

INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK FOR PROSPERITY (IPEF) AND ASEAN CENTRALITY: ASEAN'S ROLE IN ENHANCING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF POLITICAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plays a strategic role as a regional organization in Southeast Asia in maintaining stability within the Indo-Pacific region. Through the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), ASEAN aims to uphold the principles of centrality, inclusivity, and complementarity. However, the participation of several ASEAN member states in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) introduces new dynamics regarding ASEAN's centrality, particularly amidst the geopolitical rivalry between the United States (US) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). This study analyzes ASEAN's role in strengthening its centrality amidst member states' participation in IPEF and examines how ASEAN, as an actor in international relations, maintains regional norms and rules to achieve common goals, specifically in the political economic fields and broader economic cooperation within IPEF. The analysis utilizes a constructivist perspective within the study of international political economy, viewing international actors not only as external forces influencing the economic system but also as political authorities that maintain market freedom and pursue interests. Employing qualitative methods, this study utilizes a comprehensive literature review encompassing academic journals, policy papers, and official ASEAN documents to establish a robust theoretical foundation. Furthermore, online media analysis, including news articles and reports from reputable international and regional news outlets, provides contemporary context and real-world examples. In addition to these sources, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including policymakers and expertise in ASEAN and Indo-Pacific affairs, to gather in-depth perspectives and insights. Data validation is achieved through triangulation, cross-referencing information from multiple sources, including literature, media analysis, and interview transcripts, to ensure accuracy and reliability of the findings. Findings suggest that several aspects need to be addressed by ASEAN to strengthen the principle of centrality amidst the participation of member states in IPEF and enhance broader political economic cooperation.

Keywords: ASEAN; IPEF; geopolitics; political economy; centrality

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organization for countries in Southeast Asia, established in 1967 through the Bangkok Declaration (Setnas, 2020). Southeast Asia is a strategically vital region, encompassing a total water area of 2 million km² and a land area of 4.8 million km², with the population of ASEAN member countries contributing 8.09% of the world's total population, or approximately 679.68 million people (ASEAN, 2023). ASEAN's attention is significantly directed towards the economic sector, as demonstrated by its initiatives such as the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2003. These aimed to foster the free movement of goods, services, capital, investment, and labor, and to narrow economic disparities. The implementation of the AEC was underpinned by the AEC Blueprint 2015, which was later enhanced with the AEC Blueprint 2025 to guide regional economic progress.

Recognizing the importance of economic sector advancement, ASEAN proactively engages in political economic cooperation not only within the ASEAN region but also in building relationships

with external partners. In its implementation, ASEAN takes the lead in East Asian regional cooperation, including ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN+1 FTAs (Shimizu, 2021). Notably, ASEAN+1 FTAs have experienced considerable expansion since 2020, positioning ASEAN as the central platform for five key free trade agreements: the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area (ACFTA), the ASEAN–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (AJCEP), the ASEAN–Korea Free Trade Agreement (AKFTA), the ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (AIFTA), and the ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA). Furthermore, ASEAN also strives to enhance political economic cooperation within the regional area through its involvement in Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).

Geographically situated between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, Southeast Asia places ASEAN geopolitically within the Indo-Pacific region, which spans from the eastern Indian Ocean to the western Pacific Ocean, connected by the Malacca Strait. Geopolitics, as a concept utilized by international relations actors, aims to achieve political goals through the control of geographical features that shape the world (Flint, 2016). The Indo-Pacific region has become

a focal point of geopolitical activity, encompassing maritime security, trade, and environmental issue (Michel & Passarelli, 2014). ASEAN strategically defines the Indo-Pacific through the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP), a framework designed to maintain regional stability based on the principles of centrality, inclusivity, and complementarity.

The principle of ASEAN centrality is practically manifested as ASEAN's identity in navigating the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), a United States (US) initiative aimed at building economic integration within the Indo-Pacific. While IPEF ostensibly focuses on enhanced economic cooperation, several studies suggest the US initiative is also driven by a geopolitical strategy to balance the growing influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Indo-Pacific region. As a key player in this region, ASEAN faces dynamics concerning its centrality amidst the power competition between the US and the PRC. The IPEF framework currently includes 14 members, the US (as the initiator), Australia, Fiji, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and 7 ASEAN countries - Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The participation of 7 ASEAN member countries in IPEF, while 3 other member states – Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar – remain outside, presents a nuanced situation for ASEAN. This participation raises question about consistency with the principle of ASEAN centrality and the potential for uneven alignment among member states with the US and the PRC. Recognizing this phenomenon and the broader context of ASEAN's commitment to political-economic cooperation, this research seeks to answer the research question: "How does ASEAN leverage its centrality to enhance political economic cooperation within the context of member states' participation in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)?" This study utilizes a Constructivist Perspective within International Relations, which emphasizes the role of shared norms, identities, and ideas in shaping state behavior and international cooperation.

While the interplay between ASEAN and major power competition in the Indo-Pacific has been explored, this research offers a specific and nuanced analysis of how ASEAN leverages its established principle of centrality within the framework of IPEF to actively enhance political economic cooperation. Existing studies may have examined ASEAN's

general position or the implications of IPEF for the region, but this research specifically delves into ASEAN's agency and strategies in utilizing its core identity to achieve its economic and political goals within this new multilateral economic arrangement. It examines the specific mechanisms and approaches ASEAN employs to maintain its leadership and influence in the face of external pressures and the varying participation of its member states in IPEF.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research method with a deductive approach. As highlighted by Alan Bryman (2004), qualitative research prioritized the analysis of words and in-depth understanding over numerical quantification in data collection and analysis. This method is particularly suited for this study as it emphasized context description, recognizing that detailed discussion is crucial to demonstrate the significance of ASEAN's role and provide nuanced explanation of the geopolitical context surrounding IPEF and ASEAN centrality (Bryman, 2004)

To address the research question, the researcher has gathered relevant secondary data through comprehensive desk research. Employing qualitative methods, this study utilizes a comprehensive literature review encompassing academic journals, policy papers, and official ASEAN documents to establish a robust theoretical foundation. Furthermore, online media analysis, including news articles and reports from reputable international and regional news outlets, provides contemporary context and real-world examples. In addition to these sources, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including policymakers and experts in ASEAN and Indo-Pacific affairs, to gather in-depth perspectives and insights.

By employing these data collection and validation methods, this research aims to provide a robust and well-supported analysis of ASEAN's role in strengthening its centrality amidst member states' participation in IPEF and enhancing political economic cooperation. The in-depth study of this phenomenon through qualitative analysis, drawing upon a diverse range of primary and secondary data, is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as a regional organization in

Southeast Asia, has become an evolving actor in International Relations, strategically developing to achieve various regional interests, including in the political economic field. The establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), supported by the AEC Blueprint, has led to greater economic integration within ASEAN through efforts to facilitate increased flows of trade, capital, goods, and services, as well as the reduction of various barriers and obstacles in the economic sector among member states. Specifically, it can be described that AFTA laid the groundwork for the elimination of import tariffs, while the AEC brought a broader dimension of integration in terms of regulations, standards, and economic mobility. In the economic sphere, ASEAN can also be seen as a strategic region and a significant actor with the formation of ASEAN+1 FTAs, ASEAN+3 FTAs, the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), thus establishing political economic cooperation not only among member states but also with partner countries in the wider regional area.

In its development to continuously enhance political economic cooperation, ASEAN member states are faced with involvement in the United States (US) initiative within the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) framework, which launched in May 2022. The US adopted this initiative to promote economic and investment activities, encourage sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and provide benefits to workers and consumers throughout the region (Fiscal Policy Agency, 2023). The US initiative through IPEF is assumed not only as an effort to promote economic integration but also as a US geopolitical strategy to counterbalance the increasingly massive strength and intervention of the PRC in the economic sector in the Indo-Pacific region.

The researcher argues that the IPEF economic cooperation framework initiative is a continuation of the implementation of the US Pivot to Asia foreign policy, which was first introduced by President Barack Obama during a working visit to the Asia-Pacific in November 2011 (Shambaugh, 2013). The Pivot to Asia policy during the administration of President Barack Obama focused on countering the growing influence of China in the Asia-Pacific region. China began to become the largest economic partner of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, with crucial nations like the Philippines and Australia designating China as their primary trading partner. China's ambitions have also become a threat to the

rules-based order established by the United States since World War II. Furthermore, this strategy is broadly known as the Rebalance to Asia to counterbalance the PRC's strategy through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Indo-Pacific region (Planifolia, 2017).

Unlike economic agreements in general, IPEF does not commit to reducing import tariffs for trade in goods. This is also a US strategy to counterbalance the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as the largest Free Trade Area (FTA) agreement currently, with one of its members being the PRC (Fiscal Policy Agency, 2023). In its development, IPEF has agreed on 4 (four) pillars, namely Pillar I Trade, Pillar II Supply Chain, Pillar III Clean Economy, and Pillar IV Fair Economy. IPEF is believed to become a significant agreement in the world economic cooperation map. Broadly, IPEF members represent 28.93% of world trade, 39.79% of world GDP, and 32.20% of the world population (Fiscal Policy Agency, 2023). The IPEF cooperation framework is intended, among other things, to promote resilience, economic growth, and economic competitiveness and to contribute to peace and prosperity (The House, 2022).

The countries that are members of IPEF are the US (as the initiator), Australia, Fiji, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and 7 (seven) ASEAN countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The absence of 3 (three) ASEAN countries, namely Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, which are not members of IPEF, potentially threatens the principle of centrality adopted by ASEAN through the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The uneven participation or views of ASEAN member countries in an initiative in practice does not only occur in the IPEF cooperation framework. ASEAN member countries also have centrality dynamics in the AUKUS case study as a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) established on September 15, 2021, for the development of nuclear-powered submarines and military deployment in the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN member countries have different responses to AUKUS, which threatens the principle of ASEAN centrality as one form of ASEAN identity construction.

The diverse responses of ASEAN member countries to AUKUS are assumed to be a manifestation of each ASEAN member country's views on security issues, while the non-participation of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar in IPEF is assumed on 3 (three) aspects.

1. **Economic sector:** A primary consideration for the absence of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar from IPEF participation lies within the economic sector. These three nations are consistently categorized as low-income countries within the Southeast Asian region. The framework of IPEF, as envisioned and promoted by the United States, appears to prioritize engagement with countries possessing more advanced and developing market economies. This focus on economic capacity and development levels likely plays a significant role in determining which ASEAN member states are deemed suitable or strategically aligned for participation in the various pillars of IPEF, which encompass areas such as trade, supply chains, clean economy, and fair economy. The economic realities of these three nations may present challenges in meeting the commitments and standards inherent in such a framework.
2. **Institutional sector:** Beyond economic considerations, the institutional sector presents another layer of explanation for the non-participation of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. These countries are generally recognized as having relatively limited institutional capacity compared to other ASEAN member states. Fulfilling the commitments associated with IPEF, which include adherence to specific regulatory frameworks, standards, and trade practices, often demands robust institutional infrastructure and expertise. The capacity to implement and enforce these commitments across various sectors within a stipulated timeframe could pose a significant challenge for these nations. Therefore, their perceived limited institutional capacity to effectively engage with and fulfill the obligations of IPEF is a plausible contributing factor to their non-participation.
3. **Political interest sector:** The political interest sector offers a crucial dimension in understanding the stance of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar regarding IPEF. These three ASEAN member countries are widely assumed to maintain particularly close and strong diplomatic and political economic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Given the prevailing geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China for influence within the Indo-Pacific region, the alignment of these nations with Beijing could be a significant factor in their decision not to join IPEF. Their existing close ties with the PRC might lead to a reluctance to align themselves with an initiative perceived as a strategic counterweight to China's growing influence in the region. This political calculus, prioritizing existing

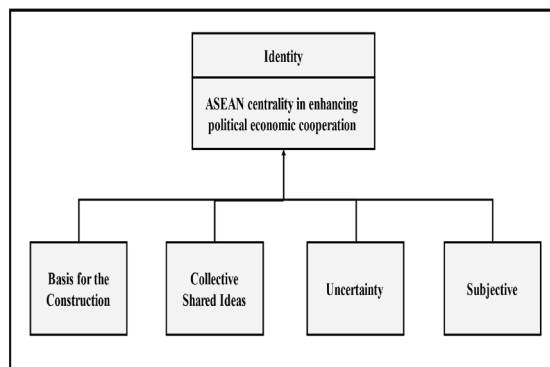
relationships and strategic interests, likely weighs heavily in their approach to participating in multilateral economic frameworks like IPEF.

Regardless of the various assumptions behind the non-participation of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, it can be understood that each ASEAN country needs to prioritize the principle of centrality as a form of ASEAN identity and commitment to face geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN as the main international organization in the Southeast Asian region also needs to play a role in maintaining the adoption of the principle of centrality as part of the ASEAN Charter and AOIP commitments.

Furthermore, this research employs constructivism theory within the study of international political economy to address the research question -“How does ASEAN leverage its centrality to enhance political economic cooperation within the context of member states’ participation in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)?”

In the study of international political economy, it is understood that actors in international relations not only play a role as external forces that intervene in the economic system but also as political authorities to maintain market freedom and achieve interests. Furthermore, constructivism in international political economy views that social facts are built through collectively shared ideas (Abdelal, 2009). Additionally, it is emphasized that markets are not a phenomenon that forms spontaneously, but rather are socially constructed through several phases, namely embedded liberalism to globalization, the deconstruction of the welfare state and developmental state, the depoliticization of money and inflation, the internationalization of markets for capital, the internationalization of markets for goods and services, and internationalization and globalization (Abdelal, 2009). In an effort to understand how constructivism works, Abdelal (2009) states that there are 4 (four) approaches that can be used, namely the use of meaning as the basis for construction, collectively shared ideas, uncertainty, and subjectivity.

The constructivist approach in the study of international political economy is utilized to understand how ASEAN as an actor in international relations shapes the identity of “centrality” as part of the adoption of principles in the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in order to maintain regional interests while striving to maintain regional order and stability, particularly for the issue of political economic cooperation.



Source: Researcher's interpretation of Abdelal's Constructivism (Abdelal, 2009)

Figure 1. Constructivist Analysis Model

ASEAN Centrality as a Form of the Basis for the Construction.

In the view of constructivism, international political economy dynamics cannot be separated from the use of meaning as the basis for construction. ASEAN centrality in this case emerges as a regional interest that originates from regional norms, culture, and identity and is driven by relations with international norms. ASEAN centrality in this case is understood not only about ASEAN itself but about broader regionalism issues, such as in the Indo-Pacific region.

ASEAN centrality in this case is the construction of the center of regional institutions involving ASEAN, such as ASEAN Plus Three (APT), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), and how ASEAN views the IPEF initiative. In the ASEAN Charter Article 1.15, it is clearly stated about the main goal of ASEAN, which is to maintain ASEAN's centrality and proactive role as the main driving force of relations and cooperation with external partners in an open, transparent, and inclusive regional architecture (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008).

Centrality here benefits ASEAN as the core of the regional order (Acharya, 2017). The competition between the US and the PRC has the potential to threaten ASEAN to become a marginal group in its own region. In practice, the US and the PRC are 2 (two) major economic powers that are strategic partners in the global supply chain for ASEAN, so ASEAN's decision to choose one of the 2 (two) powers is not the right decision when associated with the principle of ASEAN centrality.

The principle of ASEAN centrality in this case needs to be maintained and continuously strengthened amid geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. The construction of ASEAN centrality needs to be continuously upheld by every ASEAN member country through the implementation of firm and

active but impartial attitudes towards major power competition to maintain peace, security, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

ASEAN Centrality as a Form of Collectively Shared Ideas

ASEAN Centrality believes that material facts can be interpreted and consist of explanations of how the world works and describe the social reality of a group. ASEAN's strategic role can be seen in the various cooperation forums attended by ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN in this case takes a central role in creating a cooperation framework centered in ASEAN. Centrality here is interpreted as a shared idea agreement as an identity or as a reputation that needs to be maintained by ASEAN to ensure its relevance (Damayanti, 2018).

Economic integration is one of ASEAN's focuses, with a focus on the creation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) supported by the preparation of the AEC Blueprint 2015, which was later updated through the AEC Blueprint 2025. Economic integration is not only constructed as an internal idea through cooperation between ASEAN member countries but also as an external idea through cooperation with partners outside ASEAN, such as in the IPEF framework.

ASEAN centrality is understood as the primacy of ASEAN's core beliefs and identity with the encouragement of the principles of inclusivity and openness that allow the creation of a common understanding, thus positioning ASEAN as a neutral and safe platform in negotiating the regional order (Acharya, 2017). To encourage the synergy of IPEF and ASEAN centrality in line with AOIP, it is necessary to synergize collective shared ideas in the form of AOIP principles such as ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, and inclusivity based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit in the IPEF initiative, which is also agreed upon as a collective shared idea among IPEF members.

ASEAN Centrality as a Form of Uncertainty

In this case views that the uncertainty conditions faced by agents and groups will direct and guide their decisions towards the results obtained from political and market interactions. ASEAN in this case is an agent or group that then directs various strategies and policies based on the conditions of the uncertain international system, one of which is in facing the geopolitical dynamics of the US and the PRC in the Indo-Pacific region.

ASEAN needs to be a responsive actor in responding to various developments of phenomena

in the international system. To maintain ASEAN centrality, IPEF then needs to be constructed to be oriented towards concrete programs, be inclusive, and synergize with AOIP (ASEAN 2019). With 7 (seven) out of 10 (ten) ASEAN member countries joining IPEF, it indicates the potential for the possibility of unaccommodated interests of member countries if the representation of ASEAN member countries in IPEF does not prioritize regional interests in various programs and strategies. There is also the potential to disrupt regional stability caused by the assumption that IPEF is a form of US geopolitical strategy to counterbalance the PRC. ASEAN needs to maintain its commitment by not only prioritizing the principle of centrality within the Southeast Asian region but also outside the Southeast Asian region, including in the Indo-Pacific region.

ASEAN Centrality as a Form of Subjectivity,

This issue is not a social reality that occurs spontaneously or is taken for granted. In the view of constructivism in the study of international political economy, there are social facts in addition to material facts that play a role in explaining international political economy dynamics. ASEAN centrality in this case is not only seen as a material fact to promote economic and security aspects, but also as a social fact as ASEAN's identity.

Subjectivity in this case is also influenced by leadership factors. In the implementation of ASEAN, the Chairmanship is determined every year, such as Indonesia which holds the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023. As a response to IPEF, Indonesia during its ASEAN Chairmanship took various strategic steps to enhance ASEAN centrality, including the adoption of documents at the 11th ASEAN-United States Summit, namely the ASEAN-United States Leaders' Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the Concept Note on the ASEAN-US Center for ASEAN-US Engagement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). This leadership from Indonesia was then responded by the US with plans to establish the ASEAN-US Center in Washington DC to strengthen ASEAN-US relations and support ASEAN centrality. Regarding the issue of leadership, to prevent conflicts against interventions from external partners to each ASEAN member country, Article 42 of the ASEAN Charter regarding Dialogue Coordinator States has been established (ASEAN, 2023).

Based on this data, ASEAN member countries take turns acting as coordinators who have overall responsibility for coordinating and advancing ASEAN's interests in its relations with dialogue

partners, regional and international organizations, and institutions (ASEAN, 2024). Regarding ASEAN's relations with external partners, the coordinator has significant roles, including representing ASEAN and enhancing relations based on mutual respect and equality, in accordance with ASEAN principles, including the principle of centrality; leading relevant meetings between ASEAN and external partners; and supporting various related ASEAN Committees in third countries and international organizations.

IALOGUE PARTNERS

No.	Dialogue Partners	ASEAN Country Coordinator		
		2018-2021	2021-2024	2024-2027
1	Australia	Malaysia	Lao PDR	Indonesia
2	Canada	Myanmar	Malaysia	Lao PDR
3	China	Philippines	Myanmar	Malaysia
4	European Union	Singapore	Philippines	Brunei Darussalam
5	India	Thailand	Singapore	Philippines
6	Japan	Viet Nam	Thailand	Singapore
7	Republic of Korea	Brunei Darussalam	Viet Nam	Thailand
8	New Zealand	Cambodia	Brunei Darussalam	Viet Nam
9	Russia	Indonesia	Cambodia	Myanmar
10	United Kingdom	Brunei Darussalam	Viet Nam	Viet Nam
11	United States	Lao PDR	Indonesia	Cambodia

SECTORAL DIALOGUE PARTNERS

No.	Sectoral Dialogue Partners	Coordinator
1	Brazil	ASEAN Secretariat
2	Morocco	ASEAN Secretariat
3	Norway	ASEAN Secretariat
4	Pakistan	ASEAN Secretariat
5	South Africa	ASEAN Secretariat
6	Switzerland	ASEAN Secretariat
7	Türkiye	ASEAN Secretariat
8	United Arab Emirates	ASEAN Secretariat

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

No.	Development Partner	Coordinator
1	Chile	ASEAN Secretariat
2	France	ASEAN Secretariat
3	Germany	ASEAN Secretariat
4	Italy	ASEAN Secretariat
5	Netherlands	ASEAN Secretariat
6	Peru	ASEAN Secretariat

Table 1. ASEAN External Relations Coordinatorship: Periode July/August 2018 – July/August 2027

Furthermore, in order to enhance the identity of ASEAN centrality for improved political-economic cooperation within the IPEF framework, ASEAN can actively contribute to IPEF. Firstly, ASEAN can actively position the AOIP as the overarching framework for Indo-Pacific cooperation, including economic initiatives like IPEF. By consistently referencing and aligning IPEF discussions and goals with the AOIP's principles of centrality, inclusivity, and complementarity, ASEAN can steer the narrative and ensure IPEF's actions are in line with its broader vision. Secondly, ASEAN can collectively identify and articulate its key economic priorities and concerns within the IPEF framework. This unified voice will carry more weight than individual member states' participation and can influence the direction of negotiations and the design of specific agreements within IPEF. Thirdly, ASEAN can initiate and maintain regular dialogues with the US regarding IPEF, not just as a recipient of proposals but as an active partner in shaping the initiative's content and implementation. This could involve proposing

specific areas of focus or suggesting modifications to existing frameworks. Fourthly, ASEAN can strengthen internal coordination and dialogue among all ten member states regarding their engagement with IPEF. This can help bridge potential divides and ensure that even non-participating members are informed and their perspectives are considered. ASEAN can advocate for the inclusion of all its members in various aspects of IPEF, even if not all are full signatories to every pillar. This could involve observer status, participation in specific working groups, or ensuring that IPEF initiatives are designed in a way that benefits the entire region. Fifthly, ASEAN can consistently promote its own vision for the Indo-Pacific, demonstrating how its approach (as outlined in the AOIP) offers a more comprehensive and inclusive framework for regional cooperation compared to a potentially more narrowly focused initiative like IPEF.

In essence, while IPEF presents a potential challenge, ASEAN's long-standing commitment to regional economic integration, coupled with its established institutional frameworks and diplomatic capabilities, provides a strong foundation to navigate this dilemma and maintain its central role in shaping the economic future of Southeast Asia. By actively influencing IPEF and focusing on its internal strengths, ASEAN can ensure that external initiatives complement rather than undermine its core objectives.

CONCLUSION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organization for countries in the Southeast Asian region that, in practice, not only focuses on political economic cooperation in the Southeast Asian region but also prioritizes the principle of global cooperation with involvement in broader cooperation initiatives, such as in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent decades, the Indo-Pacific region has been considered to have a strategic role in the world economy, so there is tension in efforts to expand power with various geopolitical strategies carried out by the United States (US) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). ASEAN responded to the strategic value of the Indo-Pacific partnership by adopting the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a framework to maintain regional stability by carrying out 3 (three) main principles, namely centrality, inclusivity, and complementarity.

ASEAN centrality in the view of constructivism is the implementation of ASEAN's identity, which is then constructed and promoted both internally

and externally. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) as an initiative of the United States (US) for regional arrangements in building economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region, threatens ASEAN centrality. This is based on the assumption that IPEF is a means for the US to balance the influence of the PRC in the Indo-Pacific region, so the participation of ASEAN member countries can be suspected as an effort to support the US.

IPEF is also considered to threaten the principle of ASEAN centrality because it is only followed by 7 (seven) ASEAN countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, which leaves 3 (three) other ASEAN member countries, namely Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, thus indicating a rather dilemmatic position for ASEAN, namely an indication of incompatibility with the principle of ASEAN centrality and the potential for alignment with the US and the PRC.

Based on the results of the analysis, there are several aspects that ASEAN needs to do to strengthen the principle of centrality amid the participation of member countries in IPEF. First, continue to prioritize ASEAN centrality as a basis for construction as a joint commitment to remain active but impartial to the hegemony of certain powers in order to maintain peace, security, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Second, ASEAN centrality as part of a collective shared idea needs to be positioned as a neutral platform and integrate this principle into the IPEF cooperation framework. Third, with the existence of uncertainty as part of the dynamics of relations between actors in the international system, ASEAN needs to be present to construct synergy between AOIP and IPEF. Fourth, with the issue of subjectivity from ASEAN leaders, strategic leadership needs to be continuously encouraged to produce various agreements to support ASEAN centrality.

Furthermore, to enhance ASEAN centrality and political-economic cooperation within the IPEF framework, ASEAN can actively influence IPEF by positioning the AOIP as the overarching framework, articulating collective economic priorities within IPEF, engaging in regular dialogues with the US to shape IPEF, strengthening internal coordination and inclusivity among all member states regarding IPEF, and promoting its comprehensive Indo-Pacific vision (AOIP). Despite the potential challenges of IPEF, ASEAN's commitment to regional political economic cooperation and its established capabilities provide a strong basis to maintain its central role by

ensuring external initiatives complement its core objectives.

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