

Answer to Question

The Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP) between the United States and Indonesia

(Translated)

Question:

On April 13, 2026, the US Secretary of Defense and the Indonesian Minister of Defense announced the establishment of the Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP) between the United States and Indonesia. Prior to this, a classified document from the US Department of Defense was leaked regarding the authorization of comprehensive overflights by US aircraft through Indonesian airspace. What is the content of this agreement and its implications? What is its impact on Indonesia's relationship with the America? And what is its impact on Indonesia's relationship with China?

Answer:

To clarify this matter, let's review the following:

1- The joint statement of April 13, 2026, states, "The U.S. Secretary of War and Indonesian Minister of Defense announce the establishment of the Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP) between the United States and Indonesia. This announcement reflects Indonesia's important role in promoting regional stability and underscores the strength and potential of the bilateral defense relationship. The MDCP is intended to serve as a guiding framework to advance bilateral defense cooperation. With this announcement, both nations reaffirm their shared commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. The MDCP features three foundational pillars implemented based on mutual respect and national sovereignty: (1) Military modernization and capacity building; (2) Training and professional military education; and (3) Exercises and operational cooperation."

2- Two days before the joint statement was issued, the Indian newspaper Sunday Guardian revealed on its website on April 12, 2026, "A classified United States defence document lays out a plan to secure blanket overflight access for American military aircraft through Indonesian airspace, following a February meeting between Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and Donald Trump in Washington, marking a significant step in expanding U.S. operational reach across the Indo-Pacific. Prabowo visited Washington D.C. from 18 to 20 February 2026 to attend the Board of Peace Summit. During this visit, he approved a proposal to authorise blanket overflight clearance for U.S. aircraft through Indonesian airspace in a bilateral meeting with Trump, according to details contained in a classified U.S. document." (Sunday Guardian, April 12, 2026)."

3- The newspaper added, quoting the classified document, "To operationalise this commitment, the U.S. Department of War transmitted a document titled "Operationalizing U.S. Overflight" to Indonesia's Ministry of Defence on 26 February. The document proposes a formal understanding under which Indonesia would permit U.S. military aircraft to transit its airspace for contingency operations, crisis response missions and mutually agreed military exercises. The text states that the purpose of the arrangement is for "the Government of Indonesia to authorise blanket overflight for U.S. aircraft clearance through Indonesian airspace for contingency operations, crisis response purposes, and mutually agreed exercise-related activities." It further specifies that "U.S. aircraft may transit directly upon notification until subsequent notification of deactivation by the United States," effectively allowing continuous access once the mechanism is activated."

4- Then there is another matter concerning the vast Indonesian archipelago, which stretches over 5,000 kilometers from east to west, encompassing vital air corridors between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This is precisely what makes this access strategically valuable to Washington. Not all Indonesian airspace is the same. Under Article 53 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Designated Archipelago Sea Lanes (ALKIs)—namely, the Sunda Strait, Lombok Strait-Maksar Strait, and Aru Sea Lane—carry specific rights of passage for ships and aircraft. Indonesia cannot suspend these rights. **However, these lanes run from north to south.** American operational routes connecting Guam, the Philippines, Australia, or Diego Garcia, on the other hand, generally run from east to west, through airspace that, according to Indonesian Law No. 37 of 2002, has not yet become part of any designated archipelago lanes. **This is where the danger of this convention lies! This authorizes access through the east-west corridors that the US has long been interested in, as the US State Department, in its 2014 report “The Limits in the Seas,” declared should be open under international law.**

5- Furthermore, the term “**crisis response**” is broad enough to encompass both humanitarian aid or a strike initiative. “**Emergency operations**” can mean anything from coordinating disaster relief to operations in the South China Sea or beyond.

Therefore, under a comprehensive access or “comprehensive overflight” regime, Indonesia cannot effectively differentiate between these operations on a case-by-case basis. If a US aircraft crosses Indonesian airspace en route to a military operation against a third country, Indonesia becomes an intermediary, regardless of Jakarta’s intentions or prior notification. The third country will disregard the specifics of Indonesia’s agreement of intent and will simply consider Indonesian territory a transit corridor for US forces.

6- Regarding China’s stance on this confidential document and the US-Indonesia defense cooperation treaty, the Global Times, a state-run media outlet affiliated with the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, posted on its X account, “When Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun was asked to comment on Indonesia’s consideration of a proposal to grant the US military permission to fly over its territory, and on military relations between Washington and Jakarta, he stated on Friday, April 17, 2026, that “the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia explicitly state that member states share the responsibility to strengthen regional peace, security and prosperity, and shall not participate in any policy or activity, including the use of its territory, that threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. “We consistently believe that defense and security cooperation between countries should not target or harm the interests of any third party, nor should it affect regional peace and stability,” Guo said.

7- In the Indo-Pacific region, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia have mutual defense treaties with the United States. This means the United States is obligated to defend its partner in the event of an attack. Meanwhile, Singapore remains one of Washington’s closest security partners in Southeast Asia, although it is not a formal defense treaty ally. Under the 2005 Strategic Framework Agreement, the United States recognized Singapore as a major security cooperation partner. Singapore and the United States then signed an Enhanced Joint Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2015, outlining areas of cooperation in biosecurity, cybersecurity, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and strategic communications. (Asia News Channel, April 20, 2026)

8- A closer examination of the MDCP treaty reveals the following:

a. This treaty paves the way for America to increase its involvement in the maritime domain and enhance its control over the Strait of Malacca, a vital waterway for Indonesia connecting it with neighboring countries, particularly Malaysia and Singapore. This translates to greater American control over the Strait of Malacca, a crucial maritime chokepoint for global trade and energy. The Strait of Malacca is, incidentally, a vital energy artery for China, Japan, and South Korea. It’s worth noting that most of China’s crude oil and gas imports pass through this same narrow passage

between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The United States has recently moved swiftly to close this gap, and it is no coincidence that this occurred during the Trump administration.

b. This agreement paves the way for the provision, or even the establishment, of a comprehensive repair, maintenance, and overhaul facility for American military assets in Indonesia, especially warships. The MDCP joint statement stipulates cooperation in maintenance, repair, and overhaul to improve operational readiness. It is worth noting that the United States had previously expressed interest in establishing a naval base in Betung, North Sulawesi, for the maintenance and repair of its warships.

c. The agreement establishes a notification system, as in “mere notification,” rather than granting permits on a case-by-case basis, significantly reducing procedural constraints on the movement of US military forces. The agreement also outlines coordination mechanisms, including a direct hotline between US Pacific Air Forces and Indonesian air operations centers, along with parallel diplomatic and military communication channels. This notification system—mere notification of overflight without individual authorization—facilitates the smooth and timely passage of US military aircraft through Indonesian airspace. This is crucial for US aircraft to reach China and Taiwan via Indonesian airspace, and then on to the Philippines and Japan.

d- This agreement points to developments in the relationship between Indonesia and the United States during this year, including:

First: Indonesia’s participation in the US-led Borad of Peace under Trump, “Indonesia announces the readiness of 8,000 troops for the peace mission in Gaza... Indonesia is the first country to officially commit to sending forces for the Peace Council initiative launched by Trump for Gaza, where the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been holding since October 10th, following two years of devastating war.” [RT, 2/16/2026]

Second: In the same month, a reciprocal trade agreement was signed between the United States and Indonesia, “Indonesia and the United States concluded a trade agreement aimed at reducing US tariffs on Indonesian goods from 32% to 19%. Jakarta also received tariff exemptions, including on palm oil, its most important export, along with a range of other goods. The agreement was signed in Washington by Indonesian Economy Minister Airlantha Hartato and US Trade Representative Jamison Greer after months of negotiations. In return, Indonesia will remove tariffs on most US products across all sectors. Jakarta agreed to take measures against foreign companies that harm US trade interests and to facilitate US investment in vital minerals and energy resources, in cooperation with US companies, to accelerate the development of the rare earth elements sector. President Prabowo traveled to Washington to finalize the agreement and attend the first meeting of the leaders of the US-Indonesia Board of Peace. He and President Trump signed a document entitled “Implementation of the Agreement Toward a NEW GOLDEN AGE for the U.S.-Indonesian Alliance,” which the White House said would enhance economic security and growth for both countries.” [Al-Sharq [Al-Awsat, February 20, 2026]

Third: The Indian newspaper, The Sunday Guardian, revealed on its website on April 12, 2026, “A classified United States defence document lays out a plan to secure blanket overflight access for American military aircraft through Indonesian airspace, following a February meeting between Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and Donald Trump in Washington, marking a significant step in expanding U.S. operational reach across the Indo-Pacific. Prabowo visited Washington D.C. from 18 to 20 February 2026 to attend the Board of Peace Summit. During this visit, he approved a proposal to authorise blanket overflight clearance for U.S. aircraft through Indonesian airspace in a bilateral meeting with Trump, according to details contained in a classified U.S. document.” (The Sunday Guardian, April 12, 2026)).

Fourth: The signing of the MDCP agreement, which we explained above, and its joint statement on April 13, 2026, stated, “The U.S. Secretary of War and Indonesian Minister of Defense announce the establishment of the Major Defense Cooperation Partnership (MDCP) between the United States and Indonesia... The MDCP features three foundational pillars implemented based on mutual respect and national sovereignty: (1) Military modernization and capacity building; (2) Training and professional military education; and (3) Exercises and operational cooperation.”.

These four points reveal the reality of relations between Indonesia and America. They confirm what was stated in the book “Political Concepts - The Far East Question,” pages 48 (English version), which reads, “After the success of America in expelling Holland from Indonesia she tried to replace her there. But Indonesians resisted her for a long time and refused to expel one colonialist power and bring another. America then started to create difficulties for Indonesia. She instigated revolts and acted passively against the English attempts to infiltrate Indonesia through her agents. She encouraged Chinese immigration to the country and opened the way for communism. As a result of these harassments the Indonesian leaders yielded and accepted American loans and military assistance. So Indonesia fell under American influence and became one of her followers [since the Sukarno era]. After the agreement between the two superpowers the American position in Indonesia became stronger and she became the dominant force in the army and the economy.”

We also previously stated in response to a question dated November 11, 2024, after the election of the current president, “By contemplating the above-mentioned, it becomes clear that the new Indonesian president, Prabowo, since the announcement of his victory in the elections on 20/3/2024 until his inauguration on 20/10/2024, and also after that... is following in the footsteps of those who preceded him, and has even become more attached to America, and its influence is still the most powerful in Indonesia!!”

Thus, Indonesia has become a country subservient to American influence... while Indonesia, a large country in terms of its location and population, and, most importantly, the great Islam that pervades its lands... Indonesia, by implementing Islam in all aspects of life through the establishment of the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate), could influence the entire world by spreading goodness throughout its lands... and thus please the Lord of the Worlds by fulfilling His great Shariah obligation... Without this, the Indonesian regime remains captive to America, subordinate to it, obeying its commands and refraining from what it forbids, thus losing both this world and the Hereafter, and that is a manifest loss.

﴿إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَذِكْرَى لِمَنْ كَانَ لَهُ قَلْبٌ أَوْ أَلْقَى السَّمْعَ وَهُوَ شَهِيدٌ﴾

“Indeed, in that is a reminder for whoever has a heart or who listens attentively while he is present in mind.” [TMQ Surah Qaf: 37].

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