

The Labor Party logo features the word "Labor" in white text on a red rectangular background. To the right of the red bar is a blue square containing the Australian flag's stars.

OPINION PIECE | **WE'LL PUT
PEOPLE FIRST**

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ASEAN IS A MAJOR SECURITY ASSET FOR AUSTRALIA

Labor warmly welcomes ASEAN leaders to Sydney for this week's ASEAN-Australia Special Summit.

Australia became ASEAN's first formal dialogue partner under Prime Minister Whitlam in 1974, and Labor appointed the first Australian Ambassador to ASEAN in 2008. The Australian Mission to ASEAN was established in September 2013, and a formal strategic partnership was agreed in 2014.

This Special Summit builds on Australia's strong history of engagement with ASEAN under governments of both persuasions, and a significant initiative for which the government is to be commended. Australia should and does reach out to the region, and this step in our relationship with ASEAN is the result of just that outreach. It is an initiative which, in government, Labor will certainly seek to develop further.

Bringing together the 10 South East Asian nations, ASEAN remains central to the region's prosperity and security.

Australia's relationship with ASEAN is a central plank of Labor's FutureAsia policy. FutureAsia recognises the critical role that Asia already plays in Australia's economic development, and the reciprocal role that Australia should play in regional economic, political, cultural, and security affairs.

The world's economic weight continues to shift to our region. Indonesia is on track to become the world's fifth biggest economy by 2030 – just 12 years away. In the same timeframe, Asia's economy will have grown to around the same size as Europe and North America, at about 40 percent of the global economy.

This shift in global economic power is both accompanied by, and presages a significant shift in strategic weight. Maintaining a stable strategic system in our region, anchored in the rule of law, will require stronger partnerships and deeper co-operation.

Labor has a proud tradition of working hard on global and regional structures, from the G20 to APEC to the East Asian Summit. Our support for the East Asia Summit, for example, goes beyond attendance and participation, as important as these are. We provide intellectual and financial resources to strengthen it; make sure the fullest possible range of analytical, policy and planning skills are available to it; and help position it as a leading security forum on the global stage.

The stark fact is that peace and harmony cannot be imposed. The shift of the global strategic balance to Asia means regional powers must give themselves strong, inclusive and transparent institutions to manage regional economic and security issues. Institutions that reflect and respect the individual sovereignty of their members, and discourage hegemony, provide the best way to promote peace and avoid conflict.

As the major regional political institution in its own right, ASEAN remains central to regional security. With its diversity and heterogeneity, ASEAN has enhanced the security of each of its member countries and in the process it has enhanced Australia's security as well.

As important as ASEAN is, and will continue to be, there are additional arrangements that enhance regional security. The United States has been the major presence in the region since the Second World War, with a network of treaties and arrangements including with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand – and of course its alliance with Australia. This network has underpinned the region's stability, security and prosperity to the mutual and collective benefit of all.

Australia's Defence Cooperation programs in place throughout Asia deliver professional development and policy planning skills that build both national capacity and regional confidence.

Other forums have buttressed ASEAN's security initiatives by bringing countries in the region together in shared pursuits. The Five Power Defence Arrangements, established in 1971 by Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK, continue to support the security interests of the partners. The key to the FPDA's continuing relevance is that, like ASEAN itself, it gets on with its business without fuss or fanfare.

The recently established Quadrilateral – involving officials from Australia, India, Japan and the US – can play a similarly valuable complementary role. It makes a space for four like-minded, trading democracies to share their thoughts on regional security. The high-level discussions add another layer of cooperation to the intersecting bilateral and multilateral activities in place across the region.

Defence exercises, particularly naval exercises, with these countries and others in the region also play a critical role in building operational understanding and confidence which in turn is vital for the security of the Indo-Pacific. Working with neighbours builds confidence and transparency in what is a remarkably diverse region. From India in the west, to Australia in the south, to China and Japan in the north, to the US in the east, the nations of the Indo-Pacific must invest in the region's economic, political and security institutions if they are to generate the stability and prosperity that are the determinants of long-term regional security.

ASEAN comes into its own as the core that gives regional security its coherence and credibility. Adding the Quadrilateral to the regional mix of dialogues and defence arrangements can only reinforce ASEAN's central structures and institutions.

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