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For immediate release

“Former Prime Minister Paul Keating has overstepped the mark by implying Australia only has a choice between the US alliance or collaborating with the ASEAN region,” said Asialink International Director and ANU Basham Professor of Asian History Tony Milner.

“We can do both, but the trick lies in how we manage that.

“Australia’s main strategy should be to boost its relationship with Southeast Asia, including through ASEAN, but this doesn’t need to come at the expense of the United States or Chinese relationships,” said Professor Milner.

“This is a diversion we don’t need,” Professor Milner said, of Mr Keating’s call for Australia to diminish its alliance with the US.

However Professor Milner supported Mr Keating’s suggestion that we focus on Southeast Asia and ASEAN.

“Greater engagement with Southeast Asia would augment our relationship with the United States and China. It is through ASEAN that Australia can secure its place in Asia in the Asian Century,” said Professor Milner.

“Now is the time to look beyond the US-China debate and build stronger relations with our closest neighbours in Southeast Asia. The best way to do this is through ASEAN.

“Mr Keating is right to emphasise the importance of Indonesia and Southeast Asia to Australia’s long-term strategic interests.

“It is a pity that the Asia Century white paper, released earlier this month, didn’t acknowledge strongly enough our proven track record of working with Southeast Asia, and the potential that relationship has for us.”

A major Asialink report to be released on November 29 provides a framework for how Australia can deepen its relationship with Southeast Asia and secure its place in the Asian Century. The report, led by Professor Milner, draws on expertise of academics, diplomats, analysts and government officials in the region.

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