



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Global Security Hub

NATO ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC?

**A Three-Country Case Study:
India, Indonesia & the Philippines**

Dr. Jagannath Panda and Richard Ghiasy

Publication Credits

Publisher

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom
European Dialogue
Avenue de Cortenbergh 71 Kortenberglaan
1000 Bruxelles / Brussel
Belgium

 /freiheit.org/eu

 /fnf.europe

 /fnfeurope

 /@fnfeurope

 /company/fnf-europe

 /fnf_europe

Editors

Jeroen Dobber, Theresa Winter
and Christopher David
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

Authors

Dr. Jagannath Panda and Richard Ghiasy

Contact

Phone: +32 2 282 09 30

Fax: +32 2 282 0931

Email: brussels@freiheit.org

Date

June 2025

Notes on using this publication

This publication is an information offer of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom. It is available free of charge and not intended for sale. It may not be used by parties or election workers for the purpose of election advertising during election campaigns (federal, state or local government elections, or European Parliament elections).

Licence

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Acknowledgment

Following our desk research, we gathered insights from six experts (two each) from India, Indonesia, and the Philippines through a virtual workshop we hosted. We want to thank sincerely: Captain Sarabjeet Singh Parmar (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow, *Council for Strategic and Defense Research* (CSDR); Dr. Ian Montratama, Lecturer, International Relations Study Program, Universitas Pertamina; Prof. Aries A. Arugay, Chair, Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines; Major General Mandip Singh, SM, VSM, Distinguished Fellow, *United Service Institution of India* (USI); Pieter Pandie, Researcher, International Relations Department, *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS); and Prof. Renato De Castro, International Studies Department, De La Salle University. Moreover, we consulted incumbent NATO staff and former staff, specifically Gerlinde Niehus, former Deputy Director of Defence and Security Cooperation. Their insights substantially aided this policy brief, and in respect of their discretion, their insights are integrated without direct reference.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude in particular to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom's Brussels Office, which sponsored this policy paper, specifically to Jeroen Dobber, Theresa Winter, and Christopher David.

We wish this policy brief encourages more debates and insights on the opportunities and limitations for NATO engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Richard Ghiasy and Dr. Jagannath Panda

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
INTRODUCTION	6
CASE 1: NATO & INDIA – A TIMELY YET UNATTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP.	7
CASE 2: NATO & INDONESIA – NEUTRALITY STILL RULES THE ROOST?	9
CASE 3: NATO & PHILIPPINES – THE BUCK STOPS WITH THE US?	11
CONCLUSION: AN INDO-PACIFIC FUTURE AVEC UN NATO LIMITÉ?	13
ENDNOTES	14
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	17

Executive Summary

Notwithstanding some overlap in NATO's core interests with India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, particularly deterrence and crisis prevention, in its current incarnation, direct NATO cooperation with these three pivotal countries in the Indo-Pacific is difficult to reconcile. The Indo-Pacific strategic landscape and the unpredictability characterizing the second Trump administration make Indo-Pacific partners hedge even more, such that most resident actors oppose any factor or actor that may destabilize the region. This is reflected by India and Indonesia's disinterest in direct traditional security cooperation with NATO. Both countries indicate the Indo-Pacific's barometer vis-à-vis any NATO engagement more closely than the Philippines – whose special security relationship with the US is already ample for its security needs. At the core of (further) NATO engagement, beyond close cooperation with the IP4 in the Indo-Pacific, lie three problems:

- 1) Several of the Indo-Pacific's current and future perceived threats and challenges are China-centric. In contrast, NATO is (and has been) Russia-centric, and most Indo-Pacific actors, including India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, do not consider Russia a security threat. Moreover, NATO's primary theatre and objective is the security of the Trans-Atlantic, not the Indo-Pacific. Even the latest 2022 NATO Strategic Concept considers China a challenge, not a threat. There is thus **a mismatch between perceptions and (geographic) priorities** in the two theaters;
- 2) A history of colonialism and post-colonial intervention in the Indo-Pacific has left states such as India and Indonesia with a high degree **of wariness** to cooperate with NATO. Both have a strong historical tradition of non-alignment, and their foreign policy doctrines oppose collective security. Even the Philippines, which has opted for hardline deterrence vis-à-vis China with strong support from the US, its allies, and partners, does not embrace direct hard security cooperation with NATO. The Philippines can justify its near-sacrosanct longstanding collaboration with the US to its citizens and fellow ASEAN members, but not direct NATO cooperation. There is distrust (India, Indonesia) and a palpable fear of escalation (India, Indonesia, and the Philippines). Indeed, in much of the Indo-Pacific, NATO has **a perception problem**, and there are prevailing perceptions that NATO provoked the Ukraine war (Indonesia and India) and may emulate it in Asia; and
- 3) The three country case studies in this report demonstrate their strong emphasis on peace, stability, economic development, and positive relations with China despite its more assertive foreign policies and substantial maritime claims. They fear that direct hard security cooperation with NATO will destabilize ties with China – a geographic reality and economic behemoth.

Of course, there are also inherent limitations within NATO to expand cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, from the geographic restrictions of the 1949 Treaty to divergences in views on NATO engagement among some of its more prominent members.

However, this does not mean that NATO could not consider stepwise inroads, and NATO's partnership with the IP4 shows that closer cooperation prospects are not unattainable. Importantly, military strategies tend to develop based on (perceived) threats. China is not amply an existential threat to NATO, nor most Indo-Pacific residents – although maritime and terrestrial neighbors to China – Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines – are indeed highly wary of China's more muscular foreign policy and the prospect of a more China-favorable balance of power. Rather than focusing on China and Russia, both actors with whom most of the Indo-Pacific prefers good and stable ties, NATO should consider the non-targeting of specific countries and crisis prevention and non-traditional security as the common denominator. Even in these realms, NATO will need to put in more effort to convince the Indo-Pacific and win over hearts and minds, as existing and prospective security cooperation modalities with NATO members from the EU or the US are often considered just as rewarding and safe(r). Moreover, in light of evolving US foreign policy under the second Trump administration since January 2025, concerns over NATO cohesion and long-term US commitment to the alliance have grown, possibly reinforcing Indo-Pacific skepticism toward formal NATO engagements. Even if US policy content has not changed much, the perception of US **reliability** may have shifted, especially for countries like India and Indonesia.

Focusing on issues where common interests do not exist with the three countries and on matters requiring NATO to change deeply ingrained core principles – such as multi/non-alignment and cooperative security in the case of India and Indonesia, and the Philippines's preference to continue with the US rather than NATO – will be counterproductive. Instead, by focusing on the following four avenues and shared interests, NATO may build meaningful partnerships without appearing intrusive or antagonistic to national and regional dynamics:

First, ask and discuss internally and with the Indo-Pacific resident countries, such as this brief's three studied countries more profoundly **what precisely NATO's role in and added value** to the Indo-Pacific should be considering NATO-internal and Indo-Pacific-specific parameters. NATO needs to work harder on its perception problem and the **narrative of 'connecting tissue' binding the Trans-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters** to improve perceptions in the Indo-Pacific. Fostering the so-called 'rules-based order' is too lofty a goal. India and Indonesia are proponents of a more equitable international

order, not the unequivocal sustenance of the current order. Nor will too specific micro initiatives work. The objective is to identify a meso-level narrative of shared challenges and operate at that bandwidth: that narrative could be crisis prevention so that peace and economic development can be fostered, common denominators that, in turn, require a degree of deterrence capacity building.

Second, at the nexus of NATO's three core tasks – deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security – and Indo-Pacific partnerships, there is a void: How precisely do Indo-Pacific partnerships such as India, Indonesia, and the Philippines fit in? This void likely exists because **NATO does not have a (public) specific strategy for Russia, China, or even the Indo-Pacific.** Without a crisis prevention strategy, cooperative security tactics will not be effective. Involving the three case study countries and other Indo-Pacific countries in developing such strategies may gain their trust and result in more realistic and regionally catered outcomes.

Third, cooperation and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific should be considered **more strategically and as an essential task, not just a side task.** At least initially, partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, and with these three countries, need to be more based on what NATO can do for them instead of how they can contribute to transatlantic security. NATO must also clearly convey the benefits it offers in comparison to collaborating with a less risky perceived EU and NATO member state can-

not. NATO must look at the Indo-Pacific through the Indo-Pacific lens, consider historical and geopolitical (regional) sensitivities rather than the European security lens, and reconcile with different perceptions and prioritizations of security.

And fourth, by and large, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines are **very receptive to cooperation on non-traditional security** challenges, particularly climate change and disaster relief, cyber and space, counter-terrorism, and maritime security, especially sea lines of communication. These domains are all possible entry points. There is also a strong interest in learning from NATO capabilities and technologies: while the latter is more sensitive, though there is leeway, the prior can be addressed by recurring dialogues at multiple levels, and inter alia, greater enrollment of Indian, Indonesian, and Philippine officers, civilians, and diplomats at the NATO Defense College.

These four avenues, which highlight the global nature of challenges, may gradually improve local perceptions and pave the way for closer alignment on crisis prevention, and should have trickle-down effects. Nevertheless, it will be a prolonged exercise—one that may need to be led by individual members and involve a completely different cooperation dynamic from the Trans-Atlantic. Considering the more isolationist foreign policy of the US and its bilateral preferences, now might be a timely moment for Europe to consider taking a greater lead in non-military NATO engagement with the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

In 2022, soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, East Asian actors Japan and South Korea, along with Australia and New Zealand, attended the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) Summit for the first time, increasing speculations about NATO's engagement (and perhaps to a possible enlargement) in the Indo-Pacific.¹ Two years on, in October 2024, these partners from the Indo-Pacific – NATO partners also known as the *Indo-Pacific Four* (IP4) – participated for the first time in a NATO Defense Ministerial meeting.² The agenda included not only expanding NATO's cooperation with the IP4, but also the regional and global impact of the varying degrees of support provided by China, Iran, and North Korea to Russia for the Ukraine war.

NATO's current intent leaves little to doubt: in the divisive, complex, and strained geopolitical landscape following the Ukraine invasion, NATO and its high-level officials have often reiterated that the current challenges are "global and no longer bound by geography."³ This was also evidenced by the long-awaited NATO Strategic Concept released at the 2022 Madrid Summit.⁴ Japan's former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida had also echoed NATO's reiteration of interlinked geographies with a state of urgency that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow," only months after the Russian invasion.⁵

Similarly, a January 2023 Joint Press Point by NATO former Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Kishida stated that:

*"We agree that transatlantic and Indo-Pacific security is deeply interconnected. What happens in this region matters to NATO. And what happens in Europe matters to you."*⁶

Furthermore, North Korean support for Russia has increased Indo-Pacific geopolitical hackles in transatlantic and Indo-Pacific interconnectedness. For example, the North Korea-Russia military pact and the deployment of North Korean troops have internationalized the war impact, sounding an alarm in East Asia in particular.⁷ Even China has been caught in the middle with an uneasy eye on the Russia-North Korea progression in ties.⁸

In line with such sentiment and security developments, it is clear that NATO wants to engage more with transatlantic

partners and grow its outreach to new partners, most notably in the Indo-Pacific. Closer cooperation with the Indo-Pacific appears imperative, which requires the endorsement of and possible collaboration with critical regional actors such as India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These are three of the most populous democratic countries, sit strategically along the Indo-Pacific's main maritime arteries and spaces of geopolitical contention, and hold growing political sway and economic development potential.⁹ Each of these three countries has a nuanced, engaging, and pragmatic policy outlook on China, but that does not entirely discount the antithetical China narrative they hold in their policy framework.

To the IP4 and these three powers, China's ongoing attempts to turn the balance of power in its favor and maritime claims are considered **the**, though not the only, shared security challenge. In the Himalayas, the Indian Ocean region, the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea, US strategic partners and allies like India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam have highlighted unilateral changes or attempts to change the status quo by China. In addition, there are other (shared) challenges: managing US-China rivalry, territorial disputes among other states over maritime and land boundaries, military build-ups, and myriad non-traditional security challenges. In this context, it is clear that the prosperity, peace, stability, and security of the Indo-Pacific region, and in turn, the global geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape, are contingent more upon crisis prevention in the Indo-Pacific and the peaceful guidance of power balancing acts than engaging in any outright military engagement. With the return of a more inward-looking and transactional US foreign policy posture under President Trump, regional actors may further prioritize self-reliance and minilateral or bilateral arrangements over broader collective security initiatives involving NATO.

Yet, can such common interests bring closer India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and NATO?

Against this backdrop and to answer this question, this policy paper examines NATO's potential partnership with the three countries as case studies. It looks at their prospects for engagement with NATO, mainly through their current disposition in security matters, strategic priorities, autonomy, and relationship with China and the US/allies. We commence alphabetically with India.

CASE 1: NATO & India – A Timely yet Unattainable Partnership.

On the surface, NATO and India appear to be a natural fit, yet strategic culture, history, multi-alignment, and diverging perceptions and priorities break up the party.

In 2021, Stoltenberg, in his address at the Raisina Dialogue, talked about “stepping up” dialogue with India as a country that shares values and interests with NATO allies, as well as a country that is at the forefront of “shared security challenges” with NATO.¹⁰ That the then NATO chief was speaking for the first time at India’s “flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-strategy,” co-organized by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, was not just a rare occurrence but a sign of changing times and India’s view on security dynamics and partnerships. Traditionally, India, in line with its non-aligned past, historically good relations with the Soviet Union/Russia, and refusal to get caught up in alliance politics, has been reticent about engaging with NATO. It was perhaps, therefore, that in that speech, Stoltenberg perceptively stressed that cooperation does not necessarily need to include direct defense agreements or military alignments.¹¹

The question of engagement between India and NATO has been around for a while, as evidenced by the 2005 Strategic Dialogue and India’s involvement with NATO in counter-piracy and anti-terror operations.¹² One of the members of the 2005 NATO delegation to India, Karl A. Lamers, had succinctly outlined the goals for a potential India-NATO alignment: Engagement with South Asian neighbors (with varying degrees of trouble); “intensive cooperation” with the US, the UK, and the EU; integration into the global market; securing a permanent membership of the UN Security Council; and nuclear power.¹³ Most of these objectives still hold, with the addition of countering any Chinese unilateral ambitions added to the list.

In this context, in 2019, India and NATO held an exploratory political dialogue to gauge mutual interest that did not materialize into anything significant apart from a strong common interest in maintaining maritime security.¹⁴ The main grounds on which India and NATO had dissonance were NATO’s then fixation on Russia as the number one threat to transatlantic security and the continuing lack of a common European stance on China – which was at the time still tilted toward cooperation as a partner providing opportunities, and not as a strategic challenge.¹⁵ But given that the landscape before the Ukraine war was relatively less urgent for NATO vis-à-vis global security than today, the push for a relationship with India might have lacked fervor – particularly regarding China, but also perceptions of security in general.

In the years since 2019, and to India’s fervor, the West has become more cognizant of and cohesive regarding China’s reemergence, more assertive foreign policies, and growing technological prowess. Notably, in 2020, a Reflection Group report outlining NATO’s future goals (“NATO 2030”) recommended allocating “much more time, political resources, and action to the security challenges posed by China – based on an assessment of its national capabilities, economic heft, and the stated ideological goals of its leaders.”¹⁶ As a result, in 2021, the Brussels’ Communique called out China as a systemic challenge and took steps toward building a “political strategy” regarding China.¹⁷ Thus, the update of the 2022 Strategic Concept was not a total surprise; instead, it was drawn from NATO’s meetings and reports in the years before. In contrast, the 2019 London Declaration, while recognizing that “China’s growing influence and international policies” brought both “opportunities and challenges,” did not take it further.¹⁸

This is also parallel to the *European Union* (EU)’s shifting stance toward China and also to India’s fervor: In 2019, the EU’s “Strategic Outlook” called out China’s growing aspirations and that the landscape for opportunities and challenges was changing, falling short of calling China a challenge.¹⁹ Yet, the Europe-China relationship was still based on a hopeful cooperative-competitive framework. However, over the years, the EU, which released its Indo-Pacific strategy and an infrastructure project, the Global Gateway, as a bulwark against China’s *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) in 2021, has become rather vigilant about its blind connection with China, and perhaps to counter some of Beijing’s unfair and non-transparent investment practices in Europe. Moreover, despite their disunity on China, NATO and its allies, including the European members, are concerned about the collective threat of the authoritarian powers that are dominated by China’s political, economic, military, and diplomatic influence.

In this regard, recognizing the challenge that China potentially poses to Euro-Atlantic democratic values and security interests (both in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific) has changed how NATO and the EU interact with US partners like India and vice versa. Europe and India want to be assertive with China while maintaining cooperation strategies. So, diversification of trade interests, “de-risking,” and strengthening supply chains, among other factors, have strengthened their outreach toward each other.

As a result, NATO has continued to highlight its interest in engaging with India, with the US Permanent Representative to NATO, Julianne Smith, stating recently (2023) that “NATO’s door is open in terms of engagement, should India be interested”.²⁰

From a global perspective, India's geo-strategic location, projected economic future, and potential as a strong Indo-Pacific security partner against China provide India with a unique advantage, and NATO officials have repeatedly reiterated their interest in taking India as a new partner.²¹ They appear to be a natural fit. At the same time, NATO has continued to engage with several partners in the region, including India's nuclear neighbor Pakistan, Afghanistan (with which the partnership is currently suspended), and Mongolia (which has a complicated relationship with China).²²

Given the new geopolitical environment and India's shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment, India's hesitance in engaging with NATO at a level similar to the IP4 is slowly but steadily being explored. However, Indian strategic thinkers are divided about the need for India to engage with NATO. While some see the need for "pragmatic engagement" as a concerted approach to Europe, including more security-oriented deals with NATO allies, the majority of observers have concerns about NATO when seen through the lens of "a certain history," "a certain role," and its relevant theater of operations, namely Europe.²³ Others argue that India does not need NATO to deal with China and point to the fact that nemesis Pakistan is a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) of the US.²⁴ Moreover, under the new US administration, NATO's internal cohesion and strategic clarity may face greater scrutiny, making India possibly even more hesitant to align with what could be perceived as a fragmented or shifting security architecture.

The latter sentiment is echoed by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, too, who has often reiterated India's lack of intent to join the West-led NATO. In the latest statement on the topic, he stressed, "We don't have that kind of strategic architecture in mind," referring to speculations about an emerging "Asian NATO" and India's continued refusal to join military alliances.²⁵

The nature of NATO, an exclusive club based on collective security among democracies, also goes against India's history and strategic culture that shape its foreign policy principles that promote and see the world as 'one family' rather than two, three, or multiple families that each covet their own security. Nor does India want to upset its strategic relationship with Russia. Moreover, India strongly prioritizes stability and economic development, and 'adding' more military prowess to the Indo-Pacific does not necessarily underpin that. Therefore, it seems unlikely that in the near future, India will hold any formal engagement with NATO to a level similar to the IP4 states: Even a hint of a formal NATO engagement in the Indo-Pacific would be considered anathema to the Indian administration. Especially now that relations with China have somewhat been in a thaw.

CASE 2: NATO & Indonesia – Neutrality Still Rules the Roost?

Like India, Indonesia appears to be a natural fit, yet non-alignment, historical connotations, and diverging perceptions and priorities are significant hurdles to direct cooperation with NATO.

Indonesia, a leading Southeast Asian economy and a driving force in the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) politics, is vital for NATO to consider expanding cooperation with. However, the country's historic engagement with the bloc has been lacking and is likely to continue to lack.

Like India, and as a fellow victim of colonial and post-colonial trepidations, Indonesia is a prominent founder of the *Non-Aligned Movement* (NAM), which originated in the Bandung Conference of April 1955. Ever since, it has not favored alliance politics and vehemently adheres to that. However, unlike India, which has moved on to a multi-alignment trajectory, Indonesia has recently continued to champion its non-aligned past, much to the dismay of some that regard it as “outdated non-bloc pragmatism amid the evolving regional security architecture.”²⁶ At least officially, the rise in global and regional tensions between the West and Russia and China, or the wars in Ukraine and West Asia, seemed to have had no effect on the Indonesian foreign policy of neutrality. As Indonesian scholar Evan Laksmana argues, there is a lack of a unifying “threat” that can mobilize agencies and ministries to develop a shared strategic framework: the agencies and ministries, political, security, and business elites view China differently, and there is no commanding institution to centralize views and policies.²⁷ Nor is there much change anticipated in this regard.²⁸

To this effect, in December 2024, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono categorically told the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs and Defense Commission during his inaugural hearing,

“Since the beginning of his presidency, President Prabowo has reaffirmed his vision for our foreign policy, which adheres to non-aligned principles, preventing us from joining any military alliance.”²⁹

This stance may get further entrenched amid a less predictable US foreign policy attitude, reviving regional memories of great-power volatility and alliance entanglements. Notwithstanding this strict non-aligned stance, there has been a semblance of outreach between Indonesia and NATO, as evidenced by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, meeting then NATO

Secretary General Stoltenberg in June 2022 – although no details of their talks are available.³⁰ Nor have the Indonesian authorities made official statements on NATO in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the presence of the IP4 in the last few NATO summits has emphasized that Indo-Pacific security will get global attention precisely because of the region's economic and political weight. Indeed, Southeast Asia and its leading economy cannot afford to ignore present realities.

Further, the South China Sea dispute will remain a bone of contention between Indonesia and China, even if Indonesia is not a formal claimant. Around 2016/2017, Indonesia and China had multiple maritime clashes in Indonesia's exclusive economic zone near its Natuna Islands, which overlap with China's 9-dash line, which is known as the 10-dash line today.³¹ In 2023, China's re-drawing of a map using a “10-dash” line drew protests across the neighborhood, highlighting China's complex relationship with Southeast Asia.³²

Notably, Indonesia and China have signed a maritime cooperation deal, raising sovereignty concerns among experts.³³ Yet Indonesia has recently reaffirmed its position on China's broad South China Sea claims, stating that “the claim lacks an international legal basis and does not align with the 1982 UNCLOS [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea].”³⁴ In October 2024, there were reports of Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency successfully detecting and expelling a Chinese Coast Guard vessel from the North Natuna Sea.³⁵

In this context, Peterson et al. have argued that in the event of a Taiwan emergency or military escalation in the South China Sea, including the seizing of territories by China, Indonesia should look to enhance security engagement with the West, primarily the US and its allies for a “greater collective balance against China.”³⁶

At the same time, China is a top economic partner for Indonesia and has made massive investments in Indonesia; the BRI, too, has been responsible for increasing China's clout in the country. According to official estimates, bilateral trade soared during former President Joko Widodo's era, reportedly reaching about US\$127.8 billion in 2023.³⁷ Chinese firms are also establishing Indonesia's *electric vehicle* (EV) ecosystem and building the country's future capital, Nusantara.³⁸ China, under its BRI, has also funded the construction of the US\$7.3 billion Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (“Whoosh”), launched in 2023.³⁹ In essence, for Indonesia's ambition to become a developed economy by 2045, Indonesia direly needs China.⁴⁰

In terms of public opinion, a 2021 Lowy Institute poll stated that Indonesians are “increasingly skeptical” about China, yet view the US only slightly more favorably than China⁴¹. Therefore, about 84 percent want Indonesia to stay neutral in the great-power games,⁴² and the Indonesian authorities and influential media are skeptical of NATO and the potential for (military) escalation.⁴³

Consequently, Indonesia will continue pursuing strategic neutrality and promoting ASEAN centrality and its core principles of dialogue, inclusivity, and cooperation. For Indonesia, aligning with NATO, leaving aside direct cooperation on (hard) security, would go against the Indonesian Constitution and long-held beliefs in public perception.⁴⁴ Indonesia’s intent to be seen following an “independent and active” approach to foreign policy has compelled it to pursue partnerships with China-dominated forums like the newly expanded BRICS Plus – even as Widodo was circumspect, the freshly elected President Prabowo Subianto has been keen to enter the non-Western grouping.⁴⁵ This is important as it highlights that Indonesia will continue to hedge between China and the US and join varied international fora if it suits its national interests.

However, working with NATO would be different, primarily because most of the Global South, including Indonesia, perceives the bloc not so positively.⁴⁶ For example, in the context of the Ukraine war, Indonesian narratives about the war have blamed mainly NATO and the allies for provoking Russia – a public survey, too, reached the same conclusion that the war was NATO’s fault.⁴⁷

Moreover, Indonesia’s bonhomie with China also showcases that Indonesia will not take any steps that anger China or destabilize the region, and coordination with NATO on Indo-Pacific security matters will most likely do that. In short, Indonesia is not interested in cooperation with NATO or any possible ‘destabilizing cooperation’ for that matter that may warp Southeast Asia back to the 1950s when it was known as the region of conflict.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Indonesia will look to weigh the implications of more Indo-Pacific states participating with NATO to confront global challenges and align more closely, including China’s intent to reshape the balance of power in the region.⁴⁹

CASE 3: NATO & Philippines – The Buck Stops with the US?

The Philippines is the most likely major democracy in the Indo-Pacific to support or join the IP4 format and formalize cooperation with NATO. Still, the US meets all its security and deterrence needs, and it does not want to deviate more from ASEAN’s centrality and principles than it does now – and it wants to avoid aggravating China too much.

The Philippines, unlike most Southeast Asian countries, has been indirectly linked to NATO since the Cold War, as it hosted (and yet again) US bases and has cooperated closely with the US military ever since.⁵⁰ In recent years, China’s targeted and more militarized acts in the South China Sea – a region coveted as much for natural resources and fishing as for its strategic location as the world’s major crossroads for maritime trade – have affected its relations with no other country in the ASEAN bloc more than the Philippines. The Philippines sits at the front line of Chinese claims of the South China Sea. Even as South China Sea disputes over islands, atolls, shoals, and reefs, among others, go back decades, tensions have escalated ever since China presented its “9-dash line” claim to the UN in 2009, officially laying claim to the territories.⁵¹

However, then-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte wanted to negotiate with China at the time. He even signed a *memorandum of understanding* (MoU) for oil and gas exploration during President Xi Jinping’s state visit to the Philippines. The MoU was not officially released to the public, nor was any cooperation agreement publicly released.⁵² The main reason for the MoU was to prevent escalation and retaliation by China that could lead to regional instability, a core concern across Indo-Pacific countries.

The change of ruling regime in the Philippines has hardened the stance on China, with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. reversing Duterte’s conciliatory approach to China. The tensions and confrontations have reached a new level, with accusations of “intentional” boat rammings and water canyon attacks becoming more frequent and routine headlines.⁵³ As a result, the focus of the Philippine military has shifted from internal security to territorial (maritime) defense. The Philippines has resorted to a hard-balancing policy, upping its defense and security cooperation with the US and its allies, such as NATO partner Japan and other Indo-Pacific partners like India and Vietnam, which are also on the receiving end of a more assertive Chinese foreign policy. It is important to bear in mind that decades of defense cooperation with the US and Western partners have created a unique institutional affinity with the US in the Philippines.⁵⁴

The Philippines has one of the lowest defense budgets among ASEAN members, hovering around one percent. Consequently, the Marcos Jr. administration vigorously supports the steady military modernization of the Philippines with military-minded security partners while maintaining cordial diplomatic and economic relations with China.⁵⁵

The potential spillover effects from the Ukraine-Russia war have also been a part of the Philippines’ concerns – even a cautious Duterte referred to being ready for such an impact.⁵⁶ The Philippines has primarily adopted a neutral stance in the Ukraine war. However, it supported the US-led UN resolution condemning Russian actions in 2022. It showed a willingness to allow the US to use Philippine bases and facilities in case the conflict crosses over to the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁷ However, it did not participate in the Western sanctions.⁵⁸ Of late, however, Marcos, amid heightened tensions with China and Russia-China “no-limits” ties, has been vocal in his “unwavering support for Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity.”⁵⁹

In addition, the escalation in the Taiwan Straits, especially after Nancy Pelosi’s Asia (Taiwan-focused) visit months after the Ukraine war had started, has also increased concerns, given the geographical proximity of Taiwan. Then there is also the question of the Philippines, as a US treaty ally, supporting the US in the case of a Taiwan emergency.⁶⁰ In this context, there have been reports about the US drawing up contingency plans for military deployments in Japan and the Philippines in case of a Taiwan contingency.⁶¹ However, the Philippine side has stated that the report is from “still unverified sources” and that all engagements with various countries are part of the Philippines’ contingency plans.⁶²

Against the above scenario, the fact of the matter is that the Philippines is strengthening its defense options: The Philippine government under Marcos early this year revised a nearly US\$35 billion military modernization plan, “Re-Horizon 3,” an updated acquisition plan that replaces “Horizon 3,” for the next 10 years to bolster its defense capabilities amid continued tension in the region and beyond.⁶³ It has been engaging in unprecedented security cooperation with the US and Japan, including the Japan-Philippines-US trilateral cooperation expansion to advance key maritime security and critical technology objectives amid a shared concern for a free and open Indo-Pacific.⁶⁴

Bilaterally, the US and the Philippines have upped the alliance strength through key deals like the General Security of Military Information Agreement, which allows for the sharing of classified information; the Philippines giving access to four more military bases for the US; and the US providing US\$500 million as military funding.⁶⁵ Similarly, Japan and the Philippines have signed the crucial *Reciprocal Access Agreement* (RAA; Japan is only the third country to sign the RAA with the Philippines) that will facilitate reciprocal visits and joint exercises, among other measures.⁶⁶ The Philippines also became the first country under Japan's new *Official Security Assistance* (OSA), wherein the Philippine Navy will receive nearly US\$4 million in coastal surveillance radars.⁶⁷

Public opinion, too, has favored the US over China in the Philippines, unlike Indonesia and India, where it is a mixed bag. A recent survey by Pulse Asia (interviews with 1,200 respondents) revealed that a whopping 79 percent wanted the Philippines to cooperate with the US amid Chinese escalations in the South China Sea.⁶⁸ Only 10 percent favored Marcos' government working with China.⁶⁹ Importantly, a good number also want Marcos to work closely with US or NATO allies, namely Australia (43 percent), Japan (42 percent), Canada (34 percent), and the United Kingdom (22 percent), as well as the European Union (17 percent), an essential partner for NATO and a strategic partner for the US, highlighting the public's interest in "like-minded" partnerships.⁷⁰

In short, the Philippines is undoubtedly a strategically important "Major Non-NATO Ally" of the US, which provides the country with military privileges. It is also a unique ASEAN member with an apparent penchant for the US-led Indo-Pacific security architecture, as its increased security cooperation with the US and IP4 states suggests. These factors make the Philippines a perfect partner for NATO cooperation.

At the same time, the lack of signals or recent publicly available meetings between Philippine and NATO officials at a high level indicates that the country is aware of the negative repercussions of pursuing such an engagement. Of the three case studies, NATO has the least dialogue with the Philippines.

The widespread sentiment in Southeast Asia is about preserving the 'fragile peace' with China despite the South China Sea disputes. Moreover, China remains the Philippines' top trading partner, and experts have dismissed notions of economic retaliation by China, even as Chinese investment into the country for the time being has fallen.⁷¹ Marcos, in 2023, also asserted that he wanted the two countries to pursue "more engagements in trade and economy."⁷²

In all, it is unlikely that the Philippines would encourage any notions of escalation with China by cooperating with NATO, whose "eastward expansion into the Asia-Pacific" China opposes.⁷³ Moreover, the Philippines arguably already has the weakest adherence to ASEAN centrality and neutrality and has all the security support it needs from the US and the IP4.

Conclusion:

An Indo-Pacific Future Avec un NATO Limité?

Considering the findings from the three case studies, an engagement in NATO's cooperation in the Indo-Pacific beyond existing partnerships with the IP4 does not appear viable at this stage.

First and foremost, the diversities in histories, cultural and strategic traditions, and the magnitude of distances within Asia make establishing cooperation with NATO, leaving aside an Asian NATO, for that matter, highly implausible.⁷⁴ This has become even more apparent under the second Trump administration, where NATO's cohesion and the trustworthiness of US commitments are under increased scrutiny.⁷⁵

Second, even a close US strategic partner like India or a US treaty ally, the Philippines, both witnessing tensions with China, still sees China through a cooperative-competitive lens, and Russia primarily through a cooperative lens. Thus, there is a disparity between threat perceptions and priorities. Similar is the case with Indonesia, a top trading partner with China. They would all be loath to risk regional stability by welcoming defense agreements or military alignments with NATO.

Third, notions like multipolarity, sovereignty, non-alignment, and common/cooperative security, rather than collective security, are ingrained into many Asian mindsets. Particularly given that India and Indonesia are founding members of the NAM – even if NAM today has eroded rather considerably. Then there is also the case of CIA involvement in multiple regime changes and purges across Asia, including in Indonesia.⁷⁶ In India, too, US historical support of Pakistan since the early Cold War days has continued to muddle the Indian public and strategic perceptions against the US and what many perceive as a Cold War era mechanism like NATO, which will not be easy to dismiss.⁷⁷

Fourth, the success of minilaterals in the Indo-Pacific, including the Quad comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the US, has revitalized the emerging regional security landscape by stressing its increased ambit, from maritime domain awareness to economic resilience.

Therefore, given the current upward-moving dynamics between these three countries and the West, even as pragmatic security cooperation might be possible at a bilateral level with EU NATO member states with these three nations, direct NATO defense cooperation with these three pivotal countries in the Indo-Pacific is challenging to reconcile, at least in the short and medium term.

Nonetheless, there are potential avenues for cooperation with India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, mainly in line with the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and NATO 2030 aspirations. These avenues need to restrict themselves to non-traditional security. The primary objective is to craft a better narrative of shared crisis and non-traditional challenges between the transatlantic and Indo-Pacific and explore how to best operate within that bandwidth. Anti-Russia/China narratives and any centrality of transatlantic security will not work. The narrative should instead revolve around crisis prevention to foster peace, stability, and economic development in the Indo-Pacific – with substantial input from the three countries in discussion and other Indo-Pacific residents. Recurring and frequent exchange and dialogue on this purview is likely the least challenging common denominator and point of departure. Finally, given shifting priorities under the new US administration and the potential weakening of NATO cohesion, Indo-Pacific countries may grow even more cautious of engaging with the Alliance in formal security capacities. In the eyes of Indo-Pacific observers, any NATO outreach must also factor in perceptions of US credibility, predictability, and transatlantic unity.

Endnotes

- 1 "Japan to attend NATO summit for first time," *Al Jazeera*, June 25, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/15/japan-to-attend-nato-summit-for-first-time>.
- 2 "NATO Defence Ministers Meeting opens with a focus on Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific," *NATO*, October 17, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_229541.htm
- 3 See for instance "NATO Partnerships," *NATO*, August 6, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm.
- 4 The last Strategic Concept was released in 2010 when the global landscape was relatively simpler, as the document outlined, "The Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low." Moreover, China was still on its "peaceful rise" and Russia looking toward "a new stage of cooperation" ("a true strategic partnership") with NATO. "NATO-Russia set on path towards strategic partnership," *NATO*, November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_68876.htm; "NATO-Russia Relations: the Background," *NATO*, 2017, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_02/20170206_1702-nato-russia-en.pdf; "Strategic Concept 2010," November 19, 2010, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf.
- 5 "Keynote Address by Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue," Prime Minister's Office of Japan, June 10, 2022, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202206/_00002.html
- 6 Jens Stoltenberg. Joint press point by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. *NATO*. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_210901.html.
- 7 Hyung-Jin Kim, "North Korea ratifies major defense treaty with Russia," *AP*, November 12, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-russia-ukraine-059d73e4c3492c19b555476b2fb45ca9>; Ivana Kottasová and Svitlana Vlasova, "Ukraine is fighting 50,000 troops in Russia's Kursk region, Zelensky says," *CNN*, November 12, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/11/europe/russia-ukraine-kursk-intl/index.html>.
- 8 Edward Wong, "U.S. Turns to China to Stop North Korean Troops From Fighting for Russia," *New York Times*, October 31, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/31/us/politics/russia-north-korea-troops-china.html>.
- 9 Pakistan and Bangladesh are two other populous countries with fairly strategic locations, but in the context of NATO engagement are relevant to a lesser degree than the selected three countries. Moreover, Pakistan is already a *Major Non-NATO Ally* (MNNA) of the US and Bangladesh is not of the same strategic scope as India.
- 10 Jens Stoltenberg, "Speech," NATO Secretary General at the Raisina Dialogue 2021, *NATO*, April 13, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_183011.htm?selectedLocale=ru.
- 11 Jens Stoltenberg, "Speech," NATO Secretary General at the Raisina Dialogue 2021, *NATO*, April 13, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_183011.htm?selectedLocale=ru.
- 12 Dhruva Jaishankar and Ammar Nainar, "NATO's Indo-Pacific Tilt Widens Dialogue with India," *ORF America*, July 9, 2023, <https://orfamerica.org/newresearch/nato-india-dialo>.
- 13 "A NATO-India Strategic Dialogue," Report of the seminar, A NATO-India Strategic Dialogue, held at India International Centre, New Delhi, on January 14, 2005, *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies* (IPCS), February 08, 2005, https://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=1636.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 "NATO 2030: United for a New Era," Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the *NATO Secretary General*, November 25, 2020, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf.
- 17 "Brussels Summit Communiqué," *NATO*, June 14, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm.
- 18 "London Declaration," *NATO*, December 4, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.
- 19 European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, "EU-China – A strategic outlook," March 12, 2019, <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.
- 20 Yagya Sharma, "'Door open... should India be interested,' says US NATO ambassador," *Hindustan Times*, April 1, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/door-open-should-india-be-interested-says-us-nato-ambassador-101680283430681.html>.
- 21 Mircea Geoana, Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General at the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria event, "Ahead of the Future: Preparing for NATO 2030," *NATO*, May 13, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_183671.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- 22 "NATO's Partnerships," *NATO*, August 6, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm; Christoph Bluth, "Mongolia: squeezed between China and Russia fears 'new cold war,'" *Conversation*, April 3, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/mongolia-squeezed-between-china-and-russia-fears-new-cold-war-202086>.
- 23 C. Raja Mohan, "Why India Must Not Say 'No' to NATO," *The Indian Express*, April 6, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/why-india-must-not-say-no-to-nato-7260435/>; "Shyam Saran: No role for NATO in Asia, India not in the containment business," an interview, *CGTN*, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-07-10/-No-role-for-NATO-in-Asia-India-not-in-the-containment-business--1liOA8PqbyU/index.html>; and virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the three countries, December 2024.
- 24 Virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the three countries, December 2024.
- 25 "India Doesn't Share Japan's Vision for Asian NATO": Jaishankar," *Wire*, October 24, 2024, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-doesnt-share-japans-vision-for-asian-nato-jaishankar>.
- 26 I Gede Wahyu Wicaksana, "Rethinking Indonesia's non-aligned foreign policy," *East Asia Forum*, April 27, 2022, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/04/27/rethinking-indonesias-non-aligned-foreign-policy/>.
- 27 Even if the piece is from 2021, the thrust of Laksmana's thesis appears to hold true in 2024, see also Rizal Sukma's piece, footnote 28. Evan A. Laksmana. "Stuck in second gear: Indonesia's strategic dilemma in the Indo-Pacific." *ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute*. 2021. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57e3c9e1d1758e2877e03ba5/t/63563ea565a7d24b9da-15ecf1666596519632/Stuck_in_Second_Gear_Indonesias_Strategi.pdf.
- 28 Rizal Sukma. "Prabowo's diplomatic debut in China and Japan." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2024/04/prabowos-diplomatic-debut-in-china-and-japan?lang=en>; and Charles Chivvis, Scot Marciel & Dewi Fortuna Anwar. "Pivotal states: Revamping the U.S.-Indonesia partnership" [Panel discussion]. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2023, September 5. <https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2023/09/pivotal-states-revamping-the-us-indonesia-partnership?lang=en>.
- 29 Theressia Sunday Silalahi, "Indonesia Will Not Join Any Military Alliance: Foreign Minister," *Jakarta Globe*, December 2, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/indonesia-will-not-join-any-military-alliance-foreign-minister>.
- 30 "NATO Secretary General meets with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia," *NATO*, June 14, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos_196475.htm.
- 31 Joe Cochrane, "Indonesia, Long on Sidelines, Starts to Confront China's Territorial Claims," *New York Times*, September 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/10/world/asia/indonesia-south-china-sea-military-buildup.html>.
- 32 "China's new national map has set off a wave of protests. Why?" *AP*, September 1, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/china-map-territorial-dispute-south-sea-702c45165d7f9cade796700ffa5691e>.
- 33 Heru Andriyanto, "Indonesia, China Sign MoU on Blue Economy Cooperation during Prabowo's Visit," *Jakarta Globe*, November 10, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/business/indonesia-china-sign-mou-on-blue-economy-cooperation-during-prabowos-visit>.
- 34 Jayanty Nada Shofa, "Indonesia Denies Accepting China's Nine-Dash Line in New Maritime Partnership," *Jakarta Globe*, November 11, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/indonesia-denies-accepting-chinas-nine-dash-line-in-new-maritime-partnership>.
- 35 "Indonesia again expels China coast guard ship from Natuna Sea," *Antara*, October 26, 2024, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/331441/indonesia-again-expels-china-coast-guard-ship-from-natuna-sea>.

- 36 Daniel Peterson, Greg Barton, Shahram Akbarzadeh, Josh Roose, and Simon Hewes, "AUKUS-plus? Indonesia's strategic options in response to conflict in the Indo-Pacific," *Australian Journal of Defence and Strategic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2023): pp. 245-268.
- 37 Jayanty Nada Shofa, "Indonesia Forges Stronger Economic Ties with China in Jokowi Era," *Jakarta Globe*, October 18, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/business/indonesia-forges-stronger-economic-ties-with-china-in-jokowi-era>.
- 38 "Govt hails Chinese firm as first foreign investor in new capital, *Jakarta Post*, September 25, 2024, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/business/2024/09/25/govt-hails-chinese-firm-as-first-foreign-investor-in-new-capital.html>.
- 39 Zhang Niansheng, Wang Yunsong, Li Peisong, and Cao Shiyun, "Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway celebrates one-year anniversary, opening new chapter for regional prosperity and development," *Global Times*, October 18, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202410/1321455.shtml#:~:text=The%20Jakarta-Bandung%20High-Speed%20Railway%20is%20a%20golden,-Bandung%20High-Speed%20Railway>.
- 40 Virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the region, December 2024.
- 41 Ben Bland, Evan Laksmana, and Natasha Kassam, "Charting Their Own Course: How Indonesians See the World," *Lowy Institute Indonesia Poll*, 2021, <https://interactives.loyyinstitute.org/features/indonesia-poll-2021/report/Lowy%20Institute%20Indonesia%20Poll%202021.pdf>.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the region, December 2024. For media skepticism see: Endy Bayuni, "NATO moving into Indo-Pacific? Thanks, but no thanks," *The Jakarta Post*, 2024, July 11, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2024/07/11/nato-moving-into-indo-pacific-thanks-but-no-thanks.html>; Editorial Board, "No to Asia's NATO," *The Jakarta Post*, 2024, October 5, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2024/10/05/no-to-asias-nato.html>; and Galuh Maulana Yusuf, "Will Indonesia join NATO-like Mineral Security Partnership?" *The Jakarta Post*, 2024, July 22, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2024/07/22/will-indonesia-join-nato-like-mineral-security-partnership.html>.
- 44 Silalahi, "Indonesia Will Not Join Any Military Alliance."
- 45 Aisyah Llewellyn, "Indonesia's absence from bigger BRICS echoes decades of non-aligned policy," *Al Jazeera*, August 28, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/8/28/indonesias-absence-from-bigger-brics-echoesdecadesof-non-alignedpolicy>; "OECD not at odds with BRICS, says Indonesian FM," *Antara*, December 2, 2024, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/336661/oecd-not-at-odds-with-brics-says-indonesian-fm>.
- 46 Alexandra von Nahmen, "Shifting powers: NATO and the Global South," *DW*, July 9, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/shifting-powers-nato-and-the-global-south/video-69597187>.
- 47 Radityo Dharmaputra, "Non-Western Responses to Russia's War in Ukraine: Learning from Indonesia," *Journal of Regional Security* 18, 1 (2023): 59-68, <https://scindeks-clanci.ceon.rs/data/pdf/2217-995X/8888/2217-995X8800011D.pdf>.
- 48 Virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the region, December 2024.
- 49 Ermaya Suradinata, "NATO in Indonesia's Geopolitical Interest," *Center for Geopolitics & Geostrategy Studies*, Indonesia, July 25, 2024, <https://geopolstratindo.com/2024/07/25/nato-in-indonesias-geopolitical-interest/>; and Virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the region, December 2024.
- 50 Virtual workshop held by the authors with experts from the region, December 2024.
- 51 In 2012, China and the Philippines came to a head in a 14-day stand-off over the Scarborough Shoal, claimed by both, see Rodion Ebbighausen, "South China Sea Dispute," *DW*, April 24, 2012, <https://www.dw.com/en/report-says-china-policy-is-stirring-south-china-sea-dispute/a-15906624>. In 2016, an international tribunal at the Hague, in response to the case filed by the Philippines in 2013, ruled against China's historical claims as stated that "China's land reclamation and construction of artificial islands, installations, and structures ... caused severe, irreparable harm to the coral reef ecosystem." See Jim Gomez, "Philippines and China continue long standoff over Scarborough Shoal," *Northwest Asian Weekly*, April 28, 2012, <https://nwasianweekly.com/2012/04/philippines-and-china-continue-long-standoff-over-scarborough-shoal/>. China did not accept nor recognize the decision, calling it "invalid" and having "no binding force." See Jane Perlez, "Tribunal Rejects Beijing's Claims in South China Sea," *New York Times*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/12/the-south-china-sea-arbitration-the-republic-of-philippines-v-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>; Permanent Court of Arbitration, Case no. 2013-1019, <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/7/>.
- 52 Raissa Robles, "South China Sea: New Philippine leader must honour joint exploration agreement with Beijing or face conflict, says Duterte," *South China Morning Post*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3169859/south-china-sea-new-philippine-leader-must-honour-joint>.
- 53 "What's behind escalating China-Philippines tensions in the South China Sea?" *Al Jazeera*, October 11, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/11/whats-behind-escalating-china-philippines-tensions-in-the-south-china-sea>; Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Philippines president summons Chinese ambassador over laser incident," *Guardian*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/15/philippines-president-summons-chinese-ambassador-over-laser-incident>; "Philippines accuses China of water cannon attack in Spratly Islands," *Guardian*, August 6, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/06/philippines-accuses-china-of-water-cannon-attack-in-spratly-islands>.
- 54 Gregory Winger, "Alliance Embeddedness: Rodrigo Duterte and the Resilience of the US-Philippine Alliance," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 17, Issue 3, July 2021.
- 55 Renato De Castro, "The evolving grand strategy of the Philippines: Challenges and responses to external threats," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 43(1): 2024, 5-28.
- 56 Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos, "Be ready for Russia-Ukraine war spillover: PRRD to PNP, AFP," *PNA*, April 21, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1172684>.
- 57 Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, "Why Philippines offered to open bases for US use if Ukraine war spreads to Asia," *South China Morning Post*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3170811/why-philippines-offered-open-bases-us-use-if-ukraine-war-spreads>.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Darryl John Esguerra, "Marcos hopes for peace as Ukraine war reaches 1000th day," *PNA*, November 20, 2024, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1238246>.
- 60 Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Philippines' evolving view on Taiwan: From passivity to active involvement," *Brookings*, March 9, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-philippines-evolving-view-on-taiwan-from-passivity-to-active-involvement>.
- 61 "West PH Sea: US drawing up contingency plans for Taiwan emergency - Kyodo," *Inquirer.net*, November 25, 2024, <https://www.inquirer.net/421866/west-ph-sea-us-drawing-up-contingency-plans-for-taiwan-emergency-kyodo/>.
- 62 Cristina Chi, "AFP mum on reported US plan to deploy missiles for Taiwan emergency," *Philstar*, November 26, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/11/26/2403094/afp-mum-reported-us-plan-deploy-missiles-taiwan-emergency>.
- 63 Frances Mangosing, "Marcos OKs military's P2-trillion wish list for weapons, equipment," *Inquirer*, January 30, 2024, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1895629/marcos-oks-militarys-p2-trillion-wish-list-for-weapons-equipment>.
- 64 "Joint Vision Statement from the Leaders of Japan, the Philippines, and the United States," *The White House*, April 11, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/04/11/joint-vision-statement-from-the-leaders-of-japan-the-philippines-and-the-united-states/>.
- 65 "Philippines, US sign military intelligence-sharing deal to counter China," *Al Jazeera*, November 18, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/18/philippines-us-sign-military-intelligence-sharing-deal-to-counter-china>; "Philippines gives US access to strategic military bases," *DW*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/philippines-gives-us-access-to-strategic-military-bases/a-65219052>.

- Jim Gomez and Matthew Lee, "US boosts alliance with the Philippines with \$500 million funding and pact amid concern over China," *AP*, July 30, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/united-states-philippines-antony-blinken-loyd-austin-e8bc7af9b5a60f51cf60ffcf22748836>.
- 66 Helen Flores and Pia Lee-Brago, "Japan-Philippines access agreement signed today," *The Philippine Star*, July 8, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/07/08/2368497/japan-philippines-access-agreement-signed-today>.
- 67 Aaron-Matthew Lariosa, "Japan Grants Security Assistance to the Philippines, Looks to Enhance Military Cooperation," *USNI*, November 9, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/11/09/japan-grants-security-assistance-to-the-philippines-looks-to-enhance-military-cooperation>.
- 68 Gaea Katreena Cabico, "79% of Filipinos favor US partnership amid heightened tensions in WPS — Pulse Asia," *Philstar*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/01/16/2326244/79-filipinos-favor-us-partnership-amid-heightened-tensions-wps-pulse-asia>.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Mariadel Irish U. Catilogo, "Economic retaliation by China is unlikely, according to analyst," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 15, 2024, <https://business.inquirer.net/468783/economic-retaliation-by-china-is-unlikely-according-to-analyst>.
- 72 "Philippines seeks to expand economic cooperation with China," *Philstar.com*, January 4, 2023, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/01/04/2235308/philippines-seeks-expand-economic-cooperation-china>.
- 73 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2024, July 30). Regular press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202407/t20240730_11463256.html.
- 74 Jagannath Panda, "The Elusive Quest for an 'Asian NATO'," *Strategic Analysis*, 45:1 (2021), 57-66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2020.1867365>.
- 75 David Dunn & Mark Webber, "Looking Ahead: Imbalance, Dependency and NATO's Uncertain Future. *Defence Studies* (2025), 1–9. See also Daniel Kimmage, "Could NATO Survive a Second Trump Term?" *Brookings Institution*, 2024. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/could-nato-survive-a-second-trump-administration/>.
- 76 Vincent Bevins, "What the United States Did in Indonesia," *Atlantic*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/the-indonesia-documents-and-the-us-agenda/543534/>.
- 77 Tad Szulc, "The World," June 11, 1972, <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/06/11/archives/diplomatic-striptease-in-foggy-bottom-us-and-pakistan.html>; Derek Grossman, "India's Brittle Confidence in America," *RAND*, May 21, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2021/05/indias-brittle-confidence-in-america.html>.

About the authors



Dr. Jagannath Panda

is the [Head](#) of the *Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs* (SCSA-IPA) at the *Institute for Security and Development Policy* (ISDP), Sweden. Dr. Panda is also a [Professor](#) at the Department of Regional and Global Studies at the University of Warsaw, and a Senior Fellow at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies in the Netherlands. As a senior expert on East Asia, and Indo-Pacific affairs, Prof. Panda has [testified](#) to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at the US Congress on 'China and South Asia'. He is the Series Editor for *Routledge Studies on Think Asia*. Dr. Panda is named as the [Strategic Affairs Thinkers of the Next Decade](#) by The Print.



Richard Ghiasy

is a Lecturer at Leiden University, a Senior Fellow at the Leiden Asia Centre, and an Expert with the Dutch Government Sinologists Council (CKN). He mainly researches and advises on Asian geopolitics, particularly relating to China and India. In his 17-year career, he has provided policy advice to inter alia the EEAS, European Commission, Ministries across Europe and Asia, the OSCE, and OECD, and has testified at the European Parliament. Frequently, his advice has a conflict-preventive nature. Richard has also presented at several of the world's top 20 universities. Richard runs a geopolitical consultancy, GeoStrat.

