



Russia's Shadow in the Global South: Deterrence and Influence in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: As the global order transitions toward multipolarity, Russia has intensified its outreach to the Global South, seeking to reposition itself as a counterweight to Western influence. This article examines Russia's deterrence and influence strategies in Southeast Asia, a region of growing geopolitical importance. Drawing on classical deterrence theory, offensive realism, soft power dynamics, and the concept of hedging, this study analyzes how Russia combines military cooperation, economic engagement, diplomatic initiatives, and information operations to assert its presence. The article also explores how ASEAN member states respond to these strategies through nuanced hedging behaviors that reflect their desire for strategic autonomy amid great power competition. Using a qualitative descriptive method and a multi-theoretical framework, the research highlights both the opportunities and the limitations of Russia's engagement in Southeast Asia. While Moscow leverages historical ties, shared non-Western norms, and alternative governance models to foster cooperation, its limited economic capacity and increasing alignment with China constrain its independent appeal. The findings contribute to broader debates on regional security, deterrence credibility, and the reconfiguration of power relations in the Global South.

Keywords: Russia, deterrence, Southeast Asia, Global South, strategic competition, ASEAN.

Introduction

The intensifying disintegration of the post-Cold War "unipolar moment" has rekindled great-power rivalry in areas previously deemed secondary to global strategy. This transition is most apparent in Southeast Asia, where the Associa-

tion of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is both courted and constrained by various external actors. Russia's revitalized engagement in the sub-region, encompassing arms sales, naval port visits, vaccine diplomacy, and media operations, is often portrayed as peripheral compared to China's economic influence or the United States' alliance framework. Such Sino-American dichotomies, however, conceal the distinctive strategic rationale that Moscow articulates. Grounded in Alexander Dugin's neo-Eurasianist discourse, this rationale positions the Russian state as a "civilizational pole" tasked with opposing Western universalism, fostering normative diversity, and establishing solidarity with the "World Majority" of the Global South.¹

Dugin's body of work, ranging from *Foundations of Geopolitics* to *The Fourth Political Theory*, provides not only a philosophical lexicon for anti-liberal critique but also outlines specific geopolitical strategies. Two themes are particularly prominent in Southeast Asia. First, the shift to a multipolar system necessitates the intentional dissemination of deterrent capabilities to allied entities along the maritime periphery of the Eurasian "heartland," thereby hampering U.S. power projection east of the Strait of Malacca.² Second, collaboration with culturally non-Western societies must extend beyond mere transactional commerce and be grounded in the concept of "civilizational choice," providing states with an alternative modernity that validates traditional values and strategic autonomy.³

These propositions accord with ASEAN's inherent hedging tendency: its members pursue external balancing resources while avoiding formal alliances; they embrace great-power markets while remaining vigilant about ideological domination. Moscow crafts a strategy of deterrence and influence by providing inexpensive arms, fostering energy cooperation, and engaging in high-level diplomatic forums, while also expressing a shared grievance against Western "double standards," thereby aligning itself with this ambivalent strategic culture. Whether such cooperation can mitigate Russia's limited economic influence, dependence on China, and reputational damage from the Ukraine conflict remains an unresolved empirical question.

Historical cases demonstrate how physical separation between deterring powers and conflict zones can erode threat credibility and enable aggression.⁴ Deterrence involves leveraging military, economic, and informational tools to influence a state's strategic choices. Deterrence failures linked to geographical distance often stem from logistical constraints that create exploitable windows; perceived credibility gaps in which deterring states lack forward-deployed denial capabilities; and asymmetric will, which can override cost-benefit calculations. Geographic proximity makes deterrence easier, but even physically distant

¹ Alexander Dugin, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism* (London: Arktos Media, 2014).

² Dugin, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*, 175-183.

³ Dugin, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*, 55-62, 137-151.

⁴ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, vol. 89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

countries can still coerce.⁵ For most Global South states, especially those in Southeast Asia, the effectiveness of deterrence hinges on how these powers balance credibility, economic interdependence, and regional alliances in shaping their decisions.⁶

The political and international dimensions of Global South countries are fundamentally shaped by their collective resistance to global hegemonic power structures and their pursuit of multilateral alliance-building to enhance their voice in global governance.⁷ Many of these countries demonstrate strong social motivations in their development approaches, often prioritizing social equity and poverty alleviation over traditional economic growth indicators.⁸ Some engage with Russia pragmatically to secure economic benefits, such as affordable energy and military resources, while maintaining strategic autonomy from Western powers.⁹ Understanding this heterogeneity is critical for assessing how Russian influence is received across different regions and how it shapes the broader multipolar order.¹⁰

As global power dynamics shift, Russia has reemerged as a key player in the Global South by revitalizing historical ties with non-Western nations and leveraging its post-Cold War resurgence. This engagement is part of Moscow's broader strategy to challenge Western dominance while fostering alliances with emerging economies across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania.¹¹ By positioning itself as an alternative to Western-led frameworks, Russia taps into longstanding grievances against colonialism and power imbalances, which resonate deeply within the Global South.¹² This article examines how these dynamics unfold, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia – a region of growing geopolitical importance. The research aims to analyze Russia's deterrence strategies in the Global South, examine Russia's diplomatic, economic, and military engagements, and assess Southeast Asian countries' strategic autonomy and implementation of hedging strategies in response to Russian deterrence.

⁵ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Polity Press, 2004).

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (Public Affairs, 2011).

⁷ Sebastian Haug, Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner, and Günther Maihold, "The 'Global South' in the Study of World Politics: Examining a Meta Category," *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 9 (2021): 1923-1944, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1948831>.

⁸ Cle-Anne Gabriel et al., "Performance Beyond Economic Growth: Alternatives from Growth-Averse Enterprises in the Global South," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 44, no. 2-4 (2019): 119-137, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375419853148>.

⁹ Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, "The Invasion of Ukraine, the Quest for a Multipolar World, and Russia's Civilizational Appeal to the Global South," *Slavic Review* 83, no. 1 (2024): 1-7, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2024.320>.

¹⁰ Mikhail Komin, "Deconstructing Russia's Anti-colonial Posturing in the Global South," European Council on Foreign Relations, November 27, 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/article/deconstructing-russias-anti-colonial-posturing-in-the-global-south/>.

¹¹ Ivan Grek, "Redefining Power: The Global South's Game-Changing Alliance with Russia," *Russia.Post*, February 2, 2024, https://russiapost.info/global_south/alliance.

¹² Komin, "Deconstructing Russia's Anti-colonial Posturing in the Global South."

Russia's Deterrence in the Global South: Between Power and Influence

To analyze Russia's deterrence and influence strategies in Southeast Asia, this study employs a multifaceted theoretical approach, drawing on classical deterrence theory, theories of power, and the concept of hedging. Kenneth Waltz's deterrence theory provides a foundational understanding of how states use the threat of force to prevent adversaries from taking undesired actions.¹³ In the context of Russia's engagement in Southeast Asia, this theory helps explain Moscow's military presence and arms sales in the region. Russia's military cooperation with countries like Vietnam and Myanmar can be seen as an effort to deter potential adversaries, particularly the United States and China, from expanding their influence in the region.¹⁴

John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism offers insights into Russia's motivations and strategies in Southeast Asia. Mearsheimer argues that, in an anarchic international system, great powers seek to maximize their power and pursue regional hegemony to ensure their survival.¹⁵ This perspective helps explain Russia's efforts to expand its influence in Southeast Asia as a means of counterbalancing U.S. and Chinese power in the region. However, offensive realism faces criticism that is particularly relevant in this case. Offensive realism expects pronounced balancing against rising powers, but much of Southeast Asia responds to both China and the United States through hedging rather than pure balancing or bandwagoning.¹⁶ This behavior suggests the need to complement structural realism with frameworks that capture strategic ambiguity and mixed signals. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power complements Mearsheimer's focus on hard power. Nye argues that a state's ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce, is crucial in international relations.¹⁷ Russia's diplomatic efforts, cultural exchanges, and economic engagement in Southeast Asia can be analyzed through this lens, revealing a more nuanced approach to influence beyond military means.

Cheng-Chwee Kuik's concept of hedging is particularly relevant to understanding the responses of Southeast Asian countries to Russia's engagement.

¹³ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," *American Political Science Review* 84, no. 3 (1990): 731-745.

¹⁴ Joshua Kurlantzick, "Russia's Influence in Southeast Asia Is Fading," Council on Foreign Relations, September 25, 2023, www.cfr.org/article/russias-influence-southeast-asia-fading.

¹⁵ Sverrir Steinsson, "John Mearsheimer's Theory of Offensive Realism and the Rise of China," *E-International Relations*, March 6, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/47402>.

¹⁶ Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "Navigating the Narratives of Indo-Pacific: 'Rules,' 'Like-mindedness,' and 'De-risking' in the Eyes of Southeast Asia," *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs* 9 (2023): 51-56, <https://hdl.handle.net/10822/1085043>.

¹⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Realism About Foreign-Policy Realism," Project Syndicate, February 2, 2022, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ukraine-and-limits-of-for-eign-policy-realism-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-02>.

Hedging refers to the strategy of maintaining positive relations with multiple great powers in order to maximize benefits and minimize risks.¹⁸ This concept helps explain why Southeast Asian nations might welcome Russian involvement to diversify their strategic partnerships and reduce dependence on either the United States or China.

These theoretical frameworks facilitate the understanding of the complex dynamics of Russia's deterrence and influence strategies in Southeast Asia. Classical deterrence theory explains Russia's military posturing, while theories of power elucidate both hard- and soft-power approaches.¹⁹ The concept of hedging provides insight into the receptiveness of Southeast Asian countries to Russian engagement. It guides the analysis of Russia's activities in the region, including arms sales, diplomatic initiatives, and economic cooperation. It also helps contextualize the responses of Southeast Asian nations and the implications for regional security dynamics.

Southeast Asia represents a focal point for Russia's efforts within the Global South due to its strategic location and significant economic potential. Moscow's engagement with ASEAN member states spans multiple dimensions, ranging from arms sales to energy cooperation to high-level diplomatic initiatives.²⁰ However, ASEAN's response to Russian overtures reflects the region's commitment to strategic neutrality.

Within ASEAN itself, responses to Russian power plays vary widely depending on each country's geopolitical priorities. Nations like Vietnam and Myanmar may lean toward deeper cooperation with Moscow due to historical ties or shared interests.²¹ In contrast, others like Singapore adopt more cautious stances aligned with Western positions. Meanwhile, countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia often pursue balanced approaches that reflect their commitment to non-alignment principles.²² This article examines these nuanced responses by analyzing how ASEAN states employ hedging strategies to safeguard their autonomy while navigating Russian influence amid broader regional complexities.²³

¹⁸ Kurlantzick, "Russia's Influence in Southeast Asia Is Fading."

¹⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 5-41, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560372>.

²⁰ Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "Southeast Asia Hedges Between Feasibility and Desirability," *East Asia Forum*, July 4, 2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/07/04/southeast-asia-hedges-between-feasibility-and-desirability/>.

²¹ Nguyen Ba Hai and Kazushige Kobayashi, "Vietnam-Russia Relations After 2022: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities of 'Bamboo Diplomacy' in A Multipolar World," *The Russia Program*, June 24, 2024, <https://therussiaprogram.org/vietnam-russia>.

²² Jie Zhang, "Rebuilding Strategic Autonomy: ASEAN's Response to US-China Strategic Competition," *China International Strategy Review* 5 (2023): 73-89, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-023-00128-3>.

²³ Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior Towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 500-514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714>.

The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing case studies of specific Southeast Asian countries to illustrate Russia's strategies and their effects. By examining primary sources, including government statements and policy documents, as well as secondary literature, this article analyzes how Russia leverages deterrence and influence in the region. This theoretical approach sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis of Russia's role in Southeast Asia, contributing to a broader understanding of great-power competition and regional security dynamics in the Global South. It highlights the relevance of this research to addressing critical issues within Security and Defense Studies, particularly for understanding the evolving nature of power projection and regional responses to great-power engagement.

The Russian Way of Deterrence in Southeast Asia

While classical Western deterrence theory primarily focuses on preventing armed attacks through the threat of military retaliation, the Russian understanding of deterrence, as articulated by scholars such as D. Adamsky, is considerably more comprehensive. Unlike the Western emphasis on "deterrence by punishment" or "deterrence by denial" in a military context, Russian deterrence (or *sderzhivaniye*) encompasses a wide array of political, diplomatic, economic, informational, and military tools aimed at shaping an adversary's perceptions and behavior in order to prevent any action deemed detrimental to Russia's interests, without necessarily resorting to military force.²⁴ This approach is less about preventing an armed attack and more about strategically influencing a state's choices and reducing its appetite for certain actions, including the expansion of rivals' influence.

In the context of Southeast Asia, Russia employs this comprehensive deterrence strategy to counter the expanding influence of the United States and China. This is achieved not through direct military threats but rather by denying the United States and China exclusive access, reducing their appeal, and creating a more complex geopolitical landscape that discourages their unfettered expansion.

Russia's strategy to deter the United States and China from expanding their influence in Southeast Asia involves several key tactics²⁵:

1. Denying Exclusive Access and Reducing Appetite

Russia aims to ensure that no single major power gains hegemonic influence in Southeast Asia.²⁶ By actively engaging with ASEAN member states across various

²⁴ Dmitry Adamsky, *The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War* (Stanford University Press, 2024).

²⁵ Elfira Sylviani Kaunang et al., "Russia's National Security Policy in Facing the Dynamics of Threats and Global Challenges: A Critical Analysis," *Formosa Journal of Science and Technology* 3, no. 9 (2024): 2169-2190, <https://doi.org/10.55927/fjst.v3i9.10301>.

²⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

sectors, Russia offers an alternative partnership, thereby denying the United States and China a monopoly on security, economic, or diplomatic relations. For instance, continued Russian arms sales, even if declining in volume, ensure that some regional militaries retain a degree of independence from U.S. or Chinese defense suppliers, thus limiting the integration of these countries into a U.S.- or China-centric security architecture. This diversified engagement reduces the “appetite” of the United States and China to pursue exclusive alliances, as they recognize the region’s commitment to strategic autonomy and non-alignment.

2. Shaping Perceptions and Narratives

Russia utilizes its extensive information operations network, including state-backed media such as *RT* and *Sputnik*, to promote narratives that question Western dominance and highlight the benefits of a multipolar world order. By framing itself as a champion against “neo-colonialism” and a proponent of “traditional values,” Russia resonates with certain segments of the Global South, including Southeast Asia. This psychological dimension of deterrence aims to erode trust in Western institutions and policies, thereby making it less attractive for regional states to align solely with the United States or its allies. Similarly, by aligning with China on certain diplomatic fronts, such as UN voting patterns, Russia contributes to a perception of a united front against Western hegemony, which can indirectly deter unilateral U.S. actions.²⁷

3. Strengthening Strategic Autonomy and Hedging

Russia’s support for ASEAN centrality and its emphasis on non-interference and consensus-based decision-making align with the region’s desire for strategic autonomy. By offering military cooperation, advanced technologies (e.g., nuclear energy), and alternative financial systems, Russia enables Southeast Asian states to diversify their partnerships and reduce over-reliance on any single power. This strengthens the region’s ability to “hedge” between great powers, making it more challenging for the United States or China to exert overwhelming influence or dictate regional policies. The ability of a Southeast Asian nation to turn to Russia for arms or energy, for example, diminishes the leverage Washington or Beijing might otherwise have.

4. Creating Diplomatic Resistance and Counterbalancing Initiatives

Through its participation in multilateral forums like the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM), and ADMM-Plus,²⁸ Russia actively participates in discussions on regional security, often presenting perspectives

²⁷ Clara Fong and Will Mellow, “Where the China-Russia Partnership Is Headed in Seven Charts and Maps,” Council on Foreign Relations, December 12, 2024, www.cfr.org/article/where-china-russia-partnership-headed-seven-charts-and-maps.

²⁸ Asia Pacific Task Force, “ADMM and ADMM-Plus 2024: ASEAN’s Blueprint for a Secure and Resilient Region,” Policy Brief, *Beyond the Horizon*, November 23, 2024, <https://behorizon.org/admm-and-admm-plus-2024-aseans-blueprint-for-a-secure-and-resilient-region/>.

that subtly challenge U.S. or Chinese initiatives. While not overtly confrontational, Russia's presence and viewpoints contribute to a more complex diplomatic environment, requiring the United States and China to navigate a wider array of interests and perspectives, thus potentially slowing or complicating their efforts to expand influence. Russia's active role in organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) further underscores its commitment to alternative global governance structures that indirectly counterbalance Western-led frameworks.²⁹

The effects of Russia's influence and coercion on U.S. and Chinese influence in the region are nuanced. While Russia's economic capacity is limited compared to China's, and its military capabilities are far outmatched by those of the United States, its strategies contribute to a diffusion of power and a less predictable regional environment for Washington and Beijing. Russia's efforts to foster strategic autonomy among ASEAN states mean that the United States and China often face a more independent and less easily swayed set of regional partners. This subtle deterrence, achieved through political and informational means rather than direct military confrontation, reduces the ease with which the United States and China can expand their influence and access. It compels them to engage more cautiously and to acknowledge the multipolar aspirations of the Global South, thereby achieving a form of deterrence by complicating the strategic landscape and increasing the costs of direct competition.

Russia's Deterrence Credibility in a Distant Theater

Applying the credibility conditions of classical deterrence theory to Russia's activities in Southeast Asia reveals both potential and limitations. These can be assessed from three aspects: certainty, severity, and celerity.³⁰ In terms of certainty, Russia does not have the military bases or alliance commitments that underpin U.S. and Chinese deterrence in the region. Moscow has no permanent bases, and its naval presence in the South China Sea is limited. This weakens the belief that Russia could quickly intervene to help regional partners in times of crisis. Russia possesses strong nuclear and conventional forces. Still, their impact on Southeast Asia remains uncertain. Nuclear deterrence is viewed as lacking credibility in regional disputes. Russia's conventional power in the Indo-Pacific is less than that of other major powers, such as the United States and China. The celerity dimension—speed of response—is also a concern. Any major Russian military action in Southeast Asia would face delays because of distance and logistics. This lowers the deterrent effect of Russian threats. This is especially true when compared to countries with forces closer to the region and better access.

²⁹ Paul Stronski and Richard Sokolsky, "Multipolarity in Practice: Understanding Russia's Engagement with Regional Institutions," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 8, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/01/multipolarity-in-practice-understanding-russias-engagement-with-regional-institutions>.

³⁰ Morgan, *Deterrence Now*.

These constraints push Russia away from traditional deterrence methods, such as punishment or denial. This section examines Russia's strategy in Asia for increasing the political and reputational costs for its rivals' influence in Southeast Asia. Russia aims to push back against efforts to reduce its regional influence. It relies on novel strategies rather than traditional deterrence.

Engagement with ASEAN-Led Forums

Russia's engagement with ASEAN has been a key component of its strategy to increase its influence in Southeast Asia. In November 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin and ASEAN leaders made a historic decision to elevate the ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership to a strategic level.³¹ This upgrade reflects Russia's growing importance in the region and its desire to play a more significant role in shaping regional institutions and governance models.

One of the primary ways Russia has sought to influence multilateral institutions in Southeast Asia is through its participation in ASEAN-led forums. Russia has been particularly active in the East Asia Summit (EAS), where it has promoted multilateral discussions on regional security issues.³² By engaging in these forums, Russia aims to position itself as a key player in the regional security architecture and to offer an alternative perspective to Western-dominated approaches.

Russia's approach to multilateral institutions in Southeast Asia aligns with its broader foreign policy objectives of promoting a multipolar world order and challenging Western dominance in global governance. This strategy resonates with many Southeast Asian countries that seek to balance their relationships with major powers and maintain strategic autonomy. Russia's support for ASEAN centrality in regional affairs and its emphasis on non-intervention and consensus-based decision-making align well with the preferences of Southeast Asian states.³³

Military Cooperation and Arms Trade

Russia's approach to leveraging deterrence and influence in the Global South has evolved significantly in recent years, particularly amid its protracted confrontation with Western states. This section examines Russia's multifaceted approach, focusing on military cooperation, economic engagement, and diplomatic efforts.

³¹ "Joint Statement of ASEAN and Russia Foreign Ministers on the Occasion of the 5th Anniversary of ASEAN-Russia Strategic Partnership, Jakarta, Indonesia, 13 July 2023," ASEAN Secretariat Website, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Joint-Statement-of-ASEAN-and-Russia-Foreign-Ministers-on-the-Occasion-of-the-5th-Anniversary-of-ASEAN-R.pdf>.

³² "Press Release on EAS Foreign Ministers' Meetings and ASEAN Regional Forum on Security," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, July 11, 2025, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/2035584/.

³³ Dmitry Gorenburg and Paul Schwartz, "Russia's Strategy in Southeast Asia," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 578, March 2019, https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Pepm578_Gorenburg-Schwartz_March2019-0.pdf.

In the arms market, Russia and China compete directly for contracts involving tanks, armored vehicles, surface combatants, and submarines.³⁴ Russia has long been a dominant force in the arms trade with the Global South, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where it historically held the largest market share among foreign suppliers. From 2018 to 2022, Russia commanded 26 % of the region's arms market, outpacing rivals such as China and France.³⁵ However, over recent years, Russia's share has declined, dropping to 17 % in the 2019–2023 period, as China and other suppliers have made inroads and Western sanctions have constrained Russia's ability to export arms and access critical components.³⁶

China has undercut Russia on price in several cases, notably in Thailand's purchase of VT-4 tanks and S26T submarines, where Beijing offered lower-priced platforms and favorable financing terms.³⁷ Russia still holds advantages in certain high-end systems and in countries such as Vietnam and Myanmar, where historical ties and existing stockpiles create path dependencies. This approach aligns with Russia's post-Soviet strategy of arming governments embroiled in internal or regional conflicts, thereby solidifying its role as a crisis-proof partner for regimes facing Western pressure or sanctions.³⁸ Yet, the overall trend is toward growing Chinese competitiveness.

Economic Engagement: Extractive Industries, Energy, and Finance

Russia's economic strategy in the Global South is anchored in securing access to extractive industries, particularly in Africa, where Russian companies and state-linked actors have established a significant presence in gold, diamond, and strategic mineral mining.³⁹ These ventures are not only lucrative, yielding billions of dollars in gold and other resources, but are also leveraged for geopolitical purposes, providing Moscow with both financial returns and influence over host governments. Russian firms such as Nordgold have secured major mining leases

³⁴ Ian Storey, "Russia in Southeast Asia: Falling Influence Despite Being Largest Arms Seller," *ThinkChina*, March 31, 2021, www.thinkchina.sg/politics/russia-southeast-asia-falling-influence-despite-being-largest-arms-seller.

³⁵ Africa Defense Forum (ADF), "Russia Emerges as Top Weapons Supplier to Sub-Saharan Africa," ADF Daily News, April 18, 2023, <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/04/russia-emerges-as-top-weapons-supplier-to-sub-saharan-africa/>.

³⁶ "Russia Accounts for 24 % of Africa's Arms Imports between 2019 and 2023, SIPRI Finds," *Ecofin Agency*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-managemnt/1203-45270-russia-accounts-for-24-of-africa-s-arms-imports-between-2019-and-2023-sipri-finds>.

³⁷ Ian Storey, *Putin's Russia and Southeast Asia: The Kremlin's Pivot to Asia and the Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War* (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Publishing, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789815306484>.

³⁸ Kemal Mohamedou, "The Wagner Group, Russia's Foreign Policy and Sub-Saharan Africa," *Geneva Paper* 32/24, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, March 2024, March 6, 2024, www.gcsp.ch/sites/default/files/2024-12/geneva-paper-32-2024.pdf.

³⁹ Habib Badawi, "Russia's Strategic Pivot to Africa: Geopolitical Implications in a Multi-polar World," *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 18 (2024): 10-38, <https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.142484>.

in gold-rich countries like Burkina Faso,⁴⁰ while private military companies linked to the Kremlin facilitate and protect these operations, sometimes operating in legal gray zones or outright circumventing sanctions.⁴¹

Energy cooperation is another cornerstone of Russia's engagement with the Global South. As a leading exporter of oil, natural gas, and nuclear technology, Russia has forged deep partnerships with countries across Asia. In the wake of Western sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has redirected much of its energy exports to India and China, often at discounted rates to secure long-term buyers.⁴² Russian state-owned companies like Gazprom, Rosneft, and Rosatom have inked deals for oil and gas exploration, pipeline construction, and nuclear power plant development in countries such as Myanmar, Vietnam, and Indonesia.⁴³ These projects not only generate revenue but also create lasting dependencies, embedding Russian influence in the energy infrastructure of partner nations. In Southeast Asia, Russian companies are also involved in joint energy exploration projects with Vietnam in contested waters, which China views with suspicion.⁴⁴

A third pillar of Russia's strategy is the promotion of alternative financial systems to bypass Western sanctions and reduce reliance on the US dollar. Russia has encouraged the use of non-dollar currencies in oil and commodity transactions, as exemplified by recent deals with India and China that utilize the UAE dirham and Russian ruble.⁴⁵ On the Moscow Exchange, trading in currency pairs such as the dirham-ruble and rupee-ruble has increased, and Russia has advocated the broader adoption of local currencies in trade with Arab and Asian partners.⁴⁶ These efforts are complemented by Russia's participation in multilateral institutions such as BRICS, which aim to develop new financial mechanisms and reduce the dominance of Western-led systems.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ John Zadeh, "Burkina Faso Grants Strategic Gold Mining Lease to Russia's Nordgold," *Discovery Alert*, April 26, 2025, <https://discoveryalert.com.au/news/burkina-faso-mining-lease-nordgold-2025-economic-impact/>.

⁴¹ "Russia Funding War in Ukraine via Illegal Gold Mining in Africa – WGC Report," *bne Intellinews*, November 20, 2024, <https://www.intellinews.com/russia-funding-war-in-ukraine-via-illegal-gold-mining-in-africa-wgc-report-353990/>.

⁴² Gayathri Pramod, "Global South in Russia & China's Grip," *Global Strategic & Defense News*, February 27, 2025, <https://gsdn.live/global-south-in-russia-chinas-grip/>.

⁴³ "Southeast Asia in Focus," *Rosatom Newsletter* # 284, December 2024, <https://rosatomnewsletter.com/2024/12/19/southeast-asia-in-focus-2/>.

⁴⁴ Michał Zareba, "Role of Military Cooperation in Vietnam-Russia Relations," *Eastern Review* 11, no. 2 (2024): 51-66, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1427-9657.11.16>.

⁴⁵ Nidhi Verma, "Exclusive: Russia Seeking Oil Payments from India in Dirhams," *Reuters*, July 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/exclusive-russia-seeking-oil-payments-india-dirhams-sources-document-2022-07-18/>.

⁴⁶ Alperen Aktas, "Russia, China Conduct over 99 % of Trade in National Currencies, Says Official," *Anadolu Agency*, November 4, 2025, www.aa.com.tr/en/world/russia-china-conduct-over-99-of-trade-in-national-currencies-says-official/3734770.

⁴⁷ Igor Matveev, "De-Dollarisation in Trade Between Russia and the Arab World," Valdai

Diplomatic Outreach and Anti-Western Sentiment

Russia has intensified its diplomatic outreach to the Global South by orchestrating high-profile international forums and summits designed to rally support against what it characterizes as Western neo-colonialism. These events serve both as platforms for Moscow to showcase its anti-colonial credentials and as opportunities to deepen bilateral and multilateral ties with Global South partners.⁴⁸

A central pillar of Russia's strategy is the active exploitation of anti-Western sentiment, drawing on both historical grievances and contemporary dissatisfaction with Western policies.⁴⁹ The Kremlin has strategically leveraged the legacy of Soviet support for anti-colonial movements and positioned itself as a champion of "traditional values" in contrast to what it portrays as Western moral decline.⁵⁰ This approach has contributed to fostering a sense of solidarity and shared purpose among countries that feel marginalized by the current international order.

Russia's promotion of non-Western governance models in Southeast Asia is largely channeled through its engagement in multilateral institutions such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These platforms offer alternatives to Western liberal democratic models by emphasizing state sovereignty, economic development, and stability over political liberalization. Russia is also expanding its influence within multilateral organizations, most notably by lobbying for the enlargement of BRICS and using its leadership roles to challenge Western-dominated global governance structures. As host of the 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia emphasized the bloc's growing geopolitical and economic clout and advocated for greater Global South solidarity.⁵¹ Moscow's efforts to position itself as a leader within these forums are part of a broader push to promote a multipolar world order, in which

Discussion Club, August 2, 2023, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/de-dollarisation-in-trade-between-russia/>.

⁴⁸ Kester Kenn Klomegah, "BRICS+: Behind Global South's Future Development," *Modern Diplomacy*, October 1, 2024, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/10/01/brics-behind-global-souths-future-development/>.

⁴⁹ Yasmin Samrai, "The Geopolitical Blame Game: Russia's Strategy of Weaponizing Grievances against the West," Thesis (Center for International Security and Cooperation, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, May 2021), <https://purl.stanford.edu/nf523cr9725>.

⁵⁰ African Digital Democracy Observatory, "Russia vs the West and How It Plays Out in the Global South," *Medium*, June 6, 2024, <https://disinfo.africa/russian-vs-the-west-and-how-it-plays-out-in-the-global-south-5abad5541261>.

⁵¹ Suvolaxmi Dutta Choudhury, Tanya Dawar, and Suyesha Dutta, "BRICS Summit Advances Global South Solidarity Despite Diverging Priorities," Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, October 29, 2024, www.asiapacific.ca/publication/brics-summit-advances-global-south-solidarity-despite.

emerging economies have a stronger voice and the dominance of Western institutions is diminished.⁵²

The SCO further complements these efforts by providing a flexible framework for security and economic cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism and regional stability.⁵³ Through these multilateral mechanisms, Russia continues to advocate for non-Western governance paradigms that resonate with many Southeast Asian states, despite facing challenges such as limited economic leverage and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Ultimately, Russia's pragmatic approach, rooted in respect for regional norms and the promotion of multipolarity, ensures its continued influence on Southeast Asia's governance landscape.⁵⁴

In multilateral bodies, Beijing and Moscow frequently align to block Western-sponsored resolutions, presenting themselves as defenders of state sovereignty and non-interference. These are messages that resonate with many Global South elites. Neither Russia nor China has ever used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to block a resolution proposed by the other, reflecting a pattern of strategic alignment and mutual support in the Council's proceedings.⁵⁵ Over the past decade, all of China's formal vetoes have been exercised in tandem with Russia, particularly on issues where China's direct interests were not at stake, such as resolutions concerning Syria, Venezuela, and North Korea. Rather than opposing each other, both countries have coordinated closely, often using the veto as a diplomatic tool to counterbalance Western initiatives and reinforce their shared principles of state sovereignty and non-interference.⁵⁶ The result is a consistent voting bloc that has effectively challenged the dominance of the Western permanent members and reduced the likelihood of Security Council action on contentious issues without Russian and Chinese approval,⁵⁷ as exemplified on the chart below.⁵⁸

⁵² Klomegh, "BRICS+: Behind Global South's Future Development."

⁵³ "Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 15, 2001, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/000M3130.pdf>

⁵⁴ "SCO Secretary-General Meets with Ambassadors of ASEAN States to China," The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, December 18, 2020, <https://eng.sectsco.org/20201218/704295.html>

⁵⁵ James P. Machaffie, "Russian-Chinese Cooperation at the United Nations Security Council: Costly Signalling and Trust Building in the Strategic Partnership," *China Report* 58, no. 4 (2022): 431-447, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00094455221128349>.

⁵⁶ "UN Security Council Working Methods: The Veto," Security Council Report, February 13, 2024, www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/the-veto.php.

⁵⁷ Angad Singh Brar, "The Russia-China Congruence at the UNSC," Observer Research Foundation, August 1, 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-russia-china-congruence-at-the-unscc>.

⁵⁸ Fong and Mellow, "Where the China-Russia Partnership Is Headed."

China and Russia Frequently Vote Together on the Security Council*Vetoes by UN Security Council members since 1991***Information Operations and Cyber Cooperation**

Russia employs a multifaceted information strategy to expand its influence across the Global South, leveraging state-backed media, disinformation campaigns, and cyber operations. Central to this approach is the prominent use of media outlets such as RT and Sputnik, which have significantly increased their presence in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. For example, Sputnik opened an office in Indonesia in 2024, while RT has launched new regional channels and advertising campaigns targeting African audiences.⁵⁹ These platforms present Russia as a reliable partner and an alternative to Western powers, often framing Moscow's actions in anti-colonial or anti-Western terms to resonate with local audiences and exploit historical grievances.⁶⁰

A key element of Russia's information strategy is the deployment of tailored disinformation campaigns that exploit regional political and social tensions.⁶¹ These campaigns are sophisticated, often mixing factual information with misleading or false narratives to erode trust in Western institutions and undermine support for Ukraine and Western sanctions. This approach has proven effective in sowing confusion, amplifying anti-Western sentiment, and bolstering Russia's image as a champion of sovereignty and multipolarity.

Beyond traditional and social media, Russia also seeks to build influence through cyber cooperation by assisting Global South countries in information security. This cooperation extends to advocating for international legal regulation of digital relations and supporting the development of alternative digital infrastructure, thereby deepening bilateral ties and embedding Russian influence in these countries' digital governance frameworks.⁶²

⁵⁹ "3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the Architecture of FIMI Operations," EU External Action Service, March 19, 2025, www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/3rd-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats-0_en.

⁶⁰ Cayley Clifford and Steven Gruz, "Russian and African Media: Exercising Soft Power," South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) Programme, Policy Insights 125, February 2022, <https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Policy-Insights-125-clifford-gruzd.pdf>.

⁶¹ Marlena Zadorožna and Marin Butuc, "Russian Disinformation in Moldova and Poland in the Context of the Russo-Ukrainian War," *Security and Defence Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2024): 47-65, <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/189686>.

⁶² Pratiwi Ika Kartikaningrum, F. G. Cempaka Timur, and Ahmad G. Dohamid, "Strategic Communication and Propaganda: The Role of Media in the Dynamics of the War of

Russia's deterrence and influence strategies in the Global South reflect a pragmatic approach to maintaining its global relevance amid Western opposition. By diversifying its engagement across military, economic, and diplomatic spheres, Russia seeks to create a network of partnerships that can provide strategic depth and economic opportunities. However, Russia faces significant challenges. The decline in arms sales and the impact of Western sanctions have limited its capacity for sustained influence.

While Russia's capacity for sustained military threat projection may be limited, its combined activities across various domains have the potential to undermine Western interests and complicate the diplomatic and security landscape in key regions.⁶³

Russia's Engagement in ASEAN Regional Security Issues

As mentioned previously, Russia has become an active participant in ASEAN-led platforms, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ADMM and ADMM-Plus, using these forums to engage in dialogue with ASEAN member states. This neutrality allows Russia to strengthen defense ties with countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines, providing military equipment and training without overtly taking sides. It also engages in other security issues such as counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and transnational crime.⁶⁴ Through these multilateral mechanisms, Russia seeks to reinforce regional stability and advance its vision of a multipolar world order, positioning itself as a partner that supports ASEAN's central role in shaping the Asia-Pacific's security architecture.⁶⁵ The ASEAN-Russia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (JWG on CTTC) exemplifies this cooperation, facilitating joint efforts to address threats like drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cybercrime – areas of growing concern for Southeast Asian states.

In the realm of territorial disputes, Russia maintains a neutral stance on the South China Sea issue, advocating for peaceful resolution through dialogue and adherence to international law, including the United Nations Convention on the

Ideas in Asymmetric Conflict," *Aurelia: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2025): 1545-1553, <https://rayyanjurnal.com/index.php/aurelia/article/view/5297>. – in Indonesian

⁶³ Hanna Notte, "OP#58: Dangerous Decline: Russia's Military and Security Influence in the Global South and the Implications for the United States," Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, November 17, 2023, <https://nonproliferation.org/op58-dangerous-decline-russias-military-and-security-influence-in-the-global-south-and-the-implications-for-the-united-states/>.

⁶⁴ "About the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus," ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Website, January 1, 2026, <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/about-admm/about-admm-plus.html>.

⁶⁵ Andrey Gubin, "Can Southeast Asia Avoid Hierarchy?," Russian International Affairs Council, March 10, 2025, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/can-southeast-asia-avoid-hierarchy/>.

Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).⁶⁶ Such an approach helps Moscow maintain influence and flexibility in the region, though it occasionally aligns with China's legal positions—such as questioning the legitimacy of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling—without directly endorsing Beijing's maritime claims. Russia's close defense cooperation with Vietnam, including arms sales and joint energy projects, further underscores its attempt to balance relations among competing regional actors.⁶⁷

However, Russia's engagement is not without controversy. Its continued arms sales and diplomatic support for Myanmar's military junta following the 2021 coup have drawn criticism from some ASEAN members and international observers, who argue that this undermines regional stability and ASEAN's efforts to resolve the crisis. Despite this criticism, Russia has deepened military cooperation with the junta, including co-chairing counterterrorism working groups and conducting joint military exercises under the ADMM-Plus framework.⁶⁸ This pragmatic approach aligns with Moscow's broader strategy of supporting regimes that serve its geopolitical interests, even at the risk of damaging its reputation among certain ASEAN states.⁶⁹

The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) 2021–2025 between ASEAN and Russia outlines a broad agenda for political-security collaboration, encompassing joint military exercises, academic exchanges on defense strategies, and cooperation between defense think tanks.⁷⁰ Russia's emphasis on multilateralism through ASEAN-centric platforms, while rejecting Western-led security arrangements such as AUKUS, resonates with ASEAN's principle of neutrality and non-alignment.⁷¹ Yet, despite these efforts, Russia often struggles to be seen as an independent power in Southeast Asia, with its close diplomatic alignment with

⁶⁶ Sok Khemara, "Russia Wades into South China Sea Dispute with ASEAN Accord," *VOA East Asia*, May 18, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-asean-south-china-sea/3336191.html>.

⁶⁷ Emil Avdaliani, "Russia's ASEAN Embrace," *The Interpreter*, The Lowy Institute, February 28, 2025, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/russia-s-asean-embrace>.

⁶⁸ Saahil Menon, "What Is Driving Closer Cooperation between Russia and Myanmar?" *New Eastern Europe*, April 22, 2025, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2025/04/22/what-is-driving-closer-cooperation-between-russia-and-myanmar/>.

⁶⁹ "ASEAN Aiding and Abetting the Myanmar Junta's Atrocities Through Counter Terrorism Military Training in Russia," *Justice For Myanmar*, September 30, 2023, www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/asean-aiding-and-abetting-the-myanmar-juntas-atrocities-through-counter-terrorism-military-training-in-russia.

⁷⁰ Lucas Myers and Dan White, "Russia's Complicated Strategic Frontiers in Southeast Asia," *The Diplomat*, April 4, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/russias-complicated-strategic-frontiers-in-southeast-asia/>.

⁷¹ Andrey Gubin, "The Indo-Pacific Conundrum: Why U.S. Plans Are Destined to Fail?" Russian International Affairs Council, September 14, 2021, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-indo-pacific-conundrum-why-u-s-plans-are-destined-to-fail/>.

China—evident in shared voting patterns at the United Nations—reinforcing perceptions of a Sino-Russian bloc.⁷² Additionally, Moscow's limited economic leverage compared to Beijing constrains its ability to expand its influence within ASEAN beyond the military and political domains, as Russian foreign direct investment and trade volumes remain modest relative to those of other major partners.⁷³

ASEAN Members' Response to Russian Influence

ASEAN's Mixed Approach to Russia's Influence

ASEAN's response to Russia's growing influence is characterized by pragmatism, hedging, and a strong commitment to maintaining its own centrality. China is ASEAN's largest trading partner, and its economic footprint through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and RCEP is deeply embedded across the region.⁷⁴ At the same time, China's assertive actions in the South China Sea have raised significant security concerns among several ASEAN members, prompting a search for external balancing options. Russia, for its part, has sought to position itself as a supporter of ASEAN's multilateralism and non-bloc approach, actively participating in ASEAN-led forums and emphasizing respect for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).⁷⁵

Yet ASEAN countries differ in their responses. Some, such as Cambodia and Laos, lean toward Beijing because of economic dependence, while others, such as Singapore and Indonesia, maintain a careful balance between security ties with the United States and economic engagement with China.⁷⁶ Russia's value to ASEAN lies mainly in its ability to marginally increase the region's bargaining power⁷⁷ by promoting a more competitive strategic landscape. Still, its limited economic clout and close association with China restrict its appeal as a truly independent partner.⁷⁸ ASEAN's approach is to avoid binary alignments, maximize benefits from all major powers, and preserve regional stability through multilateral dialogue.

⁷² Avdaliani, "Russia's ASEAN Embrace."

⁷³ Ekaterina Koldunova, "Russia-ASEAN: Limits and Opportunities of Economic Partnership," *Valdai Discussion Club*, August 29, 2022, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-asean-limits-and-opportunities/>.

⁷⁴ Global Diplomatic Forum, "ASEAN's Balancing Act Between the U.S. and China," *Fre-spectives*, February 17, 2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/aseans-balancing-act-between-us-china-global-diplomatic-forum-qr7ze/>.

⁷⁵ Joanne Lin, "Advancing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific Beyond Indonesia's Chairmanship," *Fulcrum* (ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute), February 16, 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/advancing-the-asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific-beyond-indonesias-chairmanship/>.

⁷⁶ Global Diplomatic Forum, "ASEAN's Balancing Act Between the U.S. and China."

⁷⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Public Affairs, 2005).

⁷⁸ Myers and White, "Russia's Complicated Strategic Frontiers in Southeast Asia."

Impact of New Minilateral Security Groupings

The emergence of new minilateral security groupings such as JAPHUS (Japan-Philippines-U.S.), JAROKUS (Japan-ROK-U.S.), and AUKUS (Australia-U.K.-U.S.) reflects the region's response to China's assertiveness and the perceived need for stronger security guarantees.⁷⁹ These alliances are designed to enhance deterrence, improve interoperability, and uphold the regional *status quo*, particularly in flashpoints such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

These groupings complicate the strategic environment for both Russia and China. While China is the primary focus of these alliances, Moscow views them as manifestations of a U.S. containment strategy that further marginalizes Russian influence in the region.⁸⁰ Russia has responded by criticizing these initiatives and doubling down on its partnership with China, but its capacity to shape regional security outcomes remains limited.⁸¹

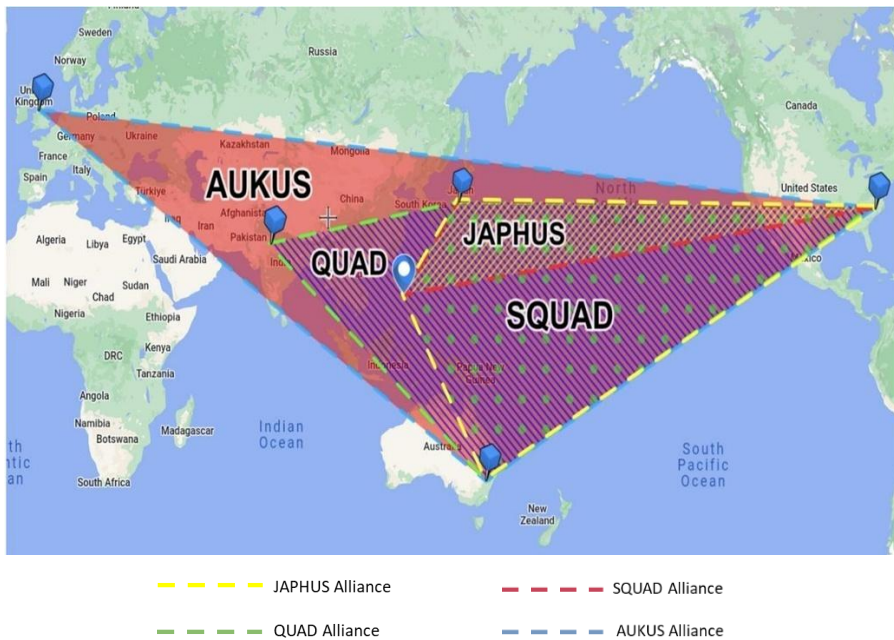


Figure 1: Minilateral Security Configurations.

⁷⁹ "The Strategic Influence of the JAPHUS Alliance in the Indo-Pacific," *The Habibie Center*, ASEAN Studies, June 27, 2024, <https://habibiecenter.or.id/contain-news/pengaruh-strategis-aliansi-japhus-dalam-indo-pasifik/264>. – in Indonesian

⁸⁰ Gubin, "Can Southeast Asia Avoid Hierarchy?"

⁸¹ David Batashvili, "Why Russia Will Keep Supporting China in the Indo-Pacific," *The Diplomat*, March 16, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/why-russia-will-keep-supporting-china-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

ASEAN-led mechanisms, particularly the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), remain central to the region's diplomatic architecture. The ARF provides a platform for inclusive, consensus-based dialogue on security issues that involves all major regional actors, including China, Russia, and the United States. ASEAN's strategy, as articulated in the AOIP, is to promote inclusiveness, transparency, and respect for international law while avoiding exclusive blocs or confrontational alignments. This multilateral approach allows ASEAN to manage great-power competition, preserve its own agency, and foster habits of dialogue and cooperation.⁸² In this context, Russia's participation in ASEAN-led forums contributes marginally to sustaining a broader tent that includes all major powers, but does not fundamentally alter the balance of capabilities or commitments.

Conclusion

This article examines Russia's strategies in Southeast Asia and how ASEAN states respond. Russia uses a combination of arms transfers, diplomacy, and other tools to make it costly for other powers to dominate. It wants to preserve its influence and limit that of other major powers. ASEAN states work with Russia, but also maintain ties with other powers such as China and the United States.

This article argues against the common belief that Russia and China form a united front in Southeast Asia. They have different interests and actually compete in some areas. ASEAN states respond to Russia in different ways. Some align with Russia, while others keep their distance. Russia offers ASEAN some benefits, but it is not a replacement for major economic or security partners. Russia's influence in Southeast Asia should be understood less as a direct military threat and more as part of a broader contest over narratives, norms, and institutional order. Strong responses require a commitment to international law. They also require inclusive diplomacy and an understanding of post-colonial issues. These responses should not focus solely on military strength.

Russia's shadow in the Global South is, in many respects, larger than its material footprint would suggest. Yet shadows lengthen as the sun sets, especially in Southeast Asia. As China grows stronger, Southeast Asia faces a key question: Will Moscow remain an independent player, allowing room for hedging, or will it be drawn into a China-centered order? How ASEAN states respond to these changes will affect their security and independence. It will also influence the broader contours of multipolarity in the twenty-first century.

⁸² Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, "The ASEAN Regional Forum: Challenges and Prospects," *The Pacific Forum, Issues & Insights* 21, June 2021, https://pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/issuesinsights_Vol21WP8.pdf.

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