

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

CONTENTS

- Vietnam President To Lam's visit to Australia and New Zealand.
- The Second Joint Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue (2+2) between China and Indonesia.
- Japan, Indonesia and Australia hold first-ever trilateral talks.
- 2+2 Defence and Foreign Defence Ministers Meeting between Indonesia and Australia.
- Myanmar Rejects ASEAN Calls for Suu Kyi's Release
- Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Russia.

Overview

August 2026 saw significant developments in Indo-Pacific strategic and defence cooperation, involving Southeast Asian countries and regional partners. Vietnam President To Lam's visit to Australia and New Zealand highlighted bilateral cooperation and Hanoi's efforts to strengthen strategic partnerships. Indonesia emerged as a key focus of regional defence diplomacy. Indonesia maintained engagement with China through the China-Indonesia 2+2 meeting, reflecting Jakarta's continued policy of strategic diversification and balanced relations with major powers. Japan, Indonesia and Australia held their first-ever trilateral talks, signalling the emergence of minilateral frameworks and more convergence among the three countries. This was complemented by the Indonesia-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting, which reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening defence and security cooperation.

Meanwhile, Myanmar rejected ASEAN's call for Suu Kyi's Release and questioned the need for a Special Envoy. Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Russia underscored Myanmar's deepening strategic engagement with Moscow amid its continuing international isolation.

Vietnam President To Lam's visit to Australia and New Zealand

Vietnamese General Secretary and President To Lam paid a state visit to Australia from 9–12 August 2026, his first visit to Australia in this capacity. The visit sought to consolidate the Vietnam–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, established in March 2024.

The two sides agreed to deepen cooperation in defence and security, maritime law enforcement, critical minerals, semiconductors, clean energy, science and technology, and supply-chain resilience. Of particular strategic significance was a new MoU between the Vietnam Coast Guard and Australian Border Force, aimed at strengthening maritime law-enforcement cooperation. To Lam also undertook a state visit to New Zealand on 12–13 August 2026, the first visit by a Vietnamese head of state since 2007. The two sides sought to advance their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with cooperation spanning agriculture, climate change, education, trade and defence, including a new practical arrangement on peacekeeping cooperation.

The Second Joint Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue (2+2) between China and Indonesia

The Second Joint Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue between China and Indonesia was held in Jakarta on 21 August 2026, bringing together Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Defence Minister Dong Jun with Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono and Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin. The meeting followed the inaugural 2+2 dialogue held in Beijing in April 2025. The dialogue focused on expanding cooperation in defence, maritime security, cybersecurity, law enforcement, intelligence, military exercises, training and personnel exchanges. The two sides also expressed support for continued negotiations on the South China Sea Code of Conduct.

Of particular significance was the emphasis on defence-industrial cooperation and technology transfer. Indonesia is expected to pursue joint production with China

involving ammunition, missiles and rockets, potentially strengthening Jakarta's domestic defence-industrial capabilities. The 2+2 mechanism represents a notable institutionalisation of China–Indonesia security ties. For Beijing, it provides a high-level channel to deepen defence and maritime engagement with one of Southeast Asia's strategically important states.

Japan, Indonesia and Australia hold first-ever trilateral talks.

The defence chiefs of Japan, Australia and Indonesia held their first-ever trilateral talks, just weeks after an agreement by Jakarta and Beijing to boost military ties following joint naval drills east of Taiwan.

In the phone talks between Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles and Indonesian defence chief Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, the three agreed to promote both bilateral and trilateral defence cooperation, according to the Defence Ministry in Tokyo. The three ministers also exchanged views on the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region and, taking a broad view of the entire Indo-Pacific, agreed to work together to contribute to regional and global peace and stability through trilateral cooperation,” the ministry said in a readout of the meeting.

2+2 Defence and Foreign Defence Ministers Meeting between Indonesia and Australia

The 10th Australia–Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers’ 2+2 Meeting was held in Melbourne on 26 August 2026, bringing together Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles with Indonesian Foreign Minister

Sugiono and Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin. It was the first 2+2 meeting following the signing of the landmark Australia–Indonesia Treaty on Common Security (Jakarta Treaty) in February 2026. The ministers focused on strengthening cooperation in defence, maritime security, cyber security, critical technologies, counter-terrorism and regional resilience. They also welcomed plans for greater defence-industry cooperation and expanded maritime-domain awareness, including Australia’s provision of aerial drones and training to Indonesia’s coast guard (Bakamla).

The meeting indicates a deepening of the Australia–Indonesia security partnership at a time of intensifying strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. The Jakarta Treaty provides a new institutional framework for closer consultation on shared security challenges, while the 2+2 mechanism is becoming an important channel for translating this political commitment into practical defence cooperation, interoperability and maritime security capabilities.

Myanmar Rejects ASEAN Calls for Suu Kyi’s Release

Myanmar’s military-backed government has rejected ASEAN’s renewed call for the complete and unconditional release of detained former leader Aung San Suu Kyi and questioned the continued need for the organisation’s Special Envoy on Myanmar. The move comes as President Min Aung Hlaing seeks greater political legitimacy and improved engagement with ASEAN, despite continued concerns over the implementation of ASEAN’s Five-Point Consensus. The Philippines, as ASEAN Chair, welcomed recent dialogue efforts

while reiterating calls for greater access to political detainees and Suu Kyi's unconditional release.

Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Russia

Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing visited Russia from 17–20 August 2026, at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin. It was his first official visit to Russia since assuming the presidency in April 2026, and the first visit to a non-neighbouring country in his new capacity. During his meeting with Putin in Moscow on 18 August, the two sides discussed strengthening cooperation in defence, energy, space, trade and investment. Russia also indicated interest in expanding cooperation on oil-

refinery construction, hydrocarbon exploration and potential LNG supplies to Myanmar.

The visit is particularly significant for Myanmar–Russia defence relations. Moscow has remained one of Myanmar's principal sources of military equipment and a key diplomatic partner since the 2021 military takeover. The visit highlights Myanmar's continued reliance on Russia as it seeks to overcome international isolation and diversify its external partnerships. For Moscow, closer engagement with Myanmar provides an avenue to expand its economic, defence and strategic footprint in Southeast Asia and the Bay of Bengal/Indian Ocean region.