

Report calls for “Southeast Asia strategy” in the Asian Century

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01 AM THURSDAY 29 NOVEMBER

Australia needs to move beyond the US-China dynamic and focus on its relationship with Southeast Asia, according to a report prepared in consultation with academics, diplomats and business people throughout the region.

The Asialink report proposes a strategy for implementing the aspirations of the federal government’s recent white paper on *Australia in the Asian Century*, which gave little attention to Southeast Asia, with the exception of Indonesia.

The report, which includes supporting statements from former foreign ministers Gareth Evans and Alexander Downer, argues that Australia’s economic and strategic interests will be best served by making Southeast Asia central to policymaking and decisions.

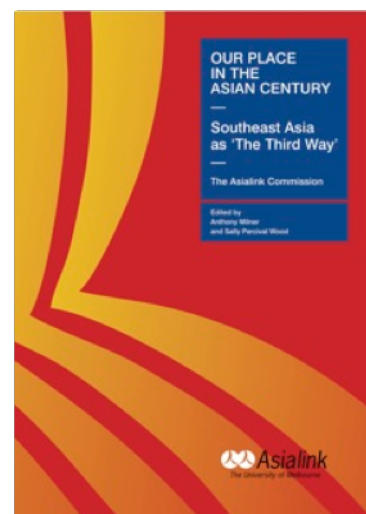
“Australian public discussion has been mesmerised by China and our alliance with the United States,” said the report’s lead author Professor Tony Milner, Asialink’s International Director and Basham Professor of Asian History at the Australian National University.

“Yes these are vital foreign policy areas, but ones where Australia acting alone is likely to have limited influence.

“Significantly deepening Australia’s relations with Southeast Asia will help us to adjust politically to the dramatic rise of China. It also makes Australia a more valuable United States ally.”

Our Place in the Asian Century: Southeast Asia as ‘The Third Way’ is the result of consultations not just in Australia, but with a wide range of specialists from the Southeast Asian region. Its recommendations include:

- Giving Southeast Asian countries a central place in the Australian international narrative as natural partners and neighbours
- Committing sustained resources to lifting Australia’s profile in Southeast Asian countries, and the ASEAN region’s profile in Australia
- Taking a whole-of-government approach to ASEAN cooperation, with a wide range of departments seeking to establish constructive partnerships in Southeast Asia.



In his foreword to the report, former foreign minister Gareth Evans said: “This is a thoughtful, thoroughly researched and lucidly written report making a compelling argument.” Alexander Downer said: “Australia will build influence and effectiveness in the region if it can first and foremost consolidate itself with ASEAN.”

View the executive summary and download the full report at www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/thirdway

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Based at The University of Melbourne, Asialink is Australia’s leading centre for the promotion of public understanding of the countries of Asia and of Australia’s role in the region.