



Influence of ASEAN Centrality on Responses to the AUKUS Pact: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to find answers to why two countries, despite sharing a high degree of similarity, may exhibit contrasting responses to a particular phenomenon. The Philippines and Indonesia share numerous similarities, encompassing geographical location, form of states, ideology, security, and economic conditions. Nevertheless, their reactions diverged when the AUKUS Defense Pact, aimed at bolstering security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, was established. Indonesia voiced concerns that the formation of the pact would potentially lead to an arms race in the region. Conversely, the Philippines responded positively by issuing verbal support for the establishment of AUKUS. Through the application of the most similar system design comparison method and Donald E Nuechterlein's concept of National Interest analysis, this article concludes that the Philippines and Indonesia adopt distinct approaches and harbor different interests in the preservation of regional stability. Indonesia has interest in prioritizing the principle of ASEAN centrality through the application of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, the Philippines considers it crucial to involve their traditional defense partners, the United States and Australia, in upholding regional security.

KEYWORDS

ASEAN Centrality; AUKUS; Indonesia; National Interest; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia and the Philippines share many similarities. The first and most obvious is in terms of geography, where both countries are located adjacent to the western part of the Pacific Ocean or the Southeastern part of the Asian Continent. They are also archipelagic states, with Indonesia consisting of 17,508 islands ([Republic of Indonesia, 1996](#)) and the Philippines having 7,641 islands ([The Philippines Library of Congress, 2008](#)). Climate-wise, both countries are situated in tropical regions and are home to rainforests. High precipitation, fertile soil, and a geographical location surrounded by the sea make the majority of the population in Indonesia and the Philippines work in the agricultural and marine sectors.

These two countries are also members of the same regional organization, namely the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which its secretariat located in Indonesia's capital. Not only are they part of it, but these countries are also two of the five founding members. On August 8, 1967, Indonesia designated Adam Malik, who was then the Foreign Minister, to sign the Bangkok Declaration, which laid the foundation for ASEAN. Similarly, the Philippines also dispatched its Foreign Minister, at that time held by a seasoned diplomat named Narsisco Ramos. Besides Indonesia and the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand also sent their representatives to support the establishment of ASEAN, which was formed to replace the previous regional organization known as The Association of Southeast Asia ([ASEAN, n.d](#)).

However, the notable similarities between the two nations led to discrepancies when they confronted opposing viewpoints following the announcement of the formation of AUKUS in September 2021. AUKUS is a defense alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, aimed at enhancing military capabilities to bolster security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Specifically, this pact underpins cooperation between the three initiator countries to pursue the integration of science, cyber technology, and artificial intelligence, industrial bases and defense supply chains, as well as underwater capabilities and long-range attacks to form a threat strategy to counter China's dominance in the international arena ([Utami, 2022](#)).

Quoting from the AUKUS Implementation factsheet ([Department of the Prime Ministers of Australia, 2022](#)), there are eight key focuses for developing security capabilities pursued through the establishment of the AUKUS Defense Pact. Firstly, the emphasis lies on Undersea Capabilities, which will be advanced through the AUKUS Undersea Robotics Autonomous Systems (AURAS) project. This collaborative effort among member nations aims to develop unmanned underwater transport, anticipated to significantly augment the maritime forces of the US, Australia, and the UK. Initial trials of the AURAS experiment are slated for 2023. Second, Quantum Technologies are highlighted through the AUKUS Quantum Arrangement (AQuA) project, which seeks to bolster investment in military quantum computing. Quantum technology will primarily be employed for position, navigation, and time determinations, with trials scheduled within three years of AUKUS formation. Thirdly, Artificial Intelligence

development is deemed crucial for enhancing defense capabilities against AI-driven threats, with a focus on accelerated adaptation, resilience, unmanned systems, and AI capabilities across diverse environments. Advanced Cyber capabilities also feature prominently in AUKUS priorities, given the increasing significance of cyber defense and the protection of communications systems and defense operations. Furthermore, the partnership countries will collaborate to accelerate the development of Hypersonic and Counter-Hypersonic Capabilities, recognizing the strategic importance of these technologies. Electronic Warfare capabilities will be enhanced through shared knowledge and technologies to enable operations in the contested electromagnetic spectrum. AUKUS also aims to foster innovation by facilitating knowledge and technology transfer among the three countries, including integrating commercial technology to address defense needs. Lastly, Information Sharing will be expanded and improved among AUKUS member countries, including sharing sensitive information and main priorities to support cooperation sustainability and development.

Following the inaugural press release of AUKUS announcing its formation, Indonesia responded negatively, citing concerns that the pact could potentially lead to an arms race and power projection that could risk regional conflicts ([Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2021](#)). In contrast to Indonesia, the Philippines responded favorably by expressing verbal support for the actions of the three founding countries of AUKUS. Through an official statement from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Teodoro Locsin Jr, the Philippines stated that the enhancement of Australia's military capacity through AUKUS is an important element in achieving and maintaining the geostrategic balance of the region ([The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, 2021](#)).

Departing from the observed anomaly, this article seeks to explain the differing responses of Indonesia and the Philippines towards the formation of the AUKUS Defense Pact. Employing the most similar system comparative method, the objective is to identify the possible factors contributing to these contrasting reactions. Therefore, this article will compare the two states using the concept of National Interest. Align with the definition by [Gabriel and Paul \(2024\)](#) this concept is chosen because "National interest reflects the general and continuing ends for which a nation acts" (p. 199). In light of this standpoint, Indonesia's and the Philippines' attitudes towards the formation of AUKUS can be seen as a reflection of the national interests of both countries. Differences in attitudes can stem from differences in national interests. Hence, the concept of National Interest is considered capable and appropriate for explaining why Indonesia chose to oppose while the Philippines chose to support AUKUS in 2021.

There are two key pieces of literature inform the preferences in this study. Initially, the work of [Mingjiang Li \(2022\)](#), *ASEAN's Responses to AUKUS: Implications for Strategic Realignments in the Indo-Pacific*, categorizes ASEAN member states into three groups based on their reactions to AUKUS: openly concerned nations, those refraining from public statements, and ostensibly supportive countries. However, Li's analysis lacks an exploration of the

underlying factors driving these disparate responses, a gap this paper intends to address. Additionally, [Widyatmoko et al. \(2022\)](#), *Dilema ASEAN Centrality dan Respon ASEAN dalam Menghadapi Pembentukan Pakta Pertahanan antara Australia-Inggris-AS (AUKUS)*, underscores that the establishment of AUKUS signals competitive dynamics among major powers, posing a threat to the national interests of ASEAN member states. They also contend that AUKUS undermines the perceived centrality of ASEAN. However, they did not provide further detail on the national interests driving the reactions from these countries and their respective perceptions of ASEAN Centrality.

Therefore, diverging from their conclusions, this article aims to delve deeper, focusing on analyzing Indonesia and the Philippines' national interests. These two countries are chosen due to their similarities, particularly when compared to other supporting and unsupporting nations. Among the supporting nations are The Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam ([Storey & Choong, 2023](#)), while Malaysia and Indonesia are among the unsupporting nations ([Prakoso, 2021](#)). Indonesia and the Philippines exhibit the highest degree of similarity, primarily attributed to their geographical shape and historical background in Southeast Asia. By incorporating these previous research insights, this study aims to investigate the factors influencing the reactions of ASEAN member states, with a specific focus on Indonesia and the Philippines' responses to the formation of AUKUS. Through a comparative analysis rooted in the concept of national interest, it seeks to elucidate the reasons for the differing attitudes of these countries towards AUKUS. This research is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the ASEAN Centrality Concept, the AUKUS Defense Pact, national interest, and political comparison methods.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the study of International Relations, national interest is one of the most commonly used concepts as a tool to explain a country's behavior through its interactions in international dynamics ([Mardiana, 2020](#)). Hans J. Morgenthau was among the pioneers in discussing national interest, defining it as the fundamental ability of a nation to protect and maintain its physical, political, and cultural identity from outside interference by other nations. According to this concept, leaders of nations develop specific policies towards other countries, which can range from cooperation to conflict ([Morgenthau, 1952](#)). Similar to Morgenthau, Felix Oppenheim views the notion of national interest through a realist lens, defining it as the welfare objectives pursued by governments on the global stage, such as safeguarding political independence and territorial integrity. Oppenheim contends that the concept of national interest is essentially synonymous with that of national security, and he employs these terms interchangeably ([Oppenheim, 1987](#)).

However, to analyze the raised issue, this article employs the concept of National Interest proposed by Donald E. Nuechterlein. Nuechterlein's framework is particularly chosen for its multidimensional perspective, contrasting with the security-focused viewpoints

of Morgenthau and Oppenheim. Unlike these perspectives, Nuechterlein's approach broadens the scope of national interest beyond security concerns. He suggests that national interest encompasses various dimensions, including economic prosperity, ideology, and regional stability, in addition to safeguarding borders and sovereignty. Nuechterlein defines national interest as the needs or goals a country seeks to achieve through its interactions with other nations. He emphasizes that discussions of national interest pertain to the welfare of the sovereign state as a whole, rather than specific organizations or groups within it ([Nuechterlein, 1976](#)). According to Nuechterlein, national interest should prioritize the welfare of citizens, as reflected in state activities beyond its borders, which are often influenced by regional or international political dynamics. This distinction between national interest and public interest is crucial, as the latter is limited to domestic territory and shaped by domestic politics.

In his writing, Nuechterlein explains that there are four types of national interests that may serve as motives for a country's foreign policy decisions or its behavior in international stage. These four interests are defense, economic, ideological, and world order interests. Firstly, the defense interest. According to Nuechterlein, this interest involves protecting the nation and state from physical violence threats coming from other countries and/or external sources that could threaten the country's political and economic systems ([Nuechterlein, 1976](#)). In other words, defense interest is to protect its sovereignty and its people from various forms of threats, whether direct or potential, and whether they can cause physical harm or not. Something is defined as a threat when it has the potential to endanger the government system, both politically and economically. Threats can originate from other countries, groups, or individuals. Secondly, the economic interest – which maintains a country's efforts to enhance the value and growth of its economy through interactions with other countries. In this context, a country's endeavour may involve economic activities, cooperation, the formulation of export-import policies, or other initiatives that support maximizing foreign trade activities.

Thirdly, the ideological interest. This term refers to a country's efforts to uphold the values or principles they strongly believe in. These values are generally seen as guidelines for achieving the country's goals in realizing shared prosperity. And the last one is order interests, which is a country's efforts to maintain the regional and broader political, economic, and security systems on the international stage. This interest is usually manifested through cooperation or support of other countries or specific international policies. As it is written by [Nuechterlein \(2019\)](#), "...in order to enhance a world order interest involving another country whose friendship and cooperation are needed to enhance stability in an important part of the world" (p. 5).

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach, using data collection methods derived from literature reviews. The qualitative method was chosen because it aims to delve deeply into

and understand a phenomenon through analyzing the behaviors, motivations, perceptions, and actions of the research subjects ([Moleong, 2017](#)). As such, this article aims to comprehensively investigate the underlying reasons for the divergent responses of Indonesia and the Philippines to AUKUS from various perspectives. Data for this study are sourced from government publications, journals, news sources, reports, and other literature available online from Indonesia and the Philippines. The collected data undergo a process of condensation, involving summarizing, selecting, and focusing on information relevant to the specific topic addressed in this study. This entails extracting key insights, selecting pertinent details, and concentrating on aspects directly related to understanding the reasons behind the differing responses of Indonesia and the Philippines to AUKUS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before delving into the discussion, it is essential to compare the two countries using consistent attributes. In this analysis, Nuechterlein's framework of various national interests will serve as the variables. This comparison is crucial to illustrate that Indonesia and the Philippines exhibit a considerable degree of similarity, thus making them suitable subjects for examination using the most similar system method. Additionally, this helps identify the specific attributes in which these two countries differ, thereby providing justification for their further causal analysis in the discussion section.

The first variable of this analysis is in terms of defense. In this regard, Indonesia and the Philippines share similar interests. This paper finds that in the case of Indonesia and the Philippines in 2021, the most significant threat to the security and sovereignty of both countries arises from China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea. For Indonesia, the significance of this concern has been underlined since 2015, as documented in the Indonesian White Book. It suggests that conflicts in the South China Sea have the potential to escalate into armed confrontations due to three main reasons. These include the frequent application of military strategies by involved parties to reinforce their territorial claims, the involvement of non-regional nations in these disputes, and the lack of a credible international institution or organization to manage and resolve the conflicts ([Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2015](#)). Moreover, this concern is reiterated in the National Defense Policy 2021 document released by the Indonesian Ministry of Defense. The document stresses that tensions in the South China Sea, which borders the North Natuna Sea, are among the factors contributing to regional instability and are specifically identified by the Indonesian Government as an actual threat to the nation ([Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2021a](#)). In this context, actual threats are defined by the Indonesian Ministry of Defense as military, non-military, and hybrid threats likely to persist in the foreseeable future, originating from both domestic and external sources. In line with Indonesia, the Philippines also views the issues in the South China Sea as their biggest security challenge. The government, through the Philippine Department of National Defense, publishes periodically updated documents

outlining their national defense strategy. In the Philippines National Defense Strategy 2018-2022, the country identifies territorial disputes in the South China Sea, bordering the West Philippine Sea, as the primary security threat to Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity by writing “...the concerns in the West Philippines Sea (WPS), which can be considered as the foremost security challenge to Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity” ([The Philippines Department of National Defense, 2018, p. 11](#)). Thus, it can be concluded that Indonesia and the Philippines both have an interest in safeguarding their sovereignty in the face of the same regional threats, which is China’s aggression and territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Apart from defense, Indonesia and the Philippines also share similar economic interests. Data on exports and imports from both countries indicates a significant reliance on China as their primary trading partner. According to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS RI), in the month prior to the declaration of the AUKUS formation, Indonesia’s trade balance report revealed exports totaling USD 21.42 billion, reaching the highest record since 2011 ([Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2021](#)), while imports amounted to USD 16.68 billion ([Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021](#)). Figure 1 and 2 provide additional insight into Indonesia’s top four major export and import partners, along with their respective values in million US dollars. These figures underscore China’s pivotal role as the primary trading partner, accounting for USD 4,780 million or 22.3% of Indonesia’s exports and USD 4,955 million or 32.25% of its imports by value, as concluded by the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency in August 2021 ([Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021](#)).

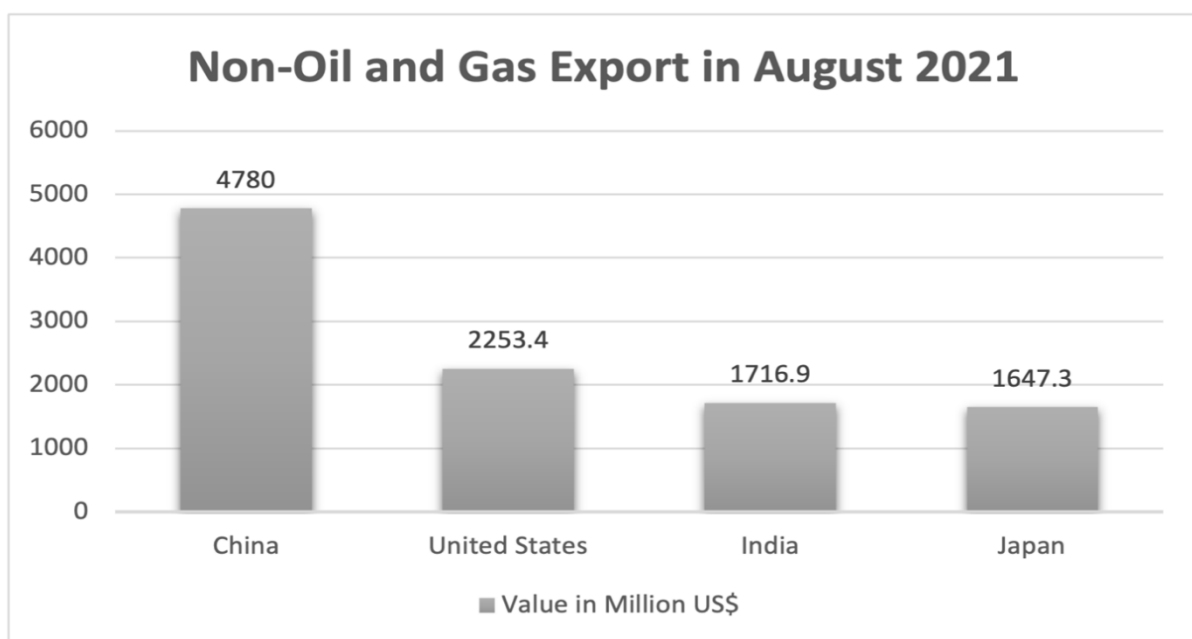


Figure 1. Indonesia’s Non-Oil and Gas Exports Partners and Their Value. Source: [Badan Pusat Statistik \(2021\)](#)

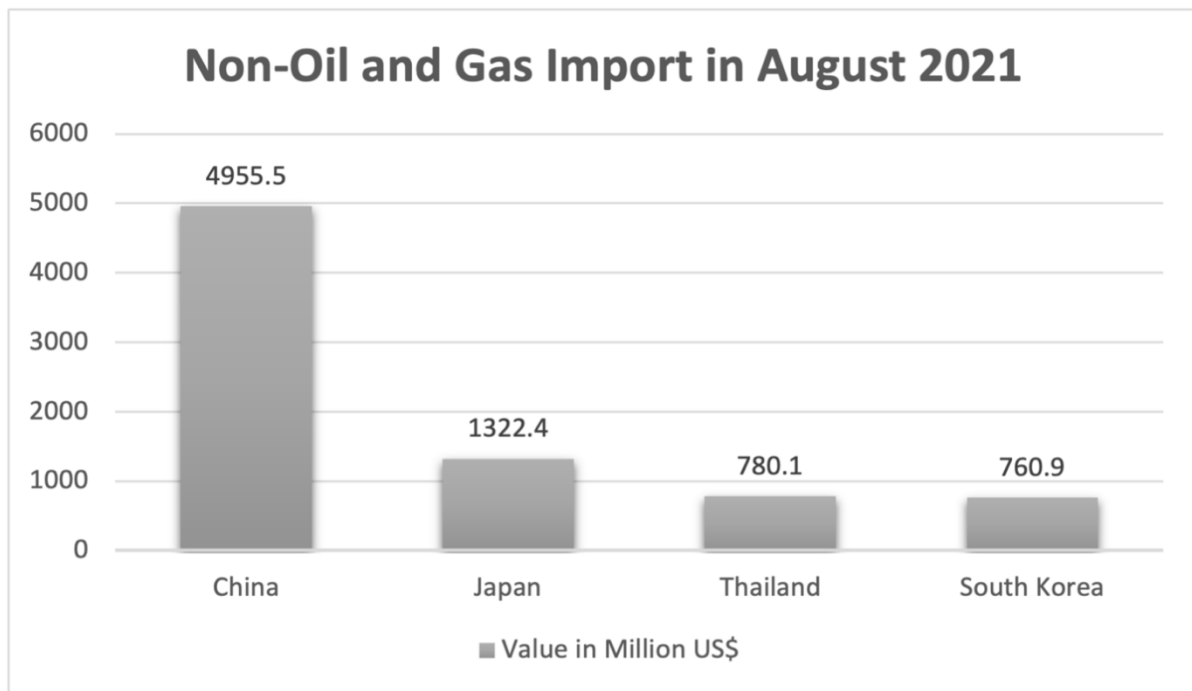


Figure 2. Indonesia's Non-Oil and Gas Imports Partners and Their Value. Source: [Badan Pusat Statistik \(2021\)](#)

Similarly, like Indonesia, China also serves as the primary partner contributing the highest trade value for the Philippine's export-import activities. The Philippine National Statistics Authority published an international trade data in August 2021, exactly one month before the formation of the AUKUS Pact. According to the information they provided, the Philippines' trade with China resulted in the largest export value, followed by the United States, Japan, and Hongkong. Trade with China totalled around USD 1,049 million or a 16.2% share of the Philippines' overall exports. On the other hand, the highest import value was also dominated by trade goods from China, followed by Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. The value of their imports from China amounted to USD 2,360.7 million. From the data collected, it can be concluded that the economic interests of Indonesia and the Philippines are closely interconnected with China as the largest trading partner for both countries.

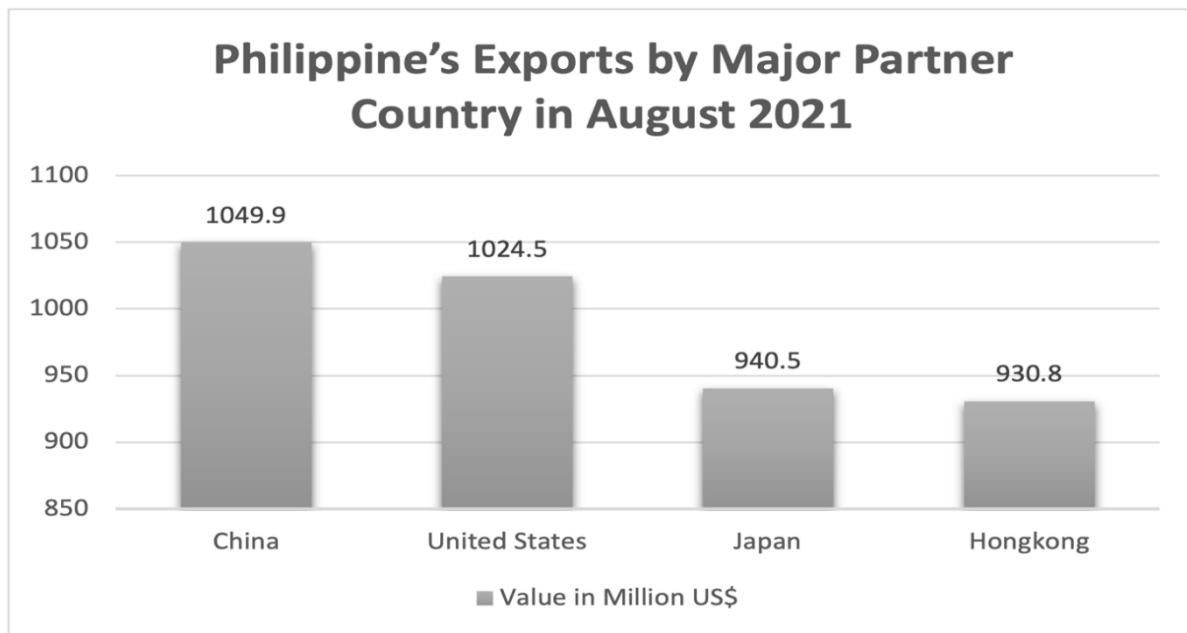


Figure 3. The Philippines' Exports Partners and Their Value. Source: [Philippines Statistics Authority \(2021\)](#)

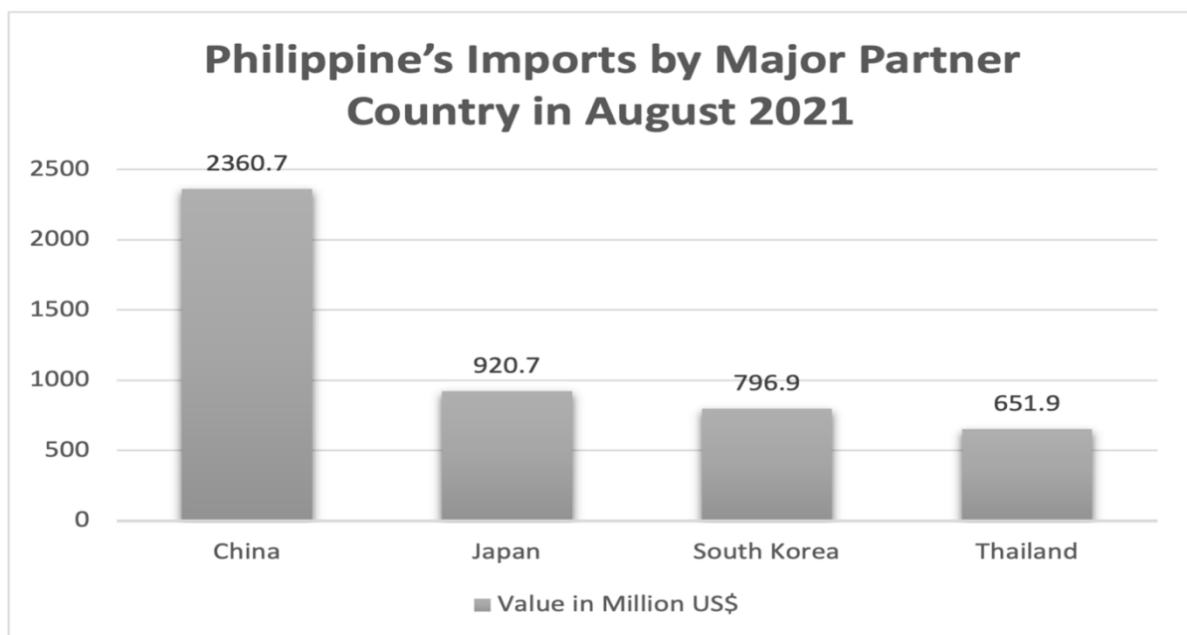


Figure 4. The Philippines' Imports Partners and Their Value. Source: [Philippines Statistics Authority \(2021\)](#)

The third type of interest discussed by Nuechterlein in the concept of National Interest is ideological interest. In this regard, Indonesia and the Philippines both normatively adhere to democratic governance, although both experienced a decline in democracy indices in 2021. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Indonesia gained an overall score of 6.48 in

2020. However, a report from the same institution indicated that Indonesia’s democracy score had decreased to 6.3 in 2021, marking its lowest position in the last 14 years. Due to this decline, Indonesia was categorized as a flawed democracy country ([Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022](#)). On the other hand, the Philippines has experienced a similar trend, with consistent declines in its democracy index for several years. In 2017, the Philippines was ranked 51st globally, then dropped two spots in 2018, and ended up at position 54 in 2021 ([Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022](#)). Based on this report, the Philippines also remains classified as a flawed democracy country ([Mateo, 2022](#)). Therefore, the ideological interest that needs to be pursued by the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines is to enhance the democratic values of both countries.

Among all the types of national interests explained by Nuechterlein in his writing, this paper finds out that the only differentiating variables between Indonesia and the Philippines lie in their World Order Interest. As stated by Nuechterlein, this term refers to a country’s interest manifested in efforts to maintain stability in the political and economic system in its region. In this regard, Indonesia initiated a framework called the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific which in its core, prioritize ASEAN centrality and leadership in shaping the economic and security architecture ([ASEAN, 2020](#)). This evident shows that Indonesia strongly emphasizes the concept of ASEAN centrality as the basis for addressing various regional issues. In contrast, the Philippines has shown a dismissive and pessimistic attitude towards ASEAN’s capabilities to address regional issues, especially when those issues are related to security. This attitude is reflected in the Philippines’ defense strategy which highly support the major power outside ASEAN, especially the United States, to present in the region ([The Philippines Department of National Defense, 2018](#)). Therefore, based on the four variables above, the comparison between Indonesia and the Philippines can be visualized in the following matrix.

Table 1. Indonesia and the Philippines Comparative Matrix

Countries	Indonesia	The Philippines
Defense Interest	The South China Sea dispute is a major challenge to national security	The South China Sea dispute is a major challenge to national security
Economic Interest	China is the primary trading partner	China is the primary trading partner
Ideological Interest	Democracy (declining)	Democracy (declining)

World Order Interest	Prioritizing ASEAN Centrality in maintaining regional stability	View ASEAN power as inadequate to maintain regional stability
Response to AUKUS	Disfavoring	Favoring

Source: Drawn by Authors (2024)

Expanding upon the shared traits and distinctions outlined earlier, the fundamental question driving this article is whether the disparities between Indonesia and the Philippines regarding their perspectives on ASEAN centrality impact their respective attitudes towards responding to the creation of AUKUS.

Indonesia’s View on ASEAN Centrality

The Indo-Pacific region is one of the most dynamic areas and has become a center of significant economic growth in recent decades ([Montratama, 2016](#)). This factor has also led to frequent geopolitical and geostrategic changes in the region. Economic growth accompanied by military dynamics requires countries in the Indo-Pacific to have deeper consideration in determining their steps and policies. That is why in 2019, Indonesia initiated the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) – a guideline for ASEAN member countries to build mechanisms and strategies to respond to regional dynamics. The main idea of the AOIP is to prioritize ASEAN centrality and leadership in shaping the economic and security architecture, thereby creating a peaceful, safe, stable, and prosperous Southeast Asia, Asia-Pacific, and even Indo-Pacific ([ASEAN, 2020](#)). In this context, the centrality is referred to is the role of ASEAN in determining its own stance and policies to respond to global security issues or those that may pose a threat to the region. In other words, ASEAN is expected to be relevant regionally and even internationally ([Maisi, 2023](#)).

It is known that the drafting of the AOIP is based on Indonesia’s perspective on the Indo-Pacific region ([Setyorini, 2022](#)). This perspective was introduced several years earlier by Marty Natalegawa, the Indonesian Foreign Minister from 2009 to 2014. The idea was then developed and brought by the Indonesian government to the regional negotiation table until in 2019. ASEAN officially adopted this perspective to be used as the policy direction for its member countries. The principles for responding to security issues outlined in the AOIP essentially reflect the centrality of ASEAN’s role in responding to changes and geopolitical upheavals in the Indo-Pacific region ([Wulandari et al., 2021](#)). These principles are enshrined in the final AOIP document:

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is based on the principles of strengthening ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, complementarity with existing

cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit and respect for international law, such as the UN Charter, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and other relevant treaties and conventions, the ASEAN Charter and various ASEAN treaties and agreements and the EAS Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations. ([ASEAN, 2020, pp. 2-3](#))

Subsequently, ASEAN also elaborated in its objectives that through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN member countries strive to strengthen and optimize cooperation, including defense cooperation among its member states with countries outside Southeast Asia. Quoted from the same document, it stated that:

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific involves the further strengthening and optimization of the ASEAN-led mechanism including the EAST ASIAN Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting Plus, the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, and others such as the relevant ASEAN plus one mechanism. ([ASEAN, 2020, p. 2](#))

In highlighting ASEAN centrality through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), Indonesia aims to maintain security and peace with the objective of fostering a stable, safe, and prosperous region ([Riyanto et al., 2023](#)). This sentiment was underscored by the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, during the 15th ASEAN Defense Ministers Meetings in 2021. He emphasized the importance of ASEAN viewing the region as a unified entity and not allowing greater powers to divide ASEAN ([Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2021b](#)).

Not only through AOIP, Indonesia also channels its support for ASEAN centrality as the main actor in the region into the National Defense Policy published by the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia in 2020. In this document, one of Indonesia's defense policy objectives is to maintain the sovereignty of the country on land, sea, and air, including at the borders. In order to achieve this goal, Indonesia decides to use four approaches. The first is to accelerate the determination of the country's territorial boundaries to protect sovereignty through coordination between relevant ministries and institutions. The second is by optimizing interoperability and enhancing the development of infrastructure, especially remote monitoring and surveillance equipment based on satellite technology to protect border areas of the country. Furthermore, Indonesia also seeks to reorganize the Flight Information Region above the three most vulnerable border areas, namely Batam, Tanjung Pinang, and Natuna. The last approach mentioned is that Indonesia also strives to strengthen its position as a regional power in accordance with the concept of ASEAN centrality. This effort is made through increased defense cooperation prioritizing neighboring ASEAN countries as the main partners. This cooperation will focus on maritime security through joint military exercises and sustained patrol coordination to strengthen the security structure of the regional territory,

especially in the North Natuna Sea which directly borders the South China Sea, the Malacca Strait, the Indian Ocean, the Sulu Waters, and the Pacific Ocean ([Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2021a](#)).

Indonesia's consistent stance emphasizes that the country prioritizes ASEAN centrality in maintaining regional stability through the concept of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific, which underscores dialogue, cooperation, and peace. In addition, the formulation of national defense strategies, as well as official statements from representatives of the Indonesian government, are seen as consistent with Indonesia's stance towards the establishment of the AUKUS Defense Pact in 2021. This rejection occurred not only because AUKUS was seen as potentially triggering an arms race, but AUKUS also has the potential to open new opportunities for major powers from outside the region to intervene, which will increase the complexity of regional issues and become a new obstacle to ASEAN's aspirations to become a central actor in the region.

However, three years since the establishment of this defense pact, there have been noticeable changes in Indonesia's response to AUKUS. Recent updates suggest a shift towards a more nuanced approach, with Indonesia appearing less overtly opposed to the initiative compared to their stance in 2021. Presently, they seem to adopt a more diplomatic stance, emphasizing the importance of open communication with Australia regarding their nuclear submarine project, a key focus of AUKUS ([Anwar, 2023](#)). However, due to the scope of this paper being limited to the events of 2021, further analysis of these evolving dynamics is beyond its purview. These shifting responses warrant exploration in future research within the field of International Relations.

The Philippines' View on ASEAN Centrality

The Philippines is one of the ASEAN member countries and therefore, technically, this country should also adopt the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific initiated by Indonesia as a regional guideline in making foreign policies. In written communications, the Philippines does not explicitly reject the perspective that prioritizes ASEAN centrality. However, the national defense policy and official statements from the country's leaders show a different approach from what AOIP desires. Upon reviewing the National Defense Strategy of the Philippines, it becomes evident that the country prioritizes cooperation with its traditional allies, predominantly Western nations, over its regional counterparts within ASEAN. This priority can be seen in Chapter II, which lists the orders of Philippines' security partners. Security partners are defined as countries willing to collaborate to achieve the same security interests. According to [the Philippines Department of National Defense \(2018\)](#), "It is in the interest of the country that security partnerships are being nurtured with other like-minded states and that possible opportunities of cooperation are being explored." (p. 21)

In that section, the first security partner mentioned is the United States, followed by Australia. The Philippine government emphasizes that the United States is the only country

that maintains an alliance agreement with the Philippines. Additionally, it highlights that the military capability and advancement of the United States are key reasons why the country remains a major power on the international stage. For this reason, the Philippines explicitly stated that the presence of the United States in the region is expected to be maintained and strengthened through cooperation with Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and the Philippines. The security cooperation between the United States and the Philippines focuses on five types of implementations, namely interoperability, capacity building, maritime security, maritime domain awareness, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The second country mentioned as a major security partner of the Philippines is Australia. It is noted that the Philippines and Australia have had diplomatic relations since 1946. The Status of Visiting Force Agreement (SOVFA) agreed upon by both countries serves as a solid foundation for their partnership in the field of security. In the same defense strategy document, after the United States and Australia, the list of the Philippines' main defense partners is continued by South Korea, Japan, and then ASEAN is mentioned as one of them. The Philippines indeed expresses its support for the principle of ASEAN centrality in a subsection that explains its relationship with ASEAN. However, the country also acknowledges that ASEAN still has shortcomings, namely significant economic disparities among its member countries. In discussing defense relations, the Philippines admits that they have only established official cooperation with three out of nine of their counterparts in ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. This indicates that the Philippines' statements supporting ASEAN centrality are contradicted by its actions that prioritize security cooperation with countries outside the regional organization.

In terms of relationship with the United Kingdom, formal diplomatic ties between the Philippines and the United Kingdom were established on July 4, 1946. Since then, both nations have actively collaborated to strengthen their political, economic, cultural, and interpersonal bonds. Shared interests in global and regional issues, including counterterrorism, interfaith cooperation, climate change, disaster management, and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, further solidify their relationship. The robust bilateral ties between the UK and the Philippines are underscored by the significant presence of over 200,000 Filipinos residing and contributing to British society, with many having obtained British citizenship ([Embassy of the Philippines, 2015](#)). In the realm of defense, the Philippines acknowledges the United Kingdom as one of its security partners in Europe (The Philippines Department of National Defense, 2018). Despite not having the same level of proximity as with the United States and Australia, the Philippines maintains a positive and meaningful connection with the United Kingdom. Hence, the involvement of the United Kingdom in AUKUS appears acceptable, given the significant importance placed by the Philippines on the presence of the United States and Australia, as outlined in their Defense Strategy.

Furthermore, the Philippines' less supportive stance towards the principle of ASEAN centrality is also reflected in the statement of one of its public officials. Various media reports

show how the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Teodoro Locsin, welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the AUKUS Pact by stating that the formation of this pact is important to maintain peace and stability in the region ([The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, 2021](#)). Locsin views that AUKUS will play a role as a counterbalance to China's aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the South China Sea, where the country claims nearly 80% of the disputed waters. In the same statement, Locsin also explained that the reasons the Philippines supports the formation of this trilateral defense pact are at least threefold. Firstly, there is a current imbalance of power in Southeast Asia due to China's increasingly massive influence in the region. Secondly, ASEAN countries lack sufficient military capabilities to maintain a balance of power in the region, while the United States, which has extraordinary military capabilities, is located far from Southeast Asia, separated by the Pacific Ocean. Lastly, Australia, with its planned construction of nuclear-powered attack submarines through the AUKUS project, is looking to enhance their navy's capabilities to respond to attacks efficiently and precisely. This would greatly benefit efforts to balance power in the region ([Castro, 2021](#)).

The support for AUKUS along with the reasons mentioned clearly demonstrates that the Philippines fundamentally holds a skeptical view of ASEAN's ability and willingness to play a central role in maintaining regional stability. Locsin's statements are also validated by the Philippine National Defense Strategy, which places ASEAN as a security partner of lesser importance – while the United States and Australia, the founders of AUKUS, are prioritized partners for the Philippines. Therefore, it is not surprising that after AUKUS was formed, the Philippines became the first Southeast Asian country to express support for the defense pact ([Priambudi, 2022](#)).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research findings reveal significant disparities in the views of Indonesia and the Philippines regarding ASEAN centrality, which subsequently impact their responses to the formation of the AUKUS alliance. Indonesia's steadfast commitment to ASEAN centrality, as exemplified by initiatives such as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), underscores its emphasis on regional cooperation and dialogue to maintain peace and stability. This perspective aligns with Indonesia's national defense policies, which prioritize ASEAN as a key partner and advocate for regional security. In contrast, the Philippines demonstrates a less supportive stance towards ASEAN centrality, as evidenced by its prioritization of security cooperation with traditional allies such as the United States and Australia over ASEAN. This preference is reflected in the Philippines' defense strategy, which emphasizes partnerships with Western nations, and its positive reception of the AUKUS pact, aimed at countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The divergent attitudes of Indonesia and the Philippines towards ASEAN centrality highlight the complexity of regional

dynamics and the varying strategic interests of Southeast Asian nations in responding to geopolitical developments.

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