustainable Agriculture, focusing on promoting the use of digital technology and reducing the use of harmful chemicals in agricultural production. ASEAN and India welcomed the convening of the ASEAN-India Millet Festival to raise awareness about millets among the ASEAN Member States.

Fourth, ASEAN and India welcomed collaboration in the area of FinTech, in order to build financial connectivity between India and ASEAN through digital payment, with a view of inclusion of local communities and expansion of opportunities for businesses, in bridging the divide across these sectors. Leaders noted India's proposals on the establishment of an ASEAN-India Annual Financial Dialogue and a collaboration to facilitate digital payments connectivity within ASEAN and between ASEAN and India. In this context, ASEAN welcomed India's announcement of a 'Fund for Digital Future'.

Fifth, ASEAN and India took a unified call on the South China Sea. Both recognized the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, friendship, prosperity and cooperation. Both emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). They said that failure to do so could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea. Both underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety and committed to maintaining and promoting an environment conducive to the negotiation of the COC that is consistent with International Law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

Sixth, leaders encouraged ASEAN and India to exert concrete efforts to materialise 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", which is based on the shared principles between AOIP and India's IPOI. Leaders also welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Maritime Cooperation as a means to explore and promote maritime cooperation between ASEAN and India.

To conclude, the last twenty years of ASEAN-India summits present energetic engagements between India and ASEAN, which have transformed the relationships in the realm of Indo-Pacific. India has carved out its place in ASEAN and so also ASEAN in India and the relationship between them has become truly irreversible. The 20th ASEAN-India Summit has taken significant decisions adding further momentum to 'ASEAN-India relations and the Indo-Pacific'.

Japan's National Security Policies

by

Biren Nanda

In December 2022, Japan released three documents: a National Security Strategy (2) a National Defense Strategy and (3) a Defense Buildup Program¹. According to these documents, the three pillars of Japan's national security policy are (1) to strengthen Japan's own architecture for national defense (2) to further reinforce the joint deterrence and response capability of the US-Japan Alliance and (3) to reinforce collaboration with like-minded countries.

The significance of these documents owes itself to the fact that the US–Japan defense alliance is entering a new phase – one in which warfighting capabilities and combat readiness have assumed greater importance. The imperative for Japan to play this enhanced role in alliance security arrangements has come at a time when Japan is in the midst of a long period of economic stagnation.

The National Security Strategy² – Japan's second ever, after 2013 – provides strategic guidance in a range of areas including diplomacy, defense, economic security, technology, cyber, maritime, space, intelligence, ODA and energy.

The National Defense Strategy is a ten-year program guidance for building and maintaining critical defense capabilities needed to support the NSS. These guidelines together with outcomes of the US-Japan summit held in Washington DC in January 2023, reflect what the Japanese government must do for enhancing deterrence in a rapidly deteriorating security environment.

The new NSS asserts that China "is the greatest strategic challenge". It also notes that Russian aggression against Ukraine has violated the "rules that shape the international order". Since Japan faces a grave threat from China and North Korea's air and missile defense systems, Japan will develop her own counterstrike capabilities. The counterstrikes will, however, be responsive and not preemptive. The NSS admits that Japan has underinvested in key defense-related areas including munitions and parts stockpiles, cyber and space capabilities. Greater financial outlays will be needed to realize these goals and

1 Tokuchi Hideshi. (June 23, 2023) Japan's New National Security Strategy and Contribution to a networked Regional Security Architecture. CSIS
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/japans-new-national-security-strategy-and-contribution-networked-regional-security>

2 Lff and Hornung. (March, 27, 2023) Japan's New Security Policies. Brookings

there is a pledge to increase the annual defense budget from US \$ 40 billion at present to US \$ 67 billion in 2027.

Japan has also released a Defense White Paper 2023³. The paper describes China as the “greatest security challenge”, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a “serious violation of international law” and North Korea as an “imminent threat”. The paper also asserts that Japan has to strengthen its military and work closely with South Korea to preserve regional stability.

Japan will make utmost efforts to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific by deepening cooperation with alliance partners. The FOIP – spelt out at length by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in an address to the Indian Council of World Affairs on March 20, 2023, comprises of four pillars : (1) furthering principles for peace and rules for prosperity. (2) addressing challenges in the Indo-Pacific (3) building multilayered connectivity and (4) extending efforts for security and use of the sea to the air.

Meanwhile, Chinese forces continue with their assertions in Japanese waters off the Senkaku Islands – there have been 23 incursions in the period January 1 to September 15, 2023. The Taiwanese Ministry of Defense detected 103 Chinese military aircraft, and nine naval vessels since mid-September this year.

Perhaps, with a view on the deterioration security environment in the Senkaku Islands and the Taiwan Straits, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has appointed a new defense minister⁴ -Minoru Kihara – who has a track record of promoting closer ties between Tokyo and Taiwan. The appointment was announced on September 13, 2023. Kihara was formerly the Secretary General of the Japan-Taiwan inter-parliamentary group and visited Taiwan with a Parliamentary delegation on August 22, 2023. He has also previously served as a junior minister at the Ministry of Defense.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/japans-new-security-policies-a-long-road-to-full-implementation/>

³ (September 15, 2023) Defense of Japan Report. Japanese Ministry of Defense. USNI News <https://news.usni.org/2023/09/15/2023-defense-of-japan-report>

⁴ Yang William (September 18, 2023) Increased Chinese Military Maneuvers Prompt Japan to Appoint New Defense Personnel . VOA News <https://www.voanews.com/a/increased-chinese-military-maneuvers-prompt-japan-to-appoint-new-defense-personnel-7272630.html>

The US Vietnam 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'

by
Anshita Shukla

On the 10th anniversary of the US-Vietnam comprehensive partnership, U.S. President Joe Biden arrived in Hanoi on September 10, skipping the ASEAN and East Asia Summits, to announce the upgradation of bilateral relations between the two countries. The two-level upgradation to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" is the highest ranked in Vietnam's diplomatic taxonomy – a status accorded up until now only to China, Russia, India, and South Korea. President Biden defined this as a partnership between "critical partners at a critical time".

The meeting produced a Joint Statement signed by U.S. President Biden and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong - unlike the previous agreement signed between the Presidents of the two countries. The Joint Statement enumerated ten areas to deepen cooperation - political and diplomatic relations; economic trade and investment cooperation; science, technology, and digital cooperation; climate, energy, environment, and health cooperation; addressing war legacies; culture and people-to-people ties; defence and security; promotion and protection of human rights; and coordination on regional and global issues⁵.

A key focus area of cooperation between the two countries is to build capacity and support resilient semiconductor supply chains. The two countries have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on Semiconductor Supply Chains, Workforce and Ecosystem Development to "expand the capacity of semiconductor ecosystem in Vietnam". The US government has announced a \$2 million initial seed funding to support the launch of semiconductor workforce development initiatives. The two countries have announced their intention to launch the 'Developing Electronics and leading Technology Advancement Partnerships Network' (DELTA) and the 'Vietnam- U.S. Science and Technology Agreement for Research' (VUSTAR).

Amongst other developments highlighted in the Joint Statement, the two countries have agreed to institute an annual dialogue between Vietnam's Minister of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Secretary of State. A 'Law Enforcement and Security Dialogue' has been established by the leaders to strengthen cooperation between law enforcement and criminal justice agencies in the two countries. The Joint Statement noted Vietnam's official request to the US to

⁵ Joint Leaders' Statement: Elevating United States-Vietnam Relations To A Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, [The White House](#), September 11, 2023.

review its market economy status. Various new and expanded initiatives in the aviation industry, semiconductor supply chains, travel and tourism, and energy infrastructure have been launched between U.S. and Vietnamese businesses.

This historic upgradation of ties is the result of a series of persistent diplomatic efforts by the United States to enhance its relations with Vietnam. During the previous US administration, the first articulation of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' by former President Trump was made in Da Nang in 2017. Hanoi hosted the second summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in February 2019. The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo touted Vietnam as a model for North Korea to open and modernize its economy⁶. Under the new administration, a series of high-level visits to Vietnam were made by senior members of the US administration including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Vice President Kamala Harris in 2021, Secretary of the State Antony Blinken in April 2023, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in July 2023, followed by US President Biden. Vietnam has been characterised as a like-minded country in the USA's Indo-Pacific strategy and is a member of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

The two countries are set to benefit from expanding cooperation through the upgradation of bilateral ties. Despite being the second largest trading partner, the US was only the eighth largest source of foreign investment in the first half of 2023. The upgradation of ties is intended to bridge this gap as it will help US firms 'to boost their investment plans in sectors such as semiconductor manufacturing, and offshore wind and liquefied natural gas (LNG)'⁷ Through technology transfer and training, Washington can help build up industrial know-how and support the growth and diversification of Hanoi's economy⁸. While for the United States, Vietnam serves as a potentially large defence market amidst the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Vietnam can also support US efforts to decouple with China by providing an alternate manufacturing hub and a future semiconductor manufacturing powerhouse.

The growing friction with China in the South China Sea has been a catalyst in the elevation of US-Vietnam relations. Vietnam shares a land border with China and a long coastline in the South China Sea, leaving the country vulnerable to China's expansionist activities and the militarisation of maritime features claimed by Vietnam in South China Sea. In June 2023, the Chinese vessel

⁶ Pompeo holds out Vietnam model for N. Korea, [Yonhap News Agency](#), July 9, 2018.

⁷ Vietnam's diplomatic upgrade is in line with US expectations, [Economic Intelligence](#), September 14, 2023.

⁸ Hanoi's American Hedge, [Foreign Affairs](#), September 11, 2023.

Xiang Yang Hong 10 and its entourage sailed the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Vietnam for a month⁹. Ahead of President Biden's visit to Vietnam, a Chinese Coast Guard vessel fired a high-pressured water cannon at Vietnamese fishing boats in the contested Paracel Islands on August 28, leaving two injured¹⁰. The tipping point in the relations was the new "standard map" released by China in late August¹¹. that reflected most of the South China Sea as a part of China.

Despite these friction points, China and Vietnam continue to maintain a multi-dimensional relationship. The countries share ideological and political solidarity, stemming from similar systems of government in Hanoi and Beijing. In the economic realm, China is the largest trading partner and export destination of Vietnam; and the third biggest foreign investor in Vietnam¹². Vietnam relies heavily on imports of critical components/intermediary goods and raw materials from China¹³. Through its control over dams upstream of the Mekong River, Beijing possesses the ability to regulate water supply to Vietnam. Beijing is, thus an important calculation in Vietnam's foreign policy decisions.

In the face of Hanoi's economic and geopolitical relations with China, the upgradation of relations with the US reinforces Vietnam's commitment towards a "multidirectional foreign policy". The country defines this foreign policy approach as "developing diverse and dynamic bilateral relations with all countries", congruent with its four no principles¹⁴. This is evident through Vietnam's close diplomatic communication with China to not antagonise its neighbour while upgrading its relations with the US. Ahead of President Biden's visit to Hanoi, the Chinese Communist Party's international department head Liu Jianchao met with Vietnam's ruling Communist Party leader Nguyen Phu Trong to "solidify their mutual political trust"¹⁵. Vietnam also continues to be heavily reliant upon Russia for the import of defence equipment and training, despite recent efforts for diversification. Despite US sanctions, Hanoi plans on purchasing a cache of Russian weapons, as reported

⁹ Chinese ships leave Vietnam waters after Hanoi protest, [Reuters](#), June 6, 2023.

¹⁰ Chinese Coast Guard water cannon attack on Vietnamese fishing boat leaves 2 injured, [Radio Free Asia](#), August 31, 2023.

¹¹ Vietnam join India, others in opposing new China map; rejects Beijing claims in East Sea, [The Economic Times](#), September 1, 2023.

¹² Vietnamese PM's visit to China: Vietnam pursues bamboo diplomacy, [Times of India](#), June 29, 2023.

¹³ Vietnam's Trade Structure and Challenges for Sustainable Growth, [Mitsui & Co.](#), July 2023.

¹⁴ Assessing the Bolstered U.S.-Vietnam Relationship, [Council on Foreign Relations](#), September 11, 2023.

¹⁵ China boosts 'political trust' with Vietnam ahead of Biden visit, [Reuters](#), September 6, 2023.

by the New York Times¹⁶. The country has signalled its intention to also elevate relations with Indonesia, Australia, and Singapore.

In conclusion, the upgraded partnership does reflect a closer strategic alignment between Vietnam with Washington. However, it also represents Hanoi's efforts at strengthening complex relations with multiple partners based on mutual interests to face rising challenges. The future of the US-Vietnam partnership rests in the hands of the leaders in the two countries. They must not only steer this relationship forward for mutual gain, but also successfully navigate points of concern between the two countries such as human rights, distinct political systems, and the war time legacy issues. The China factor will continue to loom large over the US-Vietnam relations. How China responds to the recent developments and how Vietnam chooses to address and balance its multi-directional partnerships, will be questions of critical concern for the future of this relationship.

¹⁶ Vietnam Chases Secret Russian Arms Deal, Even as It Deepens U.S. Ties, [The New York Times](#), September 9, 2023.

Leveraging the Strategic Value of Philippines – Australia relations

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

The Indo-Pacific - a geopolitical construct - is a complex region with diverse state capacities and overlapping security arrangements. Maximising the opportunities for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, set against the backdrop of changing regional power relations, is the *raison d'être* of present-day strategic policy. Recently, the Philippines has been proactive in recognising and responding to this power dynamic, shifting its focus towards safeguarding and bolstering its security environment. Therefore, it came to no one's surprise when Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, visited Manila - the first visit by an Australian leader in 20 years to Manila – the two countries decided to enhance their bilateral ties from a 'Comprehensive Partnership' to a 'Strategic Partnership' on September 8, 2023.¹⁷ This move will significantly broaden their cooperation in a range of areas and further strengthen their strategic alliance.

The new Strategic Partnership between the two countries aims to boost collaboration across multiple domains, including political cooperation, defence, food security, climate change and education. The joint declaration issued during the visit stated that the new strategic partnership is established based on "shared democratic values and a common vision for the region where strategic agency is freely exercised, and sovereignty is upheld"¹⁸. After signing the declaration, the President of the Philippines, Marcos Jr said this move is "a very, very important development" for both the Philippines and Australia.¹⁹ Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese echoed similar sentiments during the first visit by an Australian leader in 20 years to Manila, he emphasised that the new strategic partnership aims to establish an enduring framework for

¹⁷ Joint Declaration on a Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Philippines and the Commonwealth of Australia". September 9, 2023. Accessed from, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-declaration-strategic-partnership-between-republic-philippines-and-commonwealth>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Office of the President of the Philippines, Presidential Communications Office. "PH, Australia elevate ties with new 'Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership'" (September 8, 2023). Accessed from, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/ph-australia-elevate-ties-with-new-joint-declaration-on-strategic-partnership/

closer cooperation with the Philippines, “one of Australia’s key partners in Southeast Asia, based on a strong alignment of strategic interests”.²⁰

Key Features of the Partnership

A crucial feature of the new Strategic Partnership has been the emphasis on the Defence and Security cooperation to make “meaningful contributions to regional and global security including by working with other regional partners”. The two countries reiterated their shared interests in building prosperity and their shared vision of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ by preserving its peace. The Philippines’ growing security concerns of the coercion in the South China Sea (known as the West Philippine Sea in the Philippines) and conflict over Taiwan, has made China a threat that just cannot be ignored, pushing it to make security arrangements with other nations like Japan and Australia. The previous administration under President Rodrigo Duterte veered away from its traditional allies like the United States and instead moved closer to China, with President Duterte calling China a ‘good friend’ despite the numerous conflicts in the South China Sea. At the time, Australia was concerned that the Philippines would not adhere to a rules-based regional order and go against America’s role as East Asia’s strategic off-shore balancer, which would be against Australia’s interest. As a result, the security ties between Philippines and Australia stagnated as the government of Philippines focused on appeasing China.

It's worth noting that despite facing challenges to their relations, the two countries successfully cooperated by signing a security agreement that aimed to build capacity and address the threat of terrorism. However, it was clear that under Duterte, the focus was China. Marcos Jr.’s administration intends to reverse this trend and project regional national power and its focus upon its strategic positioning. The increasing frequency of military drills with nations like the United States, Australia and Japan have underlined this trend.. Just last month, in August, the largest of the ‘first major drills’ was conducted near the South China Sea²¹.

In light of this new agreement, during the press conference after the signing of the joint declaration, Prime Minister Albanese declared that the two countries would hold defence ministers’ meetings annually. The Enhanced Defence

²⁰ “A Stronger Partnership between Australia and the Philippines”. (September 8, 2023). Prime Minister of Australia. Accessed from, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/stronger-partnership-between-australia-and-philippines>

²¹ Lopez, Ditas. “Philippines and Australia conduct Joint Drills Near Disputed Area”. (August 21, 2023). Accessed from, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-21/philippines-australia-conduct-joint-drills-near-disputed-sea?embedded-checkout=true>

Cooperation Program (2019) and the visiting forces agreement with Manila underpin Australia's defence engagement. While under the previous administration, the security alliance between the countries was not the strongest, the defence cooperation has been growing by leaps and bounds in the last year under Marcos. The Philippines is determined to prevent China from laying a claim on the waters that rightfully belong to them. Significantly, at the time the joint declaration was signed, the Philippines was completing a re-supply mission for troops stationed to its outpost at Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed Spratly Islands despite facing harassment from Chinese vessels, which included the Chinese Coast Guard.²²

The deepening relationship between the Philippines and Australia presents a promising avenue for addressing mutual challenges and responding to joint threats. The main driver behind strengthening ties between the two nations is their shared concern about China's increasing influence in the region. Given their proximity in the Indo-Pacific, cooperation between these two nations is rapidly becoming a critical priority, especially as the involvement of the United States in the region remains uncertain.

Nonetheless, another important feature of the Partnership that shows it is heading in the right direction is its broad-ranging economic scope that expands beyond security concerns. Among the deals cited in the declaration, several aimed at the practical enmeshment between the Philippines and Australia, such as work and holiday visa arrangements to boost two-way tourism, technical exchanges, and the doubling slots for Filipinos in the Australia Awards educational scholarship program. These deals address the lack of an economic force that binds the two countries, which has been a significant issue in the Philippine-Australia relationship.

Conclusion

While this agreement is just the latest in ways that the Philippines and Australia attempt to leverage their strategic value in the Indo-Pacific, only time will tell if this partnership will deliver the desired results or be shelved under changing political attitudes. The Philippines's dependability has been questioned in the past, especially under the previous administration that called into question Manila's security arrangements with its traditional allies like the United States. Nevertheless, the new Strategic Partnership shows that Australia-Philippines

²² Mahadzhir, Dzirhan. Chinese Warships Shadow Canadian, U.S., Japanese Warships in East China Sea, the Philippines Resupply Second Thomas Shoal. (September 9, 2023). Accessed from, <https://news.usni.org/2023/09/08/chinese-warships-shadow-canadian-u-s-japanese-warships-in-east-china-sea-the-philippines-resupply-second-thomas-shoal>

relations have reached new heights, including cooperation on maritime security and economic linkages. This partnership has the potential to bring great outcomes for both countries and the region in the future.

Outcomes of the 43rd ASEAN Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit (EAS)

by

Jayantika Rao T.V.

The recently concluded 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit and 18th East Asia Summit was presided over by the Indonesian President Joko Widodo on September 5 and September 7, respectively. The meetings took place amidst geopolitical challenges and rising uncertainties within the bloc. During the Summit, President Jokowi emphasised the importance of promoting peace and inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific region and encouraged participants to shift away from confrontation.²³ The summit resulted in the adoption of ninety documents and several tangible agreements with dialogue partners.

43rd ASEAN Leaders' Summit

Of the various documents of the 43rd ASEAN leaders Summit, the 10-page declaration titled "ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN as an Epicentrum of Growth"²⁴ was of great significance. The declaration reaffirmed the importance of 'ASEAN Centrality' and 'unity in ASEAN's engagement with external partners through ASEAN-led mechanisms'. The leaders of the region reiterated the importance of a multilateral approach to ensuring continued peace, security, stability and prosperity. They committed to strengthening the region's position as a hub of growth by addressing global challenges and unlocking its full potential. To achieve this, they agreed to strengthen ASEAN's resilience against future shocks, leverage new growth drivers and embrace a forward-looking and future-proofed agenda. To achieve these goals, the leaders agreed on various commitments, such as developing the ASEAN Local Currency Transaction (LCT) Framework, strengthening and creating non-discriminatory global supply chains, implementing the Framework for the ASEAN Industrial project-based initiative, operationalizing the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific', and many more.

²³ "President Jokowi Calls for "A Theater of Peace and Inclusivity" in Indo Pacific". (September 7, 2023). Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia. Accessed from, <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-jokowi-calls-for-a-theater-of-peace-and-inclusivity-in-indo-pacific/>

²⁴ "ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN As an Epicentrum of Growth". (September 5, 2023). ASEAN. Accessed from, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ALD-Epicentrum-of-Growth-merged.pdf>

ASEAN also released the “Jakarta Declaration on ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth”²⁵, which boldly outlines the commitments of the organization and its member states to ensure that ASEAN remains an epicentre of growth in the Indo-Pacific and beyond and is relevant to its people. The commitments include the unwavering promotion and advancement of human rights in the region, maintaining peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea per international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. ASEAN also pledged to preserve the Southeast Asian regions as a ‘Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone’ (NWFZ) and to work with complete determination towards upgrading the ASEAN Trade in Good Agreement (ATIGA) and fully and effectively implement the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement.

The ASEAN Summit also issued the “ASEAN Leaders’ Review and Decision on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus”²⁶ which reviewed the progress of the ‘Five-Point Consensus’ in relation to Myanmar. The statement stated that the primary solution to the political crisis in Myanmar would be the ‘Five-Point Consensus’, and ASEAN would continue to work with all relevant parties in Myanmar to establish trust and find a peaceful solution to the crisis. It was also decided to uphold the decision of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit regarding Myanmar’s non-political representation at the ASEAN summit, and Myanmar was denied the ASEAN Chairmanship for 2026 and it was passed on to the Philippines. Furthermore, it was agreed to enhance cooperation between ASEAN Member States neighbouring Myanmar in an effort to address the crisis in Myanmar and its impact. Notably, for the first time, the leaders directly blamed the Myanmar military for the recent intensification of the conflict. The statement calls upon the Myanmar Armed Forces, as well as all other parties involved to “de-escalate violence and stop targeted attacks on civilians, houses and public facilities, such as schools, hospitals, markets, churches, and monasteries.”

18th EAS Summit

The 18th East Asia Summit (EAS) leaders released a statement titled “The East Asia Summit Leaders’ Statement on Maintaining and Promoting the Region as

²⁵ “Jakarta Declaration On ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum Of Growth”. (September 5, 2023). ASEAN. Accessed from, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/DECLARATION-OF-ASEAN-CONCORD-IV.pdf>

²⁶ ASEAN Leaders’ Review and Decision on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus. (September 5, 2023). ASEAN. Accessed from, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/01.FINAL-ASEAN-LEADERS-REVIEW-AND-DECISION-ON-THE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-5PC-1.pdf>

an Epicentrum of Growth"²⁷. In this statement, the EAS leaders agreed on 29 points to support maintaining and promoting the region as a hub of economic growth. Some of the key points were as follows.

1. Boosting economic resilience, regional integration, and inclusive digital transformation in the digital economy.
2. Enhance energy security through various pathways and supporting low carbon economies in ASEAN.
3. Strengthen regional and global supply chain connectivity to make supply chains more resilient.
4. Strengthen the rules-based, non-discriminatory, inclusive, sustainable and transparent multilateral trading system (MTS), with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at its core.
5. Advance regional maritime cooperation through ASEAN-led mechanism while increasing efforts to develop maritime connectivity in line with and in support of the vision and goals of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025.
6. Promote peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation, and other internationally lawful uses of the seas, and unimpeded lawful maritime commerce.
7. Support ASEAN's continuous efforts in the mainstreaming and implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) through the implementation of the East Asia Summit Plan of Action (2024-2028).

The leaders also agreed to promote self-restraint, the non-use of force or the threat to use force against another states consistent with the UN Charter.

The EAS Chairman's Statement²⁸ reiterated decisions by the leaders and detailed world challenges. It urged dialogue and denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula, reaffirmed freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and rejected nuclear weapons use in the region. Regarding Ukraine, national positions were reiterated. On Myanmar, ASEAN's 5PC implementation was reiterated for de-escalation of the political crisis.

²⁷ "The East Asia Summit Leaders' Statement on Maintaining and Promoting the Region as an Epicentrum of Growth". (September 7, 2023). ASEAN. Accessed from, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/EAS-Leaders-Statement-on-Maintaining-and-Promoting-the-Region-as-an-Epicentrum-of-Growth-FINAL.pdf>

²⁸ "Chairman's Statement Of The 18th East Asia Summit". (September 7, 2023). ASEAN. Accessed from, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Final-Chairmans-Statement-of-the-18th-East-Asia-Summit-.pdf>

Conclusion

After examining the documents from both the 43rd ASEAN Leaders' Summit and the 18th East Asia Summit (EAS), it is clear that both meetings have outlined several goals for regional cooperation in terms of the economy, politics and global health. These include ASEAN Connectivity, the digital economy, the blue economy, addressing the global health crisis and AOIP. While there was agreement on various political issues such as the ongoing crisis in Myanmar and the growing uncertainty in the South China Sea, member states still have differing opinions, particularly regarding the South China Sea. Given these conditions, it remains to be seen how Indonesia's goal for ASEAN to lead the region's sustainable economic growth will be achieved in the long term.



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