

ASEAN

Background Guide

Mandate

- The ASEAN Secretariat was established on 24 February 1976 by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN. The Agreement on the Establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat stated that the basic mandate of the ASEAN Secretariat is “to provide for greater efficiency in the coordination of ASEAN organs and for more effective implementation of ASEAN projects and activities”. The more detailed functions of the ASEAN Secretariat were embodied in the functions and powers of the Secretary-General (See Annex A). The ASEAN Secretariat was established with the following composition: Secretary-General, three Bureau Directors, a Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Officer, an Administrative Officer, a Public Information Officer and an Assistant to the Secretary-General.



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Rules of Procedure

- Here are some rules of procedure delegates are required to keep in mind throughout the course of the committee.

Chits

All kinds of substantive chits will be accepted by the Executive Board

- DEL to EB
- DEL to DEL
- VIA EB TO DEL

Yields

Yields are allowed when a speaker has time left after their GSL speech. Speeches during moderated caucuses and procedural matter (debates and motions) shall not end with yielding, since the floor is not granted to the speakers during moderated caucuses. A delegate granted the right to speak during the formal debate may yield any remaining time in one of these three ways:

- Yield to another delegate The delegate's remaining time will be offered to the delegate specified by the former delegate.
- Yield to questions: POIS Questioners will be selected by the Committee Director and limited to one question each. Follow-up questions will be allowed only at the discretion of the Committee Director
- Yield to the Director Such a yield should be made if the delegate does not wish his/her speech to be subject to questions.



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Background Guide

Points that can be raised in the committee

- **Right of Reply**

A delegate whose national integrity has been impugned by another delegate may request a Right of Reply.

- **Points of Personal Privilege**

A delegate may raise a Point of Personal Privilege whenever there is something that hinders the participation of the delegate to the Committee and request that discomfort to be corrected.

- **Point of Order**

A delegate may raise a Point of Order if there is impropriety in the implementation of the parliamentary procedure. A delegate may not, in rising to a Point of Order, speak on the substance of the matter under discussion. The Point of Order will be decided by the Committee Director in accordance with the rules of procedure.

- **Point of Parliamentary Inquiry**

A delegate may raise a Point of Parliamentary Inquiry, if the delegate has a question regarding the parliamentary procedure.

- **Point of Information**

A delegate may raise a Point of Information, if the delegate has a question regarding the agenda item or the debate proceedings. (allowed after gsIs or after mod cauc speeches by the discretion of the eb)



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Background Guide

Drafting Process

- **Working Paper**

Working papers are tools for guiding the committee in its discussion and helping it in the way to create a draft resolution. Working papers are not official documents and may be presented in any format approved by the Committee Directors, but do require the signature of the Committee Director to be copied and distributed. After the distribution, delegates may refer to the working paper by its designated number.

- **Draft Resolutions**

A draft resolution may be introduced when it is signed by a certain number of delegations that are present at the Committee at the time of the submission and receives the approval of the Director.

Signing a resolution need not indicate support of the resolution, and the signer has no further obligations. Signing a draft resolution only indicated a desire for the draft resolution to be discussed in the Committee.

There are no official sponsors or submitters of draft resolution. A draft resolution requires a simple majority of members present to pass.

Only one draft resolution may be passes per topic. After a draft resolution passes, voting procedure will end and all the draft resolutions on the floor will be considered as failed. In the interpretation of this rule, “present” refers collectively to all the members participating in that session, regardless of their statuses of presence.



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Background Guide

- **Final Documents**

The expected final document of all committees is a resolution. In addition to a resolution, The United Nations Security Council may produce presidential statements and press statements. In the interpretation of the related rules, “resolution” refers to all expected final documents, unless otherwise is explicitly stated.

Amendments

Amendments Delegates may amend any draft resolution that has been introduced by adding to, deleting from or revising parts of it. Amendments shall be submitted in writing to the Directors.



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Background Guide

Introduction to the Agenda

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also known as the **silk road initiative** is an initiative that was made by China in 2013 when Xi Jinping became the President of China. It was considered to develop and strengthen global trade and economic growth by integration of the countries located in **Asia, Europe and Africa** through the network of the land and shipping routes. Since its inception the BRI has had a particular focus on the ASEAN region that encompasses **10 countries in Southeast Asia including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam**. For this reason the engagements of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are crucial since the country is located in Asia.

The Belt and Road Initiative is an enormous infrastructure undertaking and ASEAN countries could be viewed as being strategically positioned in relation to the BRI though also giving ASEAN member states both prospects and problems.



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Background Guide

1. Geographical Proximity:

ASEAN has borders with China both on the land and maritime borders and thus can easily enter into connectivity deals.

Nevertheless, ASEAN's participation in the BRI is also connected with other questions connected with geopolitical stance. It has been perceived by some countries especially the American nation and its associates of the Asia-Pacific region as a strategy applied by China in order to gain domination in the zone. Therefore, ASEAN members are in a rather uncomfortable condition where they have to have good relations with China but at the same time they cannot neglect their partners in other geographically critical regions of the world such as USA, Japan and India. Managing them is important to ASEAN as it want to enhance the positive aspect of the BRI while avoiding being dependent on China or be influenced by it.



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ASEAN

Background Guide

2. Economic Significance:

China is the key trading partner of ASEAN with the figure constituting about 16% of total foreign trade of ASEAN. BRI helps to create this relationship by encouraging the construction of infrastructure that encourages trading. BRI investments were also higher in the ASEAN region, out of which about \$16 billion were invested in ASEAN countries in only the year 2020 and such investments comprised of over 71% of the total BRI investments at that time. These investments are mainly targeted towards infrastructure arrangements that support trade enhance functionalities. Indonesia and Malaysia are some of the countries that have benefited from sizeable Chinese investments whose major impact has been directed towards enhancing the infrastructure systems related to cross-border trade with China and other countries. ASEAN also becomes the destination of 5 - 6 percent of China's total outward investments.



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Background Guide

3. Infrastructure Needs:

Most of the ASEAN countries' infrastructure requirements can be met by the BRI. Thus, the majority of the Southeast Asian countries including the less developed ones such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar view BRI as an opportunity to enhance the countries' infrastructure, attract FDI, and boost economic development. These can be roads, railways, port and power plants and will offer these countries the physical and economic infrastructure that will enable them to in the future. For instance, the china Laos railway project which connects Laos to china will turn Laos into a transportation hub thus improving the trade relationship between Laos and other neighbouring countries. Besides the enhancement of infrastructure, ASEAN members stand to reap more of the opportunities in trade liberalization, tourist and immigrants' traffic and cross- border investments due to BRI induced connectivity. According to the calculation, the region needs an estimated of \$ 2. This growth rate necessitates an investment of \$75 trillion to meet infrastructure need before 2030 to sustain this growth rate.



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Background Guide

4. Early Participation:

It was the first to engage China in the act of co-constructing the BRI. Many ASEAN countries are also original members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank led by China. Thus, ASEAN's participation in the BRI also creates several questions and concerns. One of the critical concern is the issue of increased dependency on China. On the one hand, investments from China bring multifold returns; on the other hand, such investments are usually accompanied by restrictions, which sometimes are not beneficial for the host countries. For instance, the infrastructure finance from China contains conditions whereby Chinese firms supply equipment's and labor thus restricting the local employment and benefits. However, many of the ASEAN countries are therefore concerned with the so-called /debt trap/ whereby the countries find themselves mortgaging their sovereignty by taking debts from China which results to a domino effect of Chinese political and economic expansion in region. The Sri Lankan experience of Hambantota Port where China obtained a lease after the country failed to repay its loans should be taken as a notice by ASEAN countries.



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ASEAN

Background Guide

Moreover, the BRI has environment and social angles that ASEAN nations cannot ignore. Now let's look at the strengths and weaknesses of these instruments. Infrastructure Programs can therefore be real drivers of deforestation, loss of other natural resources, and increased emission of carbon on the environment. Furthermore, questions arise on the socio-cultural effects such as, relocation of people, issues to do with the ownership of land and the effects that come along with construction. It is therefore imperative that as the ASEAN countries integrate with BRI they will have to address these economic benefits alongside these environmental and social costs.

Thus, it is crucial to determine whether ASEAN should endorse BRI: this question has numerous concerns and answers that touching the basis of the region's future. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a number of benefits to participating in the BRI, as it develops the economies of the participating countries, but there are also risks that are associated with the BRI as it makes countries dependent on others, promotes excessive borrowing, and does not promote sustainable development as well as it shifts the geopolitical balance of power. I would like to underline that as ASEAN countries actively involved in cooperation with the BRI they should pay attention to these factors to secure they will bring long-term positive impact to increase welfare and stabilize situation in the region.



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Background Guide

Background

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a global development strategy adopted by China in 2013 under Xi Jinping's presidency. The aim of the initiative is to enhance global trade and stimulate economic growth across Asia and beyond through infrastructure development and investment.

ASEAN directly relates to both the Silk Route Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk road. This region is also the location of the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor linking the Pearl River Delta Economic circle with Southeast Asian countries. This strategic corridor is expected to improve China's cooperation with the ASEAN countries in terms of infrastructure development, trade transaction, investment and tourism.



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Background Guide

The BRI has emerged as one of the world's most ambitious and debated development initiatives. As of now, around 150 countries have signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with China regarding the BRI. These agreements indicate a desire to collaborate with China on the initiative's five pillars, which include:

1. Policy Coordination
2. Facilities Connectivity
3. Unimpeded Trade
4. Financial Integration
5. People-to-People Bond

The BRI is structured around **TWO** primary components:

1. **The Silk Road Economic Belt** which connects China to Europe via Central Asia via infrastructure like roadways, railways, etc.
2. **21st Century Maritime Silk Road**, which links China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe via a sea route extending through the East and South China Seas, Indian Ocean and up through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea.



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Background Guide

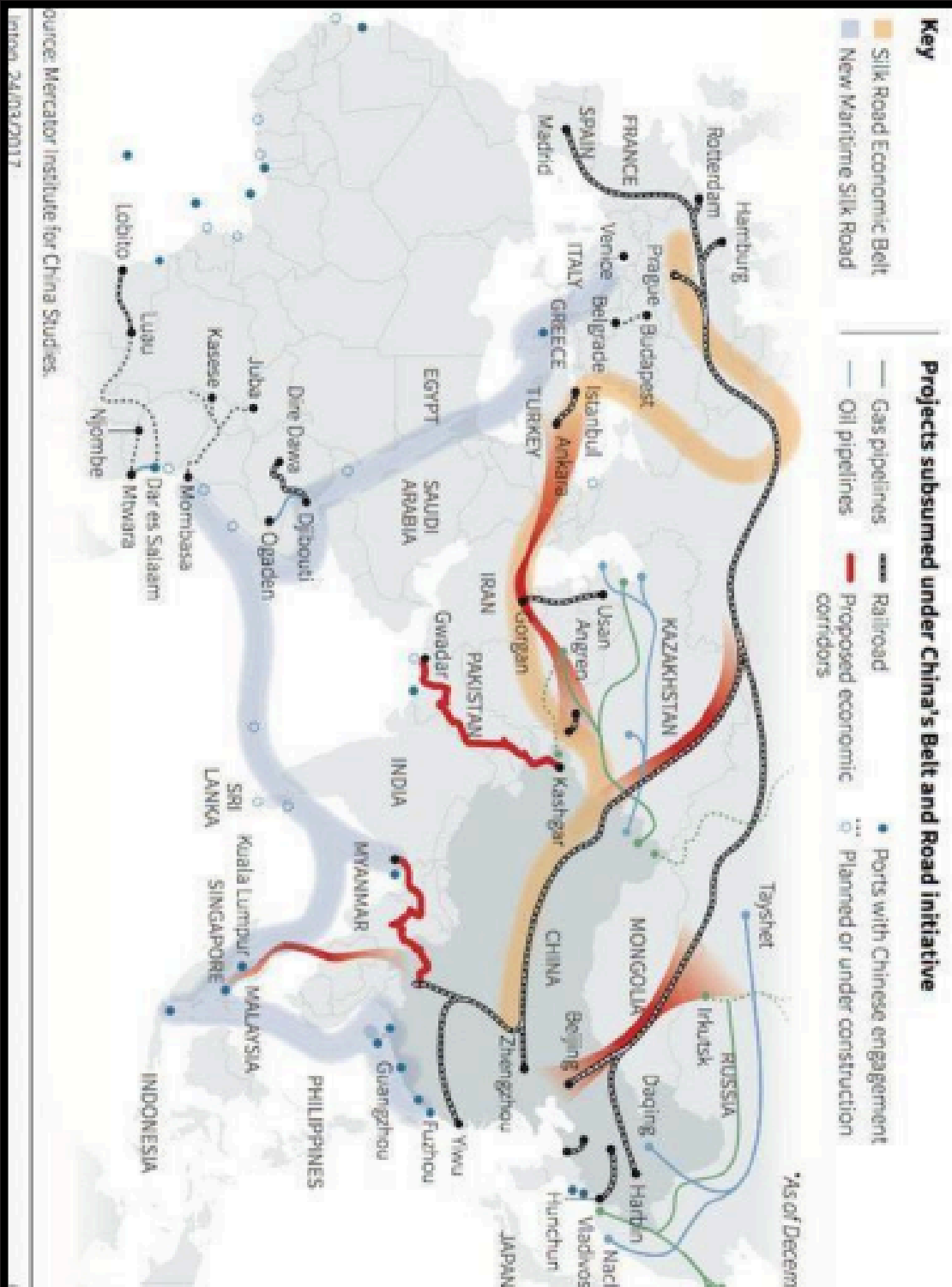
Map attached for your ready reference



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Background Guide

History.

The origins of the BRI can be traced back to the ancient Silk Road, a network of trade routes that connected the East and West from the 2nd century BCE to the 14th century CE started by the Han Dynasty. Now it has taken a modern form with the introduction of BRI. The initiative was launched by Chinese Pres. Xi Jinping in 2013, the same year he came to power. In September 2013, during an official visit to Kazakhstan.

Some say these are initiatives to revitalise the socio-economic position of China-that were once the heartbeat of global trade.



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Identifying the Problems/Analysing the Issue/Current Problems

How should we make sense of the BRI? Some say it is a vision. They invoke the romantic sentiment of the Ancient Silk Road that stretched from China to the Middle East and say that the BRI offers a comparable vision that fosters globalisation and catalyses economic growth in a world facing a growing number of uncertainties. Others see the BRI as a strategy; a geopolitical strategy that facilitates China's rise to the international stage. They argue that the economic forces behind the initiative are intentionally designed to reshape the world order in China's favour.

“Connectivity is not only a major new trend of our time, but also a key driver of future economic growth,” stated a 2021 World Economic Forum report analysing the BRI’s impact on cities.

However, the BRI has faced criticism over the years. Critics warn that many BRI projects lacks transparency and that Chinese investments can be a “debt trap,” especially for developing countries. China maintains, however, that its lending is not predatory.



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1. Environmental Aspects:

Between 2013 and 2020, BRI nations saw the commissioning of various energy plants to power the BRI. Additional environmental concerns arose in the construction of other large scale infrastructure plants with significant social resistance against various infrastructure projects due to the destruction of nature from Myanmar to Kenya, from Indonesia to the Amazon, from Serbia to Papua New Guinea. A major issue leading to this situation was that Chinese financial institutions and regulators only required adherence to national environmental regulations and licenses. In weak governance and corrupt countries, such licenses could be too easily obtained without due diligence.

Significant regulatory changes came under way in China in 2020. In December 2020, the Belt and Road Initiative Green Development Coalition (BRIGC) published the Green Development Guidance with support from various Chinese ministries that emphasised the importance of adhering to international best practices in environmental risk management.



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Background Guide

2. “The Debt Trap”:

For some countries that take on large amounts of debt to fund infrastructure upgrades, BRI money is seen as a potential poisoned chalice while China views BRI projects as a commercial endeavour, with loans close to a market interest rate that it expects to be fully repaid. Some BRI investments have involved opaque bidding processes and required the use of Chinese firms. As a result, contractors have inflated costs, leading to cancelled projects and political backlash.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine roiled global markets, a climbing number of low-income BRI countries have struggled to repay loans associated with the initiative, spurring a wave of debt crises and new criticism for BRI. In Pakistan, for example, imports required to build CPEC infrastructure contributed to a widening budget deficit, ultimately resulting in a bailout from the IMF. And in Ghana and Zambia, high debt loads that partly consisted of BRI loans led to sovereign default.



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Background Guide

3. Geopolitical Tensions:

The BRI has sparked geopolitical tensions, particularly with countries that view China's growing influence with suspicion. For example, the United States and some European nations have raised concerns about the strategic implications of Chinese investments in critical infrastructure and the potential for increased Chinese control over strategic assets. . Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi dismissed these allegations and stated that the initiative is “the product of inclusive cooperation, not a tool of geopolitics, and must not be viewed with an outdated Cold War mentality,”



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Past International Actions

ASEAN countries' participation in China's BRI has witnessed different levels of international actions and initiatives in the past including; These actions are the outcome of ASEAN's approach towards China's aggressive programme both at governmental levels as well as regional levels.

1. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs): Many of the ASEAN members have formally joined the BRI through signing of Memorandums of Understanding with China. These agreements define the areas of cooperation in infrastructure, trade and economic activities.

- **Indonesia** signed an MOU with China on the BRI in 2018. Indonesia has been particularly focused on its "Global Maritime Fulcrum" vision, which aligns with China's Maritime Silk Road initiative.
- **Malaysia** entered into many deals under the BRI umbrella and the conspicuous project that signified the country as being part of BRI was the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL). Because of their worry on debt issue, Malaysia took some time to renegotiate for the cooperation with China and it started in 2019.
- In 2016, **Laos** entered into an MOU with China that culminated in the erecting of China-Laos Railway which is part of Pan-Asian Railway Network.



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Background Guide

2. Bilateral Agreements: Recently, the level of interaction of China's leadership with representatives of the ASEAN countries has been quite high and regular dialogue is conducted at the highest level, including head-of-state and head-of-government level. For instance, in April 2024, the Chinese President Xi Jinping alongside the Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and the Vietnamese National Assembly Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue came together to pay attention to directioning of the BRI ventures in relation to the development visions of the countries. These meetings also chime on the approach that ASEAN has in China's comprehensive economic blueprint.

3. China-ASEAN Summits: Besides, there is a detailed discussion about the BRI between China and ASEAN at the summits they have been holding periodically. These summits have helped in the promotion of the initiative by China, and also dialogue among members of ASEAN on how to align the initiative with individual and collective development frameworks.

- **China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO)** has become an important event to foster trade and economic cooperation between China and ASEAN nations. Each year, infrastructure projects related to the BRI are discussed, and partnerships are formed.
- During the **22nd ASEAN-China Summit** in 2019, BRI cooperation was highlighted as a priority for improving connectivity between China and Southeast Asia.



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Background Guide

4. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

Participation: Established in 2014, the AIIB has grown to be one more crucial source of financing for the BRI projects in Asia which include the 10 ASEAN member countries. It is therefore influencing the investment shortfalls in such areas.

- **Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia** are members of the AIIB recently established. BRI called practice some countries in these received appealed funds for development of infrastructure processes.
- In this regard, in 2020 the **AIIB financed the infrastructure development initiatives** in Myanmar and Cambodia whose targeting connectivity would be towards China.

5. Infrastructure and Development Projects: Plan for many of the projects on BRI emerged from the ASEAN member states with international funding and cooperation with Chinese Company. As for the BRI and ASEAN member countries participation, it is these infrastructural initiatives that stand out most.

- **China-Laos Railway** is a leading scheme also projects under the Belt Road initiative connecting Yunnan province of China to the capital of Laos, Vientiane. This project has strengthened the relationship between the two nations, because of increased trade and tourism.
- **In Thailand**, the high railway project link between Thailand and China is a section in the railway road sketched to connect southeastern Asia to Africa through China and Malaysia from which the rail would cut through southern thorn to Singapore.
- **Myanmar** is of a great help concerning the **China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)** which is a subordinate of BRI which incorporates projects like kyaukpyu deep sea port and special zone.



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Background Guide

5. Renegotiations and Debt Diplomacy:

Although ASEAN as a whole has supported the BRI, some of the countries have either adjusted the demands or reflected on their participation because of debt vulnerability and sovereignty issues.

- **Malaysia's East Coast Rail Link (ECRL)** was initially paused by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's government due to concerns over the cost. In 2019, after renegotiating the terms with China to reduce the project's cost, Malaysia resumed the project.
- **Myanmar** renegotiated the terms of the Kyaukpyu deep-sea port project in 2018, reducing the project's scope and financial commitments to avoid potential debt traps.

6. ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA):

Since the formation of ASEAN and China Free Trade Area Agreement (ACFTA) in 2010, ASEAN and China have enhanced the framework of economic ties. The BRI goes a step further by deepening the interconnection of ASEAN economies in China's trade web via infrastructure and logistics. The ACFTA is also an ancillary arrangement that assists ASEAN nations to unlock trade potential of BRI.



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Background Guide

8. Coordination with Regional Development Plans:

Most of the ASEAN countries has aligned their BRI projects with respective national development plans as well as with the overall ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity 2025 that primarily focuses on strengthening the physical, institutional and the people's connectivity in the ASEAN region.

- **Vietnam** ensures that it has connected its goals and objectives with its engagement in the BRI focusing on the infrastructure development to achieve its economic growth.
- Mr. President Rodrigo Duterte and the **Philippines'** cooperation with China on infrastructure development programs under **"Build, Build, Build"** policy was extended within the scope of the BRI.

9. Multilateral Forums and Dialogue: All 10 Asean Countries has attended thematically numerous multilateral meetings and discussion related to BRI and its connectivity. When such forums are organized, members address the topics of policy coordination, funding, and recently also issues related to the environment.

- **Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation** has embroiled ASEAN leaders performing the same efforts who bore the discussion on regional integration, financing etc for infrastructure and trade partnerships.
- **Lancang-Mekong cooperation (LMC)** mechanism is another platform for China to work with ASEAN counties like Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam for BRI initiatives with focus on the Mekong region.



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Background Guide

10. Environmental and Social Impact Assessments:

Environmental and social impacts of BRI Activities are increasingly being advocated for with many of the international organisations and developing countries in the ASEAN. For instance, Vietnam and Malaysia has been seeking BRI projects but wanted a very high level of respect to the environment.

- **The Mekong River Commission (MRC)**, an intergovernmental body comprising Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, has worked with China to assess the environmental impact of BRI projects on the Mekong River and its ecosystem.



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TIMELINE

BEGINNING

BRI concept was introduced by President Xi Jinping

1

SEPTEMBER
2013

OCTOBER
2013

2

President Xi proposed building a close-knit China-ASEAN community and offered guidance on constructing a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to promote maritime cooperation

China and Russia reached a consensus on construction of the Belt and Road, as well as its connection with Russia's Euro-Asia Railways.

3

FEBRUARY
2014

MARCH
2014

4

Balanced development of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor undertaken

The first phase of a logistics terminal jointly built by China and Kazakhstan went into with a total investment of (\$98 million, considered a platform for goods from central Asian countries

5

MAY
2014

OCTOBER
2014

6

21 Asian countries willing to join the AIIB as founding members signed Memorandum of Understanding on Establishing AIIB.

China dismissed comparisons of the initiative to the US-sponsored Marshall Plan. Stated "the initiative is the product of inclusive cooperation, not a tool of geopolitics"

7

MARCH
2015

APRIL
2015

8

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The project has included the construction of airports, railways, highways and pipelines, among other types of trade and energy infrastructure with \$60 billion invested.

Communist Party of China officially incorporated the advancement of the BRI into its constitution.

9

OCTOBER
2017

NOVEMBER
2023

10

Cumulative BRI engagement breached the USD 1 trillion mark (USD1.053 trillion), with about USD634 billion in construction contracts, and USD419 billion in non-financial investments

Further growth of Chinese BRI engagement with a strong focus on BRI country partnerships in renewable energy, mining and related technologies continues..

11

FEBRUARY
2024

ASEAN

Background Guide

Introduction to the Agenda

Cooperation regarding **defence and security between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is, at present, understood to be an important aspect for enhancing regional stability and dealing with common security challenges. In this regard, both India and countries in ASEAN are aware that strengthening their defence ties is a popular means of making sure that they will have a safe and successful future since Geopolitical power shifts take place. The introduction will portray the relevance of this understanding underscoring its strategic significance economic implications as well as the wider context under which it functions.



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ASEAN

Background Guide

Introduction

The agenda focuses on the evolving security cooperation between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Both parties share common strategic interests in ensuring a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Given the rising security challenges, including territorial disputes in the South China Sea, maritime piracy, terrorism, and cyber threats, enhancing security cooperation between India and ASEAN has become crucial.

ASEAN, comprising ten Southeast Asian nations, seeks to strengthen partnerships to safeguard its collective security and promote regional stability. This guide explores the historical context, current challenges, and opportunities for India-ASEAN security collaboration.

Background and History

India's engagement with ASEAN began in 1992 when it became a sectoral dialogue partner, subsequently elevating to a full dialogue partnership in 1996. The relationship deepened with India's "Look East Policy," which later evolved into the "Act East Policy" in 2014, signaling India's strategic focus on deeper integration with Southeast Asia, particularly in defence and security.



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ASEAN

Background Guide

In recent years, India and ASEAN have increasingly prioritized security cooperation, addressing shared concerns over regional security dynamics, counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and maritime security. This has led to the establishment of various defence-related initiatives, such as joint military exercises, information sharing, and capacitybuilding programs.

Since India became a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, the collaboration has intensified to cover political and security dimensions. India participates in a series of consultative meetings with ASEAN under the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations, which include Summit, ministerial and senior officials meetings, and meetings at experts level, as well as dialogue and cooperation frameworks initiated by ASEAN such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1, the East Asia Summit (EAS)

Timeline

1992: India-ASEAN sectoral dialogue partnership established.

1995: Full Dialogue partnership established

2002: India participates in the ASEAN Regional Forum.

2015: ASEAN Leaders welcomed India's initiative, namely the "Act East Policy". Encouraged India to work with ASEAN to realise the vision and goals outlined in the ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together.

2018: India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit emphasizes maritime security cooperation.

2022: India-ASEAN ties reach a new high with the focus on Indo-Pacific security.

2024: Sixth East Asia Summit (EAS) Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation held



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ASEAN

Background Guide

Strategic Importance

Because of increasing tensions in the South China Sea and China's growing assertiveness, the strategic context in Southeast Asia has grown into a tangled web thus making it more complex. On this accord, India which has always viewed ASEAN as a key partner in its '**Act East Policy**' must enhance defense cooperation for several reasons.

1. **Counterbalancing Regional Threats:** Specifically India and ASEAN countries face similar problems with respect to security such as maritime security challenges, terrorism and cyber threats among others. By working together on defense initiatives, they will be able to counter these threats more effectively thereby improving their collective security position.
2. **Promoting Maritime Security:** Maritime security cooperation is crucial given India's geographical proximity to Southeast Asia and its strong interests in the Indian Ocean. Joint exercises and coordinated patrols will ensure not only good operational readiness but also the freedom of navigation in critical sea lanes essential for trade and energy security.
3. **Strengthening Multilateral Frameworks:** India's engagement in multilateral fora such as **ASEAN Defense Ministers 'Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus)** demonstrates its dedication to regional security dialogue. Such platforms promote conversations about cooperative security measures giving India a chance to have a dialogue with ASEAN members about common challenges.
4. **Countering China's Influence:** The way China causes water in the South China Sea to be **hostile** towards the South East Asian countries is of great concern for both India and ASEAN. In order to control China's power that seems to spread over the whole region, its defense relationship with ASEAN becomes deeper and deeper.



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ASEAN

Background Guide

Economic Implications

India and ASEAN defence and security cooperation does not only concern military partnerships; it also encompasses a wide variety of economic impacts:

- 1. Enhancing Trade Relations:** When there is a stable security environment in place, the economy flourishes and trade expands. Moreover, since ASEAN is among India's major **trading partners**, stronger defence ties promote all-round economic interaction hence positive outcomes for both regions.
- 2. Defence Industry Opportunities:** In light of escalating strains with China, it is imperative that ASEAN states consider India as an appealing option for varied means of acquiring weaponry. The burgeoning defence industry in India can provide ASEAN nations with sophisticated military technologies and systems on account of its pledge towards production within its own borders.
- 3. Capacity Building Initiatives:** The maritime domain awareness and humanitarian assistance-focused capacity-building programmes offered by India to ASEAN countries help improve regional capabilities. Such efforts do not only reinforce military relations but also promote wider economic growth objectives.



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Background Guide

Conclusion

In the present day geopolitical situation, India and ASEAN's defense and security cooperation holds great significance. This partnership can be made stronger so that they can not only promote their collective safety but also encourage economic development and stability in Southeast Asia, while coping with the complexities of regional dynamics. The scope of this article is to discuss different aspects of this cooperation that are important in maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the region while effectively handling the common challenges.

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Past International Actions

There have been various initiatives in order to bolster cooperation in defence and security between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Some of the notable historical international actions taken to this effect include strategic decisions, agreements signed by the two parties, and a number of joint training activities that are aimed at ensuring peace in the region as well as focusing on common security challenges.

1. India's "Look East" and "Act East" Policies:

This is a story of how the Look East Policy began in the early nineties to boost relations with ASEAN, morphing into Action East Policy in 2014 which has about it greater emphasis on deeper defense cooperation and strategic partnerships with ASEAN proponents.

2. India-ASEAN Strategic Partnership (2012):

In 2012, India and ASEAN reached a Strategic Partnership agreement that formalised military collaborations between them, encompassing joint exercises and dialogues on regional security concerns.



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Background Guide

3. India-ASEAN Defence Ministers 'Meeting (ADMM-Plus):

As a sign of its commitment to regional defense cooperation, India takes part in the **ADMM-Plus**, working together on various security issues like anti-terrorism and maritime security.

4. Joint Military and Naval Exercises:

- **Exercise MILAN:** This is India's 2 years 'Exercise MILAN that has been in existence since 1995, where different navies of ASEAN countries get together to improve their interoperability and maritime security cooperation.
- **SIMBEX (Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise):** For more than two decades now, **India and Singapore** have been conducting SIMBEX. This focuses on anti-submarine warfare, air defence as well as maritime security. The exercise helps strengthen naval ties between both countries as well as contributing to wider regional stability.
- **INDO-THAI CORPAT (India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol):** Beginning in 2005, India and Thailand have organized coordinated naval patrols (CORPAT). These patrols are meant to ensure safety of maritime traffic within the international shipping lanes located in the **Andaman Sea** and **Strait of Malacca** which are important routes globally.



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5. India-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation:

To tackle threats such as piracy and illegal fishing, a key focus of reducing piracy and illegal fishing includes the very first **India-ASEAN Maritime Exercise (AIME)** conducted in 2019.

6. Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Cooperation:

- India and ASEAN countries have strengthened their cooperation in fighting terrorism and combating transnational crimes. This collaboration involves sharing intelligence platforms and conducting joint training programs.
- The **India-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime** provides a platform for discussions on terrorism, radicalization, and cross-border crimes among other issues. In addition, India has provided several training programs to the ASEAN law enforcement agencies which include cybersecurity and counter-terrorism trainings.



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Background Guide

7. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Cooperation:

- India has lent support to ASEAN countries in relief missions during what we can also call disasters caused by nature like the **Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004**. Besides supporting **Thailand and Indonesia** it undertook '**Operation Rahat**' to disaster affected countries.
- The **Indian Navy** has been key to HADR missions showing off its skills in dealing with cataclysmal occurrences while strengthening ties with ASEAN nations.

8. BrahMos Missile Export to the Philippines (2022):

The transference of BrahMos supersonic missiles to the Philippines on 2022 was one of the most significant milestones in defence cooperation. This initiated India's **first important weapon sales into Southeast Asia**, hence fortifying its defense trade connections with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). This BrahMos agreement appears to open India to **additional arms sales** to other ASEAN states like **Vietnam and Indonesia**.

9. Security Cooperation in Multilateral Forums:

An example of this is when it uses forums like **East Asia Summit (EAS)** and **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)** to carry out concerted efforts towards addressing regional security concerns.



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Background Guide

10. India's Role in ASEAN's Vision for the Indo-Pacific (2021):

The **AOIP (ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific)** was adopted in 2019 and goes hand in hand with India's desire for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. In this regard, India has supported ASEAN's vision through initiatives under **IPOI (IndoPacific Oceans Initiative)** that have to do with maritime security and economic growth in the region.

Case Study

India's Role in the ASEAN Defence Ministers 'Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus)

The ADMM-Plus is an important forum for establishing defense and security partnership among ASEAN and its eight dialogue partners such as India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

Initiated in 2010 ADMM-Plus is a major avenue for promoting defense collaboration on important security threats facing the region. India's engagement in ADMM-Plus is a clear manifestation of its strong commitment to ASEAN's regional security architecture, especially with regard to addressing non-traditional security challenges such as maritime security, counterterrorism and disaster response.



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Background Guide

India has continually taken an active role in ADMM-Plus discussions, putting forth regional security concerns and increasing military cooperation while incorporating joint military drills specifically formed to strain the operational capacity of ASEAN and partner nations.

India's Contributions to ADMM-Plus

1. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Initiatives:

India has co-chaired the ADMM-Plus Expert Working Group on HADR and Military Medicine with Indonesia. This role involved coordinating joint military exercises focused on providing disaster relief and medical assistance in times of natural disasters, which are frequent in Southeast Asia. For example, India's Operation Rahat during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and other disaster relief efforts have demonstrated its operational capabilities in HADR missions.

India's naval capabilities in disaster response have played a pivotal role in securing its reputation as a first responder in the Indian Ocean region, where Southeast Asian countries frequently experience typhoons, tsunamis, and earthquakes.



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Background Guide

2. Maritime Security and Joint Naval Exercises:

With regard to ADMM-Plus, maritime security features prominently as an area of concern. In collaboration with other countries, India has been engaging itself in naval drills or exercises under the ADMM-Plus framework so as to mitigate certain maritime dangers such as piracy illegal trade and conflicts over borders particularly in South China Sea and Indian Ocean.

Maritime security exercises performed by ADMM-Plus are beneficial for India since they increase operational compatibility between Indian Navy and navies of ASEAN member states thereby improving overall defense capabilities with respect to important sea lanes.

3. Counter-Terrorism Cooperation:

India, through its participation in the ADMM-Plus counter-terrorism exercises, has made a significant contribution to combating the increasing menace of terrorism and radicalisation in Southeast Asia. The experience that India has encountered on dealing with terrorism within its own borders has been a boon to the common endeavours with ASEAN countries.

The **ADMM-Plus Counter-Terrorism Working Group** has played an instrumental role in promoting intelligence sharing among member states, conducting joint training programs, and fostering police cooperation aimed at defeating such evils as terrorism and transnational crime. In doing so, India has assisted ASEAN law enforcement bodies by training them on issues related to cybersecurity, border management and counter-terrorism operations.



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Background Guide

4. Expert Working Groups:

A few **Expert Working Groups (EWGs)** are a part of ADMM-Plus, which include those on counter-terrorism, HADR, maritime security, and peacekeeping operations. **India has co-chaired the EWG** on Military Medicine for which it worked with ASEAN to enhance their capacity to provide medical assistance in times of crisis.

By these EWGs, India shared technical know-how and offered training programs along with operational experience to help ASEAN member countries in reinforcing their military medical capacities and establishing quick reaction systems.

Conclusion

India has played an active role in ADMM-Plus, which has helped enhance ASEAN's defence and security capabilities. India has cemented its strategic ties with ASEAN through joint military exercises, relief missions during disasters, and collaboration in counter-terrorism efforts. In addition to bolstering India's military engagement with ASEAN nations, the ADMM-Plus also serves the purpose of interlinking greater security mechanisms across Indo-Pacific making it a pivotal actor on peace maintenance and stability in Southeast Asia.



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Identifying the problems:

India-ASEAN security cooperation faces several challenges, including geopolitical tensions, non-traditional security threats, and differing priorities among ASEAN member states.

Maritime Security and Freedom of Navigation:

Maritime security cooperation between India and ASEAN is central to their strategic partnership, particularly concerning the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the South China Sea. India has supported ASEAN's principle of "ASEAN centrality" in Indo-Pacific initiatives, recognizing the region's importance for global trade and energy supplies.

The South China Sea disputes present a significant security challenge, with China asserting extensive claims that conflict with several ASEAN members' territorial waters. India, an advocate for free navigation, supports ASEAN's stance but must navigate its own complex relationship with China.

Counterterrorism:

India acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) on 8 October 2003 during the 2nd ASEAN-India Summit. On the same occasion, ASEAN and India also signed a Joint Declaration for Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, manifesting concrete initiatives to step up cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

ASEAN faces various security threats, including terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime. Despite joint mechanisms, coordination between India and ASEAN on counterterrorism efforts requires further robust measures, particularly in intelligence sharing and capacity-building.



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Background Guide

Cybersecurity: The increasing digitization of Southeast Asian economies has raised cybersecurity concerns, with India and ASEAN both facing growing threats from cyberattacks. Joint efforts in cybersecurity cooperation have yet to be fully realized due to differences in technological capabilities and legal frameworks.

Lack of a Unified ASEAN Defence Policy:

While ASEAN operates on consensus, individual member states have different security priorities and defence capabilities. This diversity poses challenges for establishing a unified regional security framework with India.

India and ASEAN's security cooperation is an evolving partnership shaped by shared challenges and strategic interests. While progress has been made, particularly in maritime security and counterterrorism, significant obstacles remain. Addressing divergent priorities, strengthening joint mechanisms, and enhancing strategic dialogues are crucial for fostering a comprehensive security framework.



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Background Guide

Questions to consider

1. With China's increasing military presence in the South China Sea and its close relationships with countries like Myanmar and Cambodia, how can ASEAN nations effectively collaborate with India to counterbalance Chinese dominance while maintaining neutrality?
2. In light of recent Indo-Pacific security challenges and the emergence of alliances like the Quad, what specific maritime security initiatives should ASEAN-India cooperation focus on to ensure freedom of navigation and regional stability in the South China Sea?
3. As India intensifies its Act East Policy, how can ASEAN ensure that its centrality in regional security and diplomatic frameworks is not undermined by India's growing ties with the Quad and other strategic alliances in the region?
4. Given India's growing defense partnership with ASEAN countries, how should ASEAN nations balance military modernization with strategic autonomy, ensuring that they are not over-reliant on India for defense procurement and training?
5. With the rising threat of cross-border terrorism and cybersecurity breaches in Southeast Asia, what practical steps should ASEAN and India take to strengthen intelligence sharing and joint counterterrorism efforts, especially in regions vulnerable to extremism?



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6. How might India's ongoing border tensions with China in the Himalayas impact ASEAN-India defense cooperation, and what steps should ASEAN take to avoid being drawn into a wider Sino-Indian rivalry?

7. Given the recent rise in ASEAN-India joint military exercises, to what extent should ASEAN countries participate in joint drills without antagonizing China or compromising ASEAN's non-aligned stance?

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