

The US–Indonesia MDCP and Its Drift into the US Strategic Orbit

News:

On April 13, 2026, US Secretary of War **Pete Hegseth** and Indonesian Defense Minister **Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin** officially elevated bilateral ties to a **Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP)**. Announced at the Pentagon, this framework focuses on military modernization, joint special forces training, and co-developing next-generation technologies in maritime and autonomous domains.

Despite the upgrade, Indonesia notably excluded a US proposal for **military overflight clearance** from the agreement. A spokesperson for Jakarta confirmed that such access remains under "careful review" to ensure national sovereignty. Internal reports suggest Indonesia's Foreign Ministry cautioned against the proposal, fearing it could entangle the nation in South China Sea conflicts.

While Indonesia recently joined the **BRICS** bloc and maintains oil talks with Russia, President Prabowo Subianto continues to balance relations by securing trade deals with the US and joining the "Board of Peace." This strategic neutrality is vital given Indonesia's control over the **Malacca Strait**, a critical global energy chokepoint. Unlike treaty allies such as the Philippines or Australia, Indonesia's new MDCP status emphasizes high-level cooperation without the mutual defense obligations of a formal treaty. ([Source](#))

Comment:

The elevation of defense ties between the United States and Indonesia into a Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP) marks a significant recalibration of Jakarta's foreign-policy trajectory. Coming only months after Indonesia accepted an invitation from Donald Trump to join the so-called "Board of Peace," the MDCP adds yet another layer tying Indonesia to Washington's strategic orbit.

Although the MDCP formally avoids mutual-defense obligations, its focus on technology co-development, special forces integration, and modernization aligns Indonesia more deeply with American military systems and doctrinal frameworks. Historically, such dependency tends to generate political expectations—subtle but firm—on how a partner state should behave in moments of geopolitical crisis.

This dynamic is already visible. Indonesia's failure to issue a strong condemnation against the recent United States–'Israel' strikes on Iran was a striking departure from Jakarta's traditional diplomatic posture. For decades, Indonesia positioned itself as a leading voice defending Palestine and global anti-colonial norms. The muted response suggests that the growing security partnership is already shaping the boundaries of Indonesia's permissible foreign-policy expression—especially when US and 'Israeli' actions are involved.

Strategically, this is concerning. Indonesia possesses enormous latent geopolitical power: control of the Malacca Strait, one of the world's most vital maritime

chokepoints; a population of over 280 million; and vast natural resources essential to the global green-tech supply chain. In theory, Jakarta could leverage these strengths to pursue an independent foreign policy capable of counter-balancing great-power pressure. States such as Iran have demonstrated how chokepoints—like the Strait of Hormuz—and energy resources can be used to restrain or deter American coercion.

Yet Indonesia's increasing reliance on US defense support, coupled with new economic instruments such as the ART trade framework, risks narrowing its room for maneuver. By tying Jakarta more closely to Washington's strategic architecture, Indonesia may find itself constrained from taking principled stances—particularly on issues where the United States and its allies face global criticism, such as the ongoing crisis in Palestine or the broader pattern of US-'Israeli' military operations in the region.

If Indonesia continues on this trajectory, its long-standing identity as a champion of the Global South and defender of Palestinian self-determination could erode. Worse, it risks being perceived—both internationally and domestically—as tacitly aligned with the very powers enabling the Jewish entity's ongoing aggression and occupation across the Middle East and the wider Muslim world.

Indonesia must recognize that its strategic value does not lie in dependence but in autonomy. The country's control over essential trade routes, its demographic weight, and its natural resources are instruments of power that can elevate Indonesia into a truly independent actor on the world stage. But such a vision will remain unattainable if Jakarta continues to embed itself deeper into another country's geopolitical design.

Without recalibrating, Indonesia may soon find itself not only losing its independent foreign-policy posture, but also standing—by silence or complicity—in the camp that sustains occupation, injustice, and the ongoing tragedy faced by the people of Palestine.

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