

Bálint JURÁSZIK: Prabowo Subianto's Foreign Policy: Continuity or a Shift in Indonesia's "Free and Active" Foreign Policy?¹

Executive Summary

- Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy does not represent a departure from the „bebas dan aktif” (free and active) doctrine. Rather, it complements the economically oriented diplomacy of the Jokowi era with more active geopolitical and security engagement.
- Strategic autonomy is pursued through a policy of multi-alignment: Indonesia is simultaneously deepening its relations with China, the United States, Russia, and other partners while avoiding alignment with any single great-power bloc.
- Indonesia's BRICS membership and its simultaneous pursuit of OECD accession demonstrate Jakarta's intention to strengthen its role both within the Global South and within the Western-dominated international economic institutional framework.
- Foreign policy is directly linked to the objectives of Asta Cita: partnerships with China, the United States, Türkiye, India, and other countries are intended to strengthen domestic energy and defence capabilities, enhance security of supply, diversify external dependencies, and promote technological development.
- Indonesia's expanding global engagement may contribute to the relative deprioritisation of ASEAN, while the growing role of personal presidential diplomacy may carry the risk of greater centralisation in foreign policy decision-making.
- Prabowo's foreign policy therefore represents not a fundamental shift in direction, but rather a reinterpretation of Indonesia's traditional strategic autonomy—one that offers greater room for manoeuvre internationally while requiring increasingly complex balancing among the major powers.

As the international system is increasingly shaped by great-power competition, Indonesia appears to reject the logic of bloc politics. Under President Prabowo Subianto, Jakarta has simultaneously deepened its relations with the United States, China, Russia, and other regional partners. This raises a key question: is a genuinely new foreign policy direction emerging in Indonesia, or is the country's "free and active" foreign policy adapting to the geopolitical challenges of the twenty-first century? This study seeks to answer this question by examining the foreign policy initiatives undertaken during the first years of Prabowo's presidency.

1. Introduction

Following Prabowo Subianto's inauguration as president in 2024, Indonesia's foreign policy attracted considerable international attention.² The former general turned president has pursued an intensive diplomatic agenda, characterised by numerous overseas visits, meetings with the leaders of major powers, and active engagement in multilateral forums. This diplomatic activism has generated considerable debate both within Indonesia and in the international literature.³ The central question is

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² YADAV, Abhiram Singh: [Indonesia's Foreign Policy under Prabowo: A Shift Toward Strategic Assertiveness](#), Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional (International Relations Journal), 2025.07. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

³ UMAR, Ahmad Rizky M.: [Indonesia's multi-alignment dilemma under Prabowo](#), Lowy Institute, 2026.02.12. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

whether Prabowo's foreign policy represents a genuine structural shift in direction or should instead be understood as a new and more assertive manifestation of Indonesia's traditional "free and active" (*bebas dan aktif*) foreign policy doctrine.⁴

Assessments differ considerably. Some analysts argue that Prabowo's pragmatic foreign policy enables Indonesia to assume a more active role in global politics while preserving its strategic autonomy. Others contend that the growing emphasis on bilateral relations and the relative deprioritisation of ASEAN's traditionally central role could, in the longer term, weaken Indonesia's regional leadership position and undermine the consistent application of the *bebas dan aktif* principle.⁵

This study examines the extent to which Prabowo's foreign policy represents a substantive departure from previous administrations, particularly that of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi).⁶ To this end, it outlines the historical foundations of Indonesian foreign policy, analyses the most significant diplomatic initiatives of the first two years of Prabowo's presidency, and assesses their regional and global implications. Particular attention is devoted to how Indonesia's balancing strategy is shaping the balance of power in Southeast Asia and the emerging multipolar international order.

2. Historical Background

2.1. The Emergence of the "Free and Active" Foreign Policy

The doctrinal foundations of Indonesian foreign policy were laid by Vice President Mohammad Hatta in 1948, when he formulated the *bebas dan aktif* ("free and active") foreign policy principle. Under this doctrine, Indonesia should remain "free" from alignment with great-power blocs, thereby preserving its strategic autonomy, while "actively" contributing to the promotion of world peace and international justice.⁷ During the presidency of Sukarno (1945–1967), this foreign policy orientation acquired a strongly anti-colonial and anti-imperialist character, with particular emphasis on Third World solidarity.⁸ One of its most significant manifestations was the 1955 Bandung Conference, which played a major role in fostering cooperation among the newly independent states of Asia and Africa and significantly enhanced Indonesia's international standing.⁹

The *bebas dan aktif* doctrine has remained a fundamental principle of Indonesian foreign policy thinking ever since, although successive presidents have interpreted and applied it in different ways. Against this historical background, it is particularly relevant to examine whether Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy represents continuity or a substantive shift in direction.

2.2. The Evolution of the Doctrine and the Constraints of the Reform Era

During President Suharto's (1967–1998) "New Order" (Orde Baru) era, the priorities of Indonesian foreign policy underwent a significant transformation. The anti-colonial and revolutionary rhetoric of the Sukarno era was gradually replaced by a more pragmatic approach that prioritised economic development, domestic

⁴ RAKHMAT, Muhammad Zulfikar: [From China and Russia to the Board of Peace: Prabowo's Bid for Washington's Attention](#), London School of Economics and Political Science, 2026.03.04. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

⁵ BORAN, Tufan Kotay: [Prabowo's Foreign Policy Choices: Balancing Domestic Legitimacy and Global Ambition](#), Global South Forum, 2025.10.15. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

⁶ BASUKI, Tobias: [Indonesia's Gado-Gado Foreign Policy – A Look at Developments Under Prabowo Subianto's Leadership](#), Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2025.09.22. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

⁷ DHARMAPUTRA, Radityo: [Indonesia's 'In-Between' Foreign Policy](#), Fulcrum, 2026.04.16. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

⁸ Between 27 December 1949 and 17 August 1950, Sukarno served as President of the United States of Indonesia (Republik Indonesia Serikat, RIS), while Assaat served as Acting President of the Republic of Indonesia.

⁹ PUTRA, Bama Andika: [Prabowo and the shifts in Indonesia's contemporary foreign policy: unboxing a leader's Operational Code](#), Politics and International Relations, 2025.08.08. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

political stability, and cooperation with the West. Although the bebas dan aktif doctrine remained the official guiding principle of Indonesian foreign policy, its practical application increasingly served the objectives of economic modernisation and regional stability.

Following the democratic transition (Reformasi) of 1998, successive administrations sought to strike a balance between promoting democratic values internationally and advancing Indonesia's national interests.¹⁰ This process, however, was not without controversy. Foreign policy decisions regularly generated domestic political debate, particularly when the public or opposition groups perceived them as being overly aligned with the interests of the United States or other Western powers. During the presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri, for example, the administration faced criticism for supporting international cooperation in the fight against terrorism, while the administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) encountered significant domestic opposition after supporting United Nations Security Council Resolution 1747 imposing sanctions on Iran.

Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) ten-year presidency (2014–2024) introduced a new set of priorities into Indonesian foreign policy. Foreign policy increasingly became an instrument for supporting domestic economic development, particularly infrastructure development, attracting foreign direct investment, and implementing the downstreaming strategy aimed at expanding the domestic processing of natural resources. Rather than pursuing large-scale geopolitical initiatives, Jokowi primarily emphasised strengthening bilateral economic relations and promoting investment. This approach is well illustrated by the fact that throughout his presidency he did not personally attend the annual General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly on a single occasion, which, according to several analysts, reflected Indonesia's more restrained approach to multilateral engagement.¹¹

With Prabowo Subianto's assumption of office, however, the priorities of Indonesian foreign policy once again appear to be shifting. His foreign policy initiatives to date suggest not merely a continuation of Jokowi's economically oriented diplomacy, but its expansion through a more active geopolitical and security-oriented approach. The new administration is simultaneously seeking to broaden economic partnerships, deepen defence cooperation, and enhance Indonesia's international political influence. This does not represent a departure from the bebas dan aktif principle, but rather its practical application in response to a changing international environment.

Accordingly, an analysis of the Prabowo administration's foreign policy should focus not primarily on whether the underlying principle has been preserved or abandoned, but on changes in its priorities, instruments, and practical implementation. This raises the question of whether Indonesia is undergoing a genuine doctrinal shift in foreign policy or whether the changes instead reflect the adaptation of traditional Indonesian foreign policy thinking to the geopolitical challenges of the twenty-first century. To address this question, the following section examines the most significant foreign policy initiatives and diplomatic activities of the first two years of Prabowo's presidency.

3. Structural Characteristics of Prabowo's Foreign Policy

3.1. The Return of Active Diplomacy

Following Prabowo Subianto's assumption of office, the priorities of Indonesian foreign policy shifted noticeably. The new president complemented the Jokowi administration's economically oriented foreign policy with a more active and personalised approach to diplomacy. His foreign policy is strongly shaped by

¹⁰ SEBASTIAN, C Leonard, and NURSHANDRINA, Dilla Andieni: [IP25020 | Unpacking Self-Sufficiency in Prabowo's Free and Active Foreign Policy](#), S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2025.02.28. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

¹¹ NADARAJAH et al: [Indonesia's Election Signals Policy Continuity, but Stokes Uncertainty about its Democratic Trajectory](#), Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2024.02.22. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

his military background, his emphasis on strategic autonomy, and his ambition to expand Indonesia's room for manoeuvre in international affairs. In his speeches, Prabowo regularly stresses the importance of cooperation, an approach aptly reflected in his frequently quoted maxim: "One enemy is too many, a thousand friends are too few."

One of the administration's principal objectives has been to strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic role on the international stage. A prominent example was Prabowo's personal participation in the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2025, where his address emphasised multilateral cooperation, the interests of developing countries, and the need to reduce international inequalities. This stood in sharp contrast to Joko Widodo's diplomatic practice: during his presidency, rather than personally attending major multilateral forums, Jokowi generally entrusted Indonesia's representation to the foreign minister.¹²

3.2. Great-Power Balancing and the Practice of Multi-Alignment

One of the defining features of Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy is the practical application of the *bebas dan aktif* principle through what can be described as multi-alignment. While *bebas dan aktif* constitutes Indonesia's legally established foreign policy principle, multi-alignment can be understood as an analytical framework capturing the multidirectional and simultaneous cultivation of partnerships characteristic of Prabowo's foreign policy. At its core, this approach means that Indonesia does not align exclusively with any single great-power pole, but instead seeks to deepen its relations simultaneously with a range of states and international groupings, including actors that may be in competition with one another. As a twenty-first-century interpretation of the traditional *bebas dan aktif* doctrine, Indonesia seeks to avoid alignment with any single great-power bloc while simultaneously deepening its strategic, economic, and security ties with all major international actors. The objective is not to maintain neutrality in the classical sense, but to maximise the country's diplomatic room for manoeuvre and bargaining power within an increasingly multipolar international system.

In its relations with China, Prabowo has largely continued the Jokowi administration's policy of economic cooperation. His first official overseas visit was to Beijing, where he reaffirmed investment and infrastructure cooperation between the two countries. Close economic ties, however, have not eliminated conflicts of interest. In 2026, Chinese mining companies criticised the Indonesian government's tightening of nickel production quotas and the increasing tax burden on the sector. The dispute demonstrated that, even while encouraging Chinese investment, Jakarta remains determined to preserve its room for manoeuvre in natural-resource policy.¹³

Another sensitive issue in bilateral relations remains the South China Sea. A joint statement issued in November 2024, which referred to the possibility of cooperation in areas associated with overlapping maritime claims, generated controversy both domestically and internationally. Critics argued that the wording could have indirectly legitimised China's claims, prompting the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to swiftly reaffirm that Jakarta's position remained unchanged and firmly grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹⁴

Relations with the United States illustrate the pragmatic and transactional character of Prabowo's diplomacy. Shortly after assuming office, the president visited Washington, where he held talks with Joe

¹² RISWAH, Kuntum Khaira: [President Prabowo's speech at the general debate of the UNGA](#), Antara, 2025.09.24. [Online, 2026.07.21.]

¹³ DUAN et al.: [Chinese firms warn Indonesia's nickel quotas, tax hikes threaten investment](#), Reuters, 2026.05.13. [Online, 2026.08.11.]

¹⁴ KING, Gemma: [Six Months of Prabowo: Indonesia's Diplomatic Charm Offensive](#), Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2025.05.05. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

Biden and subsequently with Donald Trump. One of the most significant tests of bilateral relations came with the Trump administration's announcement of punitive tariffs affecting Indonesian exports. Personal negotiations helped mitigate the proposed measures, although Jakarta simultaneously made substantial economic commitments to purchase US energy, agricultural, and aerospace products.¹⁵ This illustrates how, under Prabowo, the maintenance of strategic partnerships is frequently underpinned by reciprocal economic bargaining.¹⁶

Alongside strengthening relations with Russia, Indonesia has also actively expanded its foreign policy partnerships in other directions.¹⁷ Prabowo has met Russian President Vladimir Putin on several occasions, while defence cooperation between the two countries has gained renewed momentum. Joint naval exercises and high-level political consultations have demonstrated that Jakarta does not intend to join Western efforts to isolate Russia internationally, but instead seeks, in accordance with the principle of strategic autonomy, to maintain cooperation with all major powers.

India has likewise assumed a prominent role in Prabowo's foreign policy.¹⁸ During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2026 visit to Jakarta, the two countries further deepened their strategic partnership, with particular emphasis on defence-industrial cooperation, maritime security, and stability in the Indian Ocean region.¹⁹ This cooperation fits well with Indonesia's broader effort to expand its foreign policy room for manoeuvre by strengthening ties with regional middle powers.²⁰

In its relations with the Middle East, the Prabowo administration has pursued both economic and political objectives. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have emerged as important financing partners for Indonesian infrastructure and housing programmes, while Jakarta has sought a more active role in international initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict in Gaza.²¹ The deterioration of the region's security environment, however, has highlighted the continuing constraints on Indonesia's foreign policy ambitions, particularly its cautious approach to military involvement and its preference for limiting participation to humanitarian roles.²²

The central dilemma of Prabowo's multi-alignment strategy, however, stems precisely from what constitutes its greatest advantage: the simultaneous deepening of relations with competing powers. Indonesia is strengthening defence and technological cooperation with the United States, maintaining close economic ties with China, and developing military cooperation with Russia, while simultaneously joining BRICS and pursuing OECD membership. In the short term, these relationships enhance Jakarta's bargaining position; over the longer term, however, they may make it increasingly difficult to ensure that none of Indonesia's partners perceives its engagement with other powers as contrary to its own strategic interests.

¹⁵ CHASE, Chris: [Trump announces tariff deal with Indonesia](#), Seafood Source, 2025.07.16. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

¹⁶ LAKSONO, Riandy: [Signed, sealed, misunderstood: Indonesia's blind leap into the US trade deal](#), Indonesia at Melbourne, 2025.08.07. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

¹⁷ SAHA, Rushali: [Indonesian foreign policy is still free, more active](#), Lowy Institute, 2024.12.11. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

¹⁸ KESARWANI, Nimisha: [CO26154 | What the Modi-Prabowo Summit Reveals About Indo-Pacific Realignment](#), S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2026.07.17. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

¹⁹ WICAKSONO, Aditya Eko Sigit: [Modi's visit marks new era for Indonesia-India strategic partnership](#), Antara, 2026.07.13. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

²⁰ DESK, Edit: [A Golden Chapter in India-Indonesia Relations: Modi's Jakarta Visit Reinforces Strategic Partnership](#), EconomicDiplomacy.in, 2026.07.08. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

²¹ BLAND, Ben: ['Continuity' Prabowo means change for Indonesia](#), Chatham House, 2024.02.15. [Online, 2026.07.22.], PRIMAYANTI: [President Prabowo pledges 8,000 troops for Gaza peace force](#), Antara, 2026.02.20. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

²² GOKCE, Saadet: [Indonesian president pledges 8,000 'or more' troops to Gaza peacekeeping force](#), AA, 2026.02.19. [Online, 2026.07.22.], SIAHAAN, Jannus TH: [Why Prabowo must follow through on cancelling the Gaza peacekeeping deployment](#), Middle East Monitor, 2026.03.21. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

At the same time, this strategy entails a number of challenges. The frequently conflicting interests of the major powers require Jakarta to engage in continuous balancing, particularly over the South China Sea, global trade disputes, and intensifying great-power competition. The long-term paradox of multi-alignment is that, while the diversification of partnerships is intended to strengthen Indonesia's strategic autonomy, deeper relations with competing powers may generate new dependencies and increasingly incompatible expectations. In a crisis, these could ultimately constrain the very foreign policy room for manoeuvre that Jakarta seeks to expand. The long-term success of Prabowo's foreign policy will therefore depend not only on Indonesia's ability to avoid falling under the exclusive influence of any single great power, but also on its capacity to manage the contradictions arising from its simultaneous partnerships.

3.3. The Relative Deprioritisation of ASEAN and the Growing Importance of the Global South

One of the most significant changes in Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy has been the reordering of priorities in multilateral diplomacy. While ASEAN has traditionally occupied a central position in Indonesian foreign policy for decades, the new administration has placed increasing emphasis on global forums and organisations bringing together countries of the Global South. This does not imply a complete abandonment of ASEAN's role; rather, it suggests that Jakarta seeks to combine its regional leadership with broader international ambitions.

This shift in emphasis was illustrated in December 2024, when Foreign Minister Sugiono did not attend the ASEAN consultations on the Myanmar crisis in Bangkok, instead accompanying President Prabowo to the D-8 summit in Cairo.²³ Several analysts interpreted this decision as an indication that the administration increasingly seeks to strengthen Indonesia's international standing through global political and economic platforms rather than focusing primarily on regional crisis management.

A central element of this strategy was Indonesia's accession to BRICS, which opened a new chapter in the country's foreign policy. Membership carries not only political but also economic significance, particularly through the potential for deeper economic and financial cooperation among developing countries. In the longer term, possible accession to the New Development Bank (NDB) could provide Indonesia with additional sources of financing. At the same time, Jakarta continues to play an active role within the G20, where it has primarily emphasised sustainable development, green finance, and the representation of developing countries' interests.

An interesting duality emerges from Indonesia's simultaneous pursuit of closer integration with the Global South through BRICS and its continued OECD accession process. This suggests that Prabowo's foreign policy does not seek ideologically driven alignment with a particular bloc, but rather aims to maintain a presence both within Western-led institutional frameworks and organisations representing emerging economies. OECD membership could facilitate administrative and economic reforms while also contributing to greater confidence among international investors.

Indonesia is also seeking a more active role in the Islamic world. Within the frameworks of the D-8 and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Jakarta has become increasingly prominent through its humanitarian initiatives and its position on the Palestinian issue. This serves not only foreign policy objectives but is also consistent with Prabowo's ambition for Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, to play a significant political role within the Islamic world.

The changing pattern of Indonesia's multilateral engagement suggests that Prabowo is not seeking to diminish the importance of ASEAN, but rather to expand Indonesia's foreign policy room for manoeuvre beyond regional frameworks and into a global dimension. Jakarta's simultaneous engagement with BRICS,

²³ The D-8 (Developing Eight) is an organisation for economic cooperation comprising eight predominantly Muslim developing countries—Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Türkiye—established in 1997.

the OECD, the G20, the D-8, and the OIC reflects its ambition to become an influential actor both in the political cooperation of the Global South and within the leading institutions of international economic governance. This strategy is closely aligned with Prabowo's multi-alignment approach, which prioritises the diversification of foreign partnerships and the strengthening of Indonesia's strategic autonomy.

4. Foreign Policy as an Instrument of National Self-Sufficiency

One of the defining characteristics of Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy is its close integration with domestic development objectives. The administration's foreign policy activism does not pursue diplomatic engagement for its own sake, but serves the implementation of the strategic objectives set out in the Asta Cita²⁴ programme. At the heart of this agenda are the strengthening of food, energy, and defence self-sufficiency, as well as enhancing Indonesia's economic resilience. International partnerships therefore represent more than foreign policy relationships alone; they have become important instruments for implementing the country's national development strategy.

In the field of food security, Prabowo attaches particular importance to the Free Nutritious Meals Programme (Program Makan Bergizi Gratis – MBG), one of the best-known Asta Cita initiatives and among those with the broadest social impact. To help secure funding for the programme, the administration has pursued active international economic diplomacy. During Prabowo's first visit to Beijing, the Chinese and Indonesian governments reached an agreement on financing the "Food Supplementation and School Feeding Programme in Indonesia", linked to Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meals Programme. The agreement illustrates how foreign relations can directly contribute to the implementation of domestic welfare programmes.²⁵

Strengthening energy security is another central component of the new administration's strategy. In the oil and gas sector, Indonesia has intensified cooperation with Chinese energy companies, particularly in the exploration of offshore reserves around Buton and Timor and in the development of extraction technologies. Cooperation between Sinopec and Pertamina Hulu Energi demonstrates Jakarta's emphasis on improving the utilisation of existing hydrocarbon reserves. Technological cooperation launched in 2024 across five Pertamina fields—Rantau, Jirak, Tanjung, Pamusian, and Zulu—was followed in May 2025 by a Joint Study Agreement (JSA) concerning the Tanjung field. Under this arrangement, the parties are examining the applicability of Chemical Enhanced Oil Recovery (CEOR) technology to improve recovery efficiency at the mature field.²⁶

At the same time, the administration regards the diversification of energy sources as a strategic priority. In the field of nuclear energy, Indonesia has also deepened cooperation with the United States. Initiatives have been launched to explore the potential application of thorium-based nuclear technologies in Indonesia, while agreements have also been concluded on cooperation in the field of small modular reactors (SMRs). In renewable energy, Prabowo has developed closer ties with Brazil on biofuel development, particularly with regard to the widespread adoption of a biodiesel blend containing 50 per cent palm oil (B50). Cooperation with a diverse range of partners reflects the administration's effort to

²⁴ Asta Cita ("Eight Aspirations/Goals") is the framework of eight strategic priorities underpinning the governing programme of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka. Among other objectives, the programme encompasses strengthening state and institutional stability, developing national defence, promoting economic self-sufficiency and job creation, developing human resources, improving infrastructure and rural areas, and strengthening food and energy security.

²⁵ DESCA, Lidya Natalia: [Pemerintah China dukung program makan bergizi gratis Presiden Prabowo](#), Antara, 2024.11.09. [Online, 2026.08.11.]

²⁶ PERTAMINA HULU INDONESIA: [PHE and Sinopec Sign Collaboration on CEOR Technology Study to Boost National Energy Resilience](#), Pertamina Hulu Indonesia, 2025.05.27. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

build Indonesia's energy supply on multiple sources, thereby reducing the country's external dependence.²⁷

The development of the defence industry is likewise a major component of Prabowo's foreign policy. Drawing on his previous experience as defence minister, the president regards arms procurement not merely as a means of military modernisation, but also as an opportunity for industrial development and technological cooperation. Indonesia has accordingly pursued a deliberate diversification of its procurement sources. An agreement with Türkiye was reached on participation in the KAAN fifth-generation fighter aircraft programme, which could facilitate technology transfer and contribute to the long-term development of Indonesia's aerospace industry.²⁸ Defence cooperation with India has also deepened further: in July 2026, a contract was signed for the acquisition of the BrahMos missile system, alongside an agreement on cooperation in the field of air-to-air missiles.²⁹ Agreements with the United States, including the purchase of Boeing aircraft, have meanwhile contributed both to strengthening bilateral economic ties and to easing trade disputes.³⁰

These initiatives demonstrate that Prabowo's foreign policy extends beyond the traditional cultivation of diplomatic relations. International partnerships are deliberately linked to Indonesia's long-term development objectives and are intended to strengthen domestic capacities in the food, energy, and defence sectors, enhance security of supply, and diversify external dependencies. In this sense, foreign policy is not treated by the administration as an isolated policy domain, but as one of its principal instruments for achieving economic modernisation, technological development, and strategic autonomy. The success of Indonesia's foreign policy activism should therefore be assessed not only by the number or intensity of its diplomatic relationships, but also by the extent to which they contribute to strengthening the country's national resilience and long-term competitiveness.

5. Interpreting Prabowo's Foreign Policy and Domestic Debates

5.1. Domestic Debates and the Dilemmas of Loyalty

Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy has generated considerable debate in Indonesia not only because of the scale of his international engagement, but also because of the manner in which foreign policy is conducted. While supporters argue that the president's active diplomatic engagement has significantly increased Indonesia's international visibility and room for manoeuvre, critics contend that foreign policy decision-making has become increasingly centred on the president himself, potentially diminishing the role of traditional diplomatic institutions and professional mechanisms. The debate therefore concerns not only Prabowo's foreign policy objectives, but also the respective roles of the president, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the diplomatic establishment in shaping Indonesia's external relations.

One of the central themes of domestic criticism concerns the president's exceptionally intensive international engagement. Former Deputy Foreign Minister Dino Patti Djalal has publicly criticised the amount of time Prabowo has spent abroad since assuming office, arguing that such travel entails significant costs while many diplomatic tasks could instead be conducted through digital diplomacy or handled by the

²⁷ NASUTION, Rahmad: [Prabowo reaffirms Indonesia's non-aligned foreign policy](#), Antara, 2026.06.10. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

²⁸ BORAN et al.: [Turkey-Indonesia's KAAN Agreement: 'Trickle-Down' Strategic Autonomy Pursuit](#), Global South Forum, 2025.08.01. [Online, 2026.07.22.], DARLING, Daniel: [Indonesia's Kaan Jet Fighter Deal with Turkey: Symbolism or Substance?](#), Defense & Security Monitor, 2025.06.17. [Online, 2026.07.22.], HELOU, Agnes: [Indonesia eyes joining Turkish 5th-generation fighter jet program KAAN](#), Breaking Defense, 2025.04.11. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

²⁹ SEKRETARIAT NEGARA REPUBLIK INDONESIA: [Indonesia-India Perkuat Kemitraan Strategis melalui 16 Kesepakatan Kerja Sama](#), Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2026.07.07. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

³⁰ KEMENTERIAN KOORDINATOR BIDANG PEREKONOMIAN REPUBLIK INDONESIA: [Dari Tantangan ke Kesepakatan: Langkah Indonesia Navigasi Negosiasi Tarif AS](#), Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2025.07.31. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Underlying this criticism are differing conceptions of how foreign policy should be conducted: while Prabowo regards personal leader-level diplomacy as one of the principal instruments of international relations, his critics emphasise greater autonomy and a more substantial role for Indonesia's professional diplomatic institutions.

Similar debates have surrounded Foreign Minister Sugiono. A former military officer and long-standing political ally of Prabowo, Sugiono does not come from a conventional diplomatic background, leading some observers to interpret his appointment as evidence that personal loyalty has been prioritised over professional expertise.³¹ The practical interpretation of *bebas dan aktif* also became the subject of domestic debate in July 2026, when the Indonesian government initially decided that the country would be represented by its ambassador in Tehran at the funeral ceremony of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The decision was criticised, among others, by former Indonesian ambassador to Washington Dino Patti Djalal, who argued that the absence of higher-level representation was difficult to reconcile with Indonesia's traditional understanding of its *bebas dan aktif* foreign policy role. Foreign Minister Sugiono, by contrast, cited technical and scheduling considerations, including preparations for high-level state visits taking place in Jakarta. The government subsequently revised its initial decision: Sugiono and Ahmad Muzani, Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), travelled to Iran at the head of a high-level delegation and attended the funeral-related ceremony.³²

Considerable debate has also emerged over the credibility of the government's foreign policy communication. The most prominent example was the interception of the Sumud Flotilla 2.0 in May 2026, which included Indonesian citizens among its participants.³³ During parliamentary discussions of the incident, Foreign Minister Sugiono avoided terms such as "abduction" or "hostage-taking", characterising the incident primarily in terms of a denial of entry. Several civil society organisations, journalists, and opposition politicians argued that this language was inconsistent with Indonesia's traditionally pro-Palestinian foreign policy rhetoric. The episode once again drew attention to the question of how the government seeks to balance humanitarian commitments, international law, and pragmatic diplomatic considerations.³⁴

Criticism, however, has extended beyond individual diplomatic controversies. In several statements, Prabowo has suggested that some government critics serve foreign interests, while his administration has begun preparing draft legislation on countering disinformation and foreign propaganda (RUU Penanggulangan Disinformasi dan Propaganda Asing). According to the government, the initiative is intended to protect Indonesia's sovereignty and information security, whereas human rights organisations and several academic observers have expressed concerns that the proposed legislation could also restrict the operating space available to independent media, civil society, and academia.³⁵

Foreign policy communication and coordination have also been marked by uncertainty on several occasions. One example occurred during Prabowo's European trip in May 2026, when a spokesperson for

³¹ SYECHBUBAKR, Ahmad Syarif: [Loyalty over expertise: The patronage problem at the heart of Prabowo's foreign policy](#), Indonesia at Melbourne, 2026.04.21. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

³² INDRA, Radhiyya: [Foreign minister to attend Khamenei funeral after domestic pressure](#), The Jakarta Post, 2026.07.07. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

³³ The Global Sumud Flotilla 2.0 was an international civilian humanitarian flotilla that departed for Gaza in May 2026 with participants from more than forty countries, seeking to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. The flotilla was intercepted by Israeli forces on 18–19 May 2026. Its participants included nine Indonesian citizens, who were released on 21 May after being detained.

³⁴ RAKHMAT, Muhammad Zulfikar: [Indonesia's foreign minister didn't defend the flotilla detainees. He defended Israel's language](#), Middle East Monitor, 2026.05.22. [Online, 2026.07.22.],

³⁵ RAKHMAT et al: [Prabowo's Foreign-Agent Rhetoric Weakens Indonesia's Fight Against FIMI](#), JakartaGlobe.id, 2026.07.20. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

the Gerindra Party referred to presidential visits to Austria and Hungary in addition to France. The Government Communications Office subsequently stated officially that Prabowo's itinerary had, from the outset, been limited exclusively to France. The episode highlighted that statements made by different actors within and around the administration have not always conveyed a consistent official foreign policy message.³⁶

Overall, domestic assessments of Prabowo's foreign policy remain sharply divided. Supporters interpret his active international engagement as evidence of Indonesia's growing international influence, while critics draw attention to the centralisation of foreign policy decision-making, the perceived growing importance of personal loyalty, and the potential marginalisation of established diplomatic institutions. The debate therefore extends beyond individual foreign policy decisions to the broader question of how the Prabowo administration understands the relationship between foreign policy and democratic institutions in twenty-first-century Indonesia.

5.2. International Assessments and Geopolitical Concerns

International actors have assessed Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy in different ways, reflecting Indonesia's distinctive position within the emerging landscape of great-power competition. While Jakarta emphasises strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, its partners frequently interpret these policies through the lens of their own geopolitical interests. As a result, the same foreign policy initiatives may simultaneously generate approval and concern among different international actors.

The United States has generally welcomed the strengthening of bilateral economic and defence ties. The purchase of Boeing aircraft, new opportunities for US energy companies, and the expansion of nuclear cooperation indicate that Indonesia remains an important partner for Washington in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, Jakarta's closer relations with Russia and China have generated concerns in some US strategic circles, particularly with regard to Indonesia's BRICS membership and joint military exercises with the Russian navy. Some US observers have therefore expressed concern that, under the banner of strategic autonomy, Indonesia could gradually move closer to Moscow and Beijing.³⁷

China, by contrast, views the continuation under Prabowo of the economic and infrastructure cooperation developed over previous years as a positive development. Chinese investment and bilateral economic ties continue to play a significant role in Indonesia's development. Nevertheless, Beijing does not necessarily regard Jakarta as an entirely predictable partner. The modernisation of the Indonesian armed forces, expanding defence cooperation with India and the United States, and Indonesia's more assertive posture around the Natuna Islands suggest that Jakarta continues to seek ways of balancing Chinese influence in the South China Sea.

Within the European Union, assessments of Prabowo's foreign policy have likewise been multifaceted. On the one hand, progress towards the Indonesia–European Union Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), together with the continuation of Jakarta's OECD accession process, has been regarded as a positive development.³⁸ The agreement resulting from the conclusion of CEPA negotiations in September 2025 provides for the gradual elimination of the overwhelming majority of tariffs and covers, among other areas, services and investment, digital trade, energy and raw-material

³⁶ ABDURRAHMAN, Sultan: [Prabowo Has No Further Foreign Visits Planned After France, Bureau Says](#), Tempo English, 2026.05.31. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

³⁷ [Fact Sheet: Trump Administration Finalizes Trade Deal with Indonesia](#), The White House, 2026.02.19. [Online, 2026.07.22.]

³⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: [Key elements of the EU-Indonesia Trade Agreement and Investment Protection Agreement](#), European Commission, 2025.09.23. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

supply chains, and sustainable development.³⁹ On the other hand, questions concerning human rights and the functioning of democratic institutions remain present in EU–Indonesia relations, alongside earlier disputes involving trade in palm oil and nickel.⁴⁰ The European approach therefore combines openness to deeper economic cooperation with an emphasis on normative expectations.⁴¹

Among regional analysts, criticism has focused primarily on the future role of ASEAN. Several observers have argued that Prabowo's active global diplomacy and emphasis on bilateral relations could result in the relative deprioritisation of ASEAN within Indonesian foreign policy.⁴² Tobias Basuki has characterised this approach as a "gado-gado" foreign policy, suggesting that the administration seeks to participate simultaneously in a wide range of differing geopolitical and economic arrangements.⁴³ Other analyses, however, interpret the diversification of partnerships and multilateral forums as part of Indonesia's broader multi-alignment strategy, aimed at preserving the country's strategic room for manoeuvre amid intensifying great-power competition.⁴⁴

Overall, international assessments demonstrate that perceptions of Prabowo's foreign policy depend to a considerable extent on the geopolitical interests of the actors concerned. While Indonesia's own narrative emphasises strategic autonomy and the diversification of partnerships, its external partners frequently assess Jakarta's actions in terms of their implications for the evolving international balance of power. This illustrates how the multi-alignment strategy simultaneously provides Indonesia with greater diplomatic room for manoeuvre while exposing it to continuing geopolitical pressures arising from the differing expectations of major powers.

6. Conclusions and Strategic Implications

Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy is not only reshaping Indonesia's international relations but is also likely to have broader implications for the regional order in Southeast Asia and the international system as a whole. His multi-alignment strategy creates new economic and diplomatic opportunities while simultaneously raising new challenges regarding strategic autonomy, regional cooperation, and the management of great-power competition.

From Indonesia's perspective, Prabowo's foreign policy may generate significant economic and technological benefits, but it also entails longer-term risks. Trade agreements with the United States and major purchases of energy and aerospace products may contribute to strengthening bilateral relations and supporting the country's modernisation, while at the same time imposing substantial fiscal costs. Moreover, changes to regulations concerning local content requirements and critical minerals raise questions about the extent to which Indonesia will be able to preserve its room for manoeuvre in industrial policy over the longer term. Defence modernisation presents a similar dilemma: the deliberate diversification of procurement sources reduces dependence on any single partner and strengthens strategic

³⁹ EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE: [Indonesia: 11th EU-Indonesia Human Rights Dialogue takes place in Indonesia](#), EEAS, 2026.04.15. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

⁴⁰ STANZEL, Angela – REITH, Stefan: [Setting the Course after Elections in Indonesia](#), Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2024. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

⁴¹ OECD: [Indonesia reaches key milestones in OECD accession process](#), OECD, 2025.06.03. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

⁴² YAACOB, Abdul Rahman: [Prabowo puts the "i" in foreign policy](#), Lowy Institute, 2024.05.13. [Online, 2026.09.16.], WICAKSANA, I Gede Wahyu et al.: [Discerning Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy: Populist personalisation and problematic changes](#), 2026. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

⁴³ BASUKI, Tobias: [Indonesia's Gado-Gado Foreign Policy – A Look at Developments Under Prabowo Subianto's Leadership](#), Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2025.09.22. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

⁴⁴ WICAKSANA, I Gede Wahyu – YAKTI, Probo Darono: [Indonesia's New Partial Multialignment Strategy: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis](#), TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia, 2025, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 264–281. [Online, 2026.09.16.]

autonomy, but the integration of military systems acquired from different countries may create long-term logistical, training, and maintenance challenges.

At the regional level, Prabowo's foreign policy raises new questions concerning Indonesia's role within ASEAN. If Jakarta continues to place greater emphasis on global forums and bilateral relationships, this may reduce ASEAN's centrality in Indonesian foreign policy thinking. While this would not necessarily weaken the organisation itself, it could affect Indonesia's traditional leadership role in forging regional consensus. Some analysts argue that such a development could reduce the effectiveness of collective ASEAN action on issues such as the South China Sea and the crisis in Myanmar, while others contend that Indonesia's expanding global network of partnerships could, over the longer term, strengthen the region's capacity to advance its interests internationally.

For the European Union, Indonesia is emerging as an increasingly important economic and strategic partner, particularly in the fields of critical raw materials, the green transition, and Indo-Pacific cooperation. Following the conclusion of CEPA negotiations on 23 September 2025, preparations for the signature and conclusion of the agreement were under way as of August 2026, potentially creating new opportunities for the further expansion of bilateral economic relations. At the same time, Prabowo's balancing strategy, particularly Indonesia's relations with Russia and the BRICS countries, may raise issues on which Jakarta's positions differ from the foreign and security policy priorities of the European Union. Consequently, economic cooperation is likely to deepen further, while differences of interest may persist on certain geopolitical issues.

At the global level, Prabowo's foreign policy fits within broader international trends towards an increasingly multipolar world order and greater room for manoeuvre for middle powers. Indonesia's example suggests that many emerging states are becoming less willing to align themselves permanently with a single geopolitical bloc, instead seeking flexible, issue-based partnerships. In this sense, multi-alignment does not imply the abandonment of traditional partnerships, but rather their supplementation through a more diversified foreign policy approach.

Overall, Prabowo's foreign policy represents both continuity and adaptation within Indonesia's foreign policy tradition. While it remains grounded in the principle of *bebas dan aktif*, its interpretation is being adapted to the geopolitical and economic challenges of the twenty-first century. The preservation of strategic autonomy, the diversification of partnerships, and the integration of foreign policy with domestic development objectives together constitute a foreign policy model that may expand Indonesia's international room for manoeuvre while simultaneously requiring increasingly complex balancing amid great-power competition. The long-term success of this model will ultimately depend on whether Jakarta can sustain this balance without enduringly compromising either its strategic autonomy or its regional leadership role.



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