

Indonesia: Interpreting Presidential Visit to China and USA

China: the most important partner of Indonesia in the region

As part of his first official diplomatic travels to the United States, Peru, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and potentially other Middle Eastern countries, President Prabowo Subianto traveled to China from November 8–10. This visit, which took place shortly after he was sworn in as Indonesia's eighth president on October 20, focused on how the country's new leader would improve its diplomatic ties, secure trade and investment opportunities, and address some of the world's most pressing issues. Given the increasing geopolitical tension in certain areas, Indonesia's diplomatic stance will be crucial in evaluating the situation in Southeast Asia and Asia overall.

The initial trip to China serves as a clear indication that President Prabowo Subianto will continue to uphold Indonesia's close ties with China, which were established during former President Joko Widodo's ten-year term. President Prabowo traveled to China with key members of his cabinet, including the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Airlangga Hartarto, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sugiono, Minister of Investment and Downstream/Head of the Investment Coordinating Board, Rosan Roeslani, Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, Sakti Wahyu Trenggono, Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Bahlil Lahadalia, Cabinet Secretary, Teddy Indra Wijaya, Vice Minister of Defense; Doni Hermawan, Vice Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology; Stella Christie, Vice Minister of Housing and Settlement; Fahri Hamzah, Indonesia's ambassador to the People's Republic of China; Djauhari Oratmangun, Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Air Force; Air Chief Marshal M. Tonny Harjono, Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Navy (Presiden RI, 2024). Prabowo Subianto and the members of the Red and White Cabinet are accompanied by a few well-known Indonesian businessmen during their tour to China, as part of the visit's agenda is the signing and negotiation of a memorandum of understanding for Chinese investment in Indonesia. The CEO of Bakrie Group, Anindya Bakrie, founder of Sinar Mas Group, Franky Oesman Widjaja, CEO of Adaro Energy Indonesia, Garibaldi Thohir, founder of Barito Group, Prajogo Pangestu, founder of Artha Graha Group, Tommy Winata, and Hashim Djojohadikusumo, brother of Prabowo Subianto, are a few of the well-known Indonesian businessmen who have traveled to China (CNN Indonesia, 2024a).

Chinese leaders President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li Qiang, and National People Congress Chairman Zhao Leji welcomed and met with President Prabowo Subianto and the



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PT Perkasa Permana Asia Abadi
Gedung Menara Astra 37/F
Jl. Jendral Sudirman Kav 5-6,
Jakarta Pusat 10220

+6221 3115 4532



SINGAPORE

30 Cecil Street,
19-08 Prudential Tower,
Singapore 049712

Phone: +65 68121611 | Fax: +65 68121601
www.ppaa.com.sg



VIETNAM

11th floor, B1 Building No.10,
Ta Quang Buu St., Hai Ba
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Tel: (+84) 912361978

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Indonesian cabinet team (Kompas, 2024). Following a three-day visit, the following five key topics emerged from discussions between the Indonesian and Chinese governments (Antara, 2024):

- 1. Investment Commitment of US\$ 10,07 billion:** Several economic agreements have been signed between private Chinese and Indonesian businesses in the fields of food security, energy security, downstream of Indonesia's 26 primary commodities, and scientific and technological development. The investment is equivalent to Rp157.64 trillion.
- 2. Signing of 7 Bilateral Agreements:** Prabowo and Xi Jinping also witnessed the signing process of seven bilateral agreements in the Great Hall of the People on November 9, 2024. Seven bilateral agreements that become an output of President Prabowo's visit to China are: 1) Protocol of Requirement of Phytosanitary for Export of Fresh Coconut Fruit from Indonesia to China; 2) Technical Guidelines to Promote Sustainable Fishing; 3) Memorandum of Understanding on Strengthening Blue Economy Cooperation; 4) Memorandum of Understanding on Mineral Resources Cooperation; 5) Memorandum of Understanding on Green Mineral Resources Cooperation; 6) Memorandum of Understanding on Water Resources Cooperation; and 7) Memorandum of Understanding on Conformity Assessment Cooperation.
- 3. Funding for The Free Nutritious Food Program:** Aside from the US\$10.07 billion investment commitment, the government of China also agreed to provide funding for a free nutritious program. Indonesia and China have agreed to the "Food Supplementation and School Feeding Programme in Indonesia" funding scheme. Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Airlangga Hartarto, stated that China has already implemented a similar program for Chinese people and will support the new free nutritious program initiative in Indonesia.
- 4. Guideline of Maritime Partnership for People Welfare:** The Technical Cooperation Guideline (TCG) was signed between the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of Indonesia, Sakti Wahyu Trenggono, and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China, Han Jun. TCG became a part of an implementing agreement that had been signed last year. Some main points of the TCG are collaboration for fulfilling the welfare of workers in the fisheries sector, enhancement of the welfare of people related to the fisheries area by creating value added from the downstream of fisheries, and regulation regarding fisheries between China and Indonesia.
- 5. Statement regarding Indonesia's Foreign Policy:** President Prabowo stated that the cooperation between Indonesia and China will not alter Indonesia's free and active foreign policy. Indonesia is committed to not taking sides with one power but will collaborate with all countries. Prabowo also stated that the partnership between Indonesia and China will create an example that, in the modern world, collaboration is the right path to achieving peace.

Apart from the success of economic diplomacy with China in securing investment and funding for the new president's policies, there are some critics regarding the joint statement of Xi Jinping and Prabowo



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Subianto regarding strategic partnerships, which includes some sentences about the South China Sea. One of the paragraphs of the Joint Statement stated that "Indonesia and China are reaching mutual understanding regarding joint development in some areas, which becomes an object of overlapped claims between countries" (BBC News Indonesia, 2024). Regarding these paragraphs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia released a statement that affirms Indonesia's position and rejects China's claim in the South China Sea (BBC News Indonesia, 2024). These points receive criticism from experts such as Hikmahanto Juwana, Professor of International Law from the University of Indonesia, who asked if the "areas that become objects of overlapped claims" refer to the Nine Dash Line at the South China Sea or not (CNN Indonesia, 2024b). Juwana also added that the joint statement became proof that Indonesia had acknowledged China's one-sided claim about the nine or ten-dash line (CNN Indonesia, 2024b).

The first presidential visit of Indonesia to China became evidence that China is the most important partner of Indonesia, which has a significant influence on Indonesia's trade and investment, given the condition that China is one of the most influential members of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) with substantial ability to finance development projects in Indonesia. Indonesia, together with Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, joined BRICS in October 2024. This highlights Indonesia's commitment to engaging in international forums while maintaining non-alignment, reflecting its ambition to play an active role in global economic dynamics and champion the interests of the global south. With the rising geopolitical tensions in East and Southeast Asia regarding the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, Prabowo's choice to visit China is the right decision to strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic position and enhance cooperation. However, Indonesia must also look for China's assertiveness, which may impact Indonesia's sovereignty, especially in the North Natuna Sea, which is close to the overclaimed area of the South China Sea. Indonesia also must assess the Chinese economic assistance to avoid some conditions that could possibly create a future burden for Indonesia.

Presidential visit to the US and 75 years of bilateral relations between Indonesia and USA

After a 3-day visit to China, President Prabowo and red and white cabinet members of Indonesia embarked on a trip to the United States on November 10 and arrived on the same day at Andrews Airbase at 4:00 pm local time. During the presidential visit to the US, Prabowo was accompanied by some cabinet members, namely Minister of Foreign Affairs Sugiono, Minister of Investment Rosan Roeslani, and Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya. This visit was to fulfill the invitation from the US after his inauguration as the 8th President of Indonesia and to commemorate the 75 years of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the US (Tempo, 2024). The visit lasted from 10 until 14 November, when the delegation of Indonesia went to Peru for the APEC meeting.

On November 11th, 2024, President Prabowo held a meeting with the United States-Indonesia Society (USINDO), which was



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attended by some companies that had been invested in Indonesia, such as Freeport, Chevron, General Electric, Georgetown, and many other prominent US companies (Setkab, 2024). During this meeting, Prabowo affirmed his stance that the new government of Indonesia will eradicate corruption at all levels and will open direct contact if US companies are facing obstacles in Indonesia's bureaucracy (Setkab, 2024). Accompanied by the Minister of Investment and former Ambassador of Indonesia to the US and Vice Minister of Science and Technology, Stella Christie, Prabowo also invites US businesses to invest in Indonesia, especially in renewable energy (Setkab, 2024).

President Prabowo was invited to meet President Biden at the White House on November 12th. They discussed not only the partnership between the US and Indonesia but also some international issues such as the war in Gaza and the development of the South China Sea. After one hour of discussion, there are 3 points of the output of the meeting as follows (Liputan 6, 2024):

1. **Military agreement between the US and Indonesia:** The US and Indonesia agreed to extend the scope of the Super Garuda Shield military exercise, one of the biggest military exercises in the Indo-Pacific Region and attended by 23 countries and 4,000 military personnel. This plan, as stated in the joint statement between Prabowo and Biden, affirms commitment to maintaining security and regional stability. Other military activities that will be developed between Indonesia and the USA are security dialogue between the USA and Indonesia and the development of the Center of Maritime Training of the Indonesia Coast Guard Agency (BAKAMLA) with US funding at Anambas, Batam, which is close to the South China Sea. The commitment to strengthen Indonesia's defense was also shown by the meeting of President Prabowo Subianto and US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, on November 13, 2024.
2. **US support for the free nutritious program of Indonesia:** the joint statement by Biden-Prabowo also captured US support for the free nutritious food program for children and pregnant women.
3. **Health and security agreement:** During the presidential visit to the US, both countries also agreed to strengthen health security to prevent contagious disease and zoonosis. According to the press release of The White House, USAID will help to strengthen the early warning system of animal and human health in Indonesia to prevent the contagion of disease in 38 provinces of Indonesia. USAID will support the development of 12 tuberculosis clinics that have been resistant to medicine and will also help link more than 23,500 medical facilities in 38 provinces to one national health electronic platform, increasing access to data and medical services for patients.
4. **Trade and Investment:** Indonesia and the USA are also committed to strengthening cooperation in trade and agriculture and will proceed with the framework of trade and investment in 2025. The US planned to extend the strong relationship in trade and agriculture, which was valued at US\$ 7 billion in 2023. The US, Indonesia, and 12 IPEF partners pioneered the supply chain's efficiency and will maintain the commitment to create long-term economic benefits.



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The presidential visit to the US marks the 75th anniversary of US-Indonesia relations. Immediate visit to the US after Prabowo's visit to China also became proof of Indonesia's foreign policy commitment to not take sides between world powers and to build cooperation with as many countries as possible. Although the US has become the second country visited by the delegation of the President of Indonesia, the output of meetings and discussions shows the importance of the US to Indonesia. One of the boldest partnerships between Indonesia and the US is the extension of military partnership in the form of Super Garuda Shield Training. Moreover, the development of the new marine training facilities near the South China Sea has become a clear attempt by Indonesia to defend its sovereignty with assistance from foreign powers. In the sphere of economics and trade, there is huge enthusiasm from prominent US businessmen to invest in Indonesia, especially in the development of renewable energy. However, all of these commitments must still wait until authorization from the new administration of Donald Trump, the President-Elect of the US. Trump will likely have a new approach to international relations and trade between the US and Southeast Asia and Indonesia.

Conclusion

The presidential visit to China and the US has become a clear sign that Indonesia will have a more open policy in terms of foreign affairs. To achieve high economic growth, the new administration of Indonesia must strengthen partnerships with major countries in the world, especially China, which has geographical proximity to Indonesia and the US, the most influential country in the world. The visit to China and the US is also an attempt by the new administration of Indonesia to secure trade and investment agreements that will contribute to Indonesia's economic growth. The aim to accelerate economic growth has a backdrop of increasing geopolitical tensions around the world, which will have a negative impact on international trade. In this issue, Indonesia must have the right international stance to ensure its objective is to transform the country from a developing to a developed country.



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