

# RCEP as a platform for comprehensive regional security

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# This presentation

- Surveys the regional political and strategic environment
- Outlines the existing institutional frameworks
- The Jakarta Dialogues
- Comprehensive regional security
- RCEP applications
- Practical considerations



# The regional context

- Strong rebound from the pandemic, but clouded by questions about global growth
- Leaderships in key countries focused on domestic political challenges
- Constant: anxiety about temperature of geopolitical competition.
- Effect: concern for existing institutions and future of regional architecture.
  - Growing pressure on global rules, concerns about whether regional institutions offer a sufficient fallback.
- Southeast Asia needs to shore up mechanisms to collectively articulate its interests in economic openness, peaceful resolution of disputes, and equal standing of states



# Existing institutions/leadership deficit

- A proliferation of often-overlapping institutions: ASEAN / IPEF / APEC / RCEP / CPTPP
- RCEP is unique in allowing for a new leader/political-level process in the context of its economic cooperation pillar
  - Chapter 15 on Economic and Technical Cooperation
  - Ministerial processes
  - At present, it's a platform, rather than agenda
- Still work to be done to institutionalise RCEP (secretariat, way of working)
- Most importantly, need to come to some shared collective vision of how the agreement will be used for technical and political cooperation beyond the text of the existing agreement



# The Jakarta dialogues

- This background that has inspired our series of Track Two diplomacy initiatives among the RCEP group, with a focus on how the interaction of economic and security cooperation platforms can be the basis for a mutually negotiated new settlement for Asia
- The contents of this presentation draw heavily on what we've learnt from an ongoing Track Two initiative known as the Jakarta Dialogues that have included experts, policymakers and down the track, political figures
- This has been complemented by discussions with senior officials, policymakers, and other key stakeholders
- The core goal: defining and articulating a new underlying set of principles for political and economic cooperation based within the ASEAN-centred architecture, and mechanisms to achieve it



# Comprehensive regional security

- To elevate non-traditional elements of security to the same consideration as military security
- Antecedents
  - 1976 ASEAN - Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia
  - 1980 Japan - *sogo anzen hoshō*
- Recent:
  - Concept of collective security arose during work on economic security
  - When socialised regionally, found this was a common challenges with military security elevated over economics
  - Needed a framework to ensure all elements of security are considered when making decisions
  - Socialised and developed idea further through Jakarta Dialogues and related conversations



# Pillars of Comprehensive Regional Security

## Peace

‘To promote **perpetual peace, everlasting amity and cooperation**’ (TAC, 1976).

## Prosperity

To utilise the economic growth of the region to aspire towards ‘**development and prosperity for all**’ (AOIP, 2019).

## Resilience

To **address all challenges facing the region** including conflict, climate change and resource depletion.



# Economic and Technical Cooperation Pillar

*The Parties shall seek to prioritise economic and technical cooperation initiatives and, where possible, minimise duplication of ongoing efforts and utilisation of resources, particularly under the free trade agreements between the Member States of ASEAN and their free trade partners. [15.2.2]*

- Current agenda: legacy
- Forward agenda: opportunity





# Practical considerations

- Where will the leadership come from?
- Urgent tests of ASEAN credibility need to be addressed
- Political timelines:
  - Indonesia has been receptive at the official level when our team has socialised the outcomes of the Jakarta Dialogue with key stakeholders
  - Indonesia as de facto permanent co-chair is a natural leader/anchor of the process, but faces a change of leadership in 2024 raises unanswered questions
  - ASEAN chairs in 2024–2026: Laos, Malaysia, Philippines\*
  - US political timelines, China political uncertainty amid economic slowdown
- Questions about what to do about Myanmar and India and potential new members
- Without leadership RCEP becomes a useful FTA but its potential as a platform for building security through rules-based trade and investment and political dialogue won't be fulfilled

