

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Indonesia's President Prabowo kicks off diplomatic tour with Beijing visit

Between 8 and 10 November, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto conducted his inaugural state visit to China.<sup>1 2</sup> The visit was Prabowo's first international trip since assuming the presidency on 20 October, but his second to China this year, having visited the country between 31 March and 2 April as president-elect.<sup>3 4 5</sup>

During the visit, Prabowo met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the atmosphere of the meeting between the heads of state as "cordial and friendly" and consisting of an "in-depth exchange of views on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of common concern".<sup>6 9</sup> In the read-out, Xi Jinping noted that the bilateral relations have shown "resilience and vitality", setting a precedent for major developing countries.<sup>7</sup>

Separately Prabowo also met with Premier Li Qiang of the State Council and Zhao Leji, the Chairman of the National Peoples' Congress (NPC) Standing Committee.<sup>8 9 10</sup> Following the high-level meetings the Chinese read-outs emphasised the importance of cooperation between both countries within the Global South and mutual support on international matters.<sup>11 12 13</sup> Zhao reportedly emphasised the willingness of the Chinese National People's Congress to enhance exchanges with Indonesia's legislature and coordinate on multilateral platforms to protect mutual and developing countries' interests. Meanwhile, President Prabowo reiterated Indonesia's focus on fostering ties with China, highlighting mutual support, collaboration across legislative bodies, fostering long-term bilateral relations, and people-to-people friendship.<sup>14</sup>

Following the meetings, the countries released a joint statement announcing several cooperation agreements in key sectors such as critical minerals and green energy, as well as specific protocols for the export of Indonesian coconut products to China, and the promotion of sustainable fisheries.<sup>15 16 17</sup> Notably, these initiatives also aligned with Prabowo's domestic priorities, including a maritime security project and a free lunch programme for schools in Indonesia, which garnered financial backing through this cooperation.<sup>18 19</sup>

**Adarga Analysis:** President Prabowo's state visit marks a significant step in Indonesia-China relations and demonstrates Prabowo's strategic priorities as the new head of state. The choice of China as the first destination in a series of working visits post-inauguration highlights the significance Indonesia places on its relationship with China.

From the Chinese perspective, President Xi's positioning of the bilateral partnership as a model for cooperation between major developing countries aligns with China's broader narrative of fostering ties across the Global South; this messaging supports China's vision of a multipolar global order, wherein collaboration with Indonesia reinforces both countries' leadership roles within the international system. Meanwhile, the focus on legislative and multilateral collaboration across the high-level meetings signals the potential for Indonesia to play an enhanced role within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and broader global platforms in future.

Bilaterally, the agreements signed reflect a mutual commitment to addressing shared economic and environmental priorities. These include Indonesia's focus on resource-based trade and development, which aligns with China's demand for critical minerals and its ambitious green energy agenda. Additionally, Prabowo's leveraging of the visit to secure financial backing for key domestic programmes is notable. By tying international cooperation to national development goals, Prabowo showcased his ability to align foreign policy with Indonesia's domestic agenda, a move likely to bolster his political standing domestically.

More broadly, this visit is situated within the context of Indonesia's foreign policy strategy, which is characterised by a 'free and active' approach. This allows the country to form relationships without aligning with specific blocs and is a long-standing policy position: to date it has been a significant enabler of Indonesia's ability to maintain positive relations with major powers such as the US and China while avoiding dependency on any one country. President Prabowo has previously pledged to continue this strategy, positioning Indonesia as an independent, non-aligned actor that promotes partnerships based on mutual benefit.<sup>20</sup>

Indonesia's balanced approach is further evident in its military cooperation strategy; in November alone, Indonesia has so far conducted joint naval exercises separately with Russia and Australia, underscoring its intention to strengthen ties with multiple partners while maintaining an independent foreign policy.<sup>21 22</sup> Similarly, Indonesia's ongoing procurement of military equipment from European countries, including submarines and patrol vessels, is further evidence of this independent and diversified approach to its defence strategy.<sup>23 24</sup>

Prabowo's diplomatic itinerary reflects Indonesia's aspirations to strengthen its influence and standing on the global stage. After Beijing, Prabowo flew directly to Washington D.C. where he met with President Biden on 12 November and held a telephone conversation with President-elect Donald Trump.<sup>25 26</sup> Following his visit to the US, President Prabowo is scheduled to travel to Peru to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, then to Brazil for the G20 Summit before visiting the UK.<sup>27</sup> It is highly likely that this series of working visits is illustrative of President Prabowo's desire to set the tone at the start of his presidency and position Indonesia as a strategic partner on the global stage.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, we have already seen bilateral economic partnerships and investments touted by several countries; in the case of the UK, since 1 October, the government announced a partnership with Indonesia Eximbank, a feasibility study for a UK-Indonesia urban rail project in Surabaya, and a public statement of intention "to step up efforts towards a new, deeper Strategic Partnership with crucial G20 partner Indonesia to support green innovation and accelerate the clean energy transition".<sup>29 30 31</sup>

Therefore, in this context, Indonesia's recent diplomatic engagements highly likely reflect a broader strategic intent to play a significant role in regional and global geopolitics while promoting a continuation of its own balanced approach to international relations that prioritises sovereignty, economic development, and partnerships based on mutual respect and shared benefits. Given Indonesia's growing strategic importance and its proactive stance on fostering these mutually beneficial ties, it is likely that multiple countries will seek to deepen cooperation and establish partnerships with Indonesia across economic, defence, and environmental sectors.

## DEFENCE

## PLA-linked institutes develop Llama-based AI model for military use

On 1 November Reuters reported that Chinese research institutions linked to the People's Liberation Army have built a military-focused AI model that is an adaptation of Meta's Llama open-source software.<sup>32</sup> The development of the Chinese model – named ChatBIT – is detailed in various academic papers, within which researchers claim that it excels in military applications such as intelligence analysis and providing situational awareness, reportedly outperforming other models, including those comparable to OpenAI's ChatGPT-4.<sup>33 34 35</sup> The adaptation process involved fine-tuning the Llama-2-13B model, integrating military-specific dialogue, and operational feedback to enhance its performance in military contexts.<sup>36</sup>

This utilisation of open-source AI models by the PLA has sparked discussions concerning the adaptation of open-source technologies for military purposes. Researchers have emphasised the potential dual-use nature of these models, raising security concerns amidst ongoing debates in technology circles regarding the risks of open-source AI – from the challenges of enforcing usage restrictions to the potential security implications of their adaptation for military applications.<sup>37 38</sup> Meta has publicly acknowledged its limited ability to enforce usage restrictions on its models, stating that any military use is contrary to its acceptable use policy.<sup>39</sup>

On 5 November Meta announced that it will, however, permit US national security agencies and defence contractors to use its Llama AI model, contrary to its previous restrictions that prohibited uses in military or national security contexts.<sup>40 41</sup> In a blog post on Meta's website the company's president of global affairs – former UK deputy prime minister Nick Clegg – announced that all of its Llama models are now available to US government agencies, as well as select industry partners including Amazon Web Services and Lockheed Martin to ensure the US maintains an edge in AI technology.<sup>42 43</sup>

Meta's decision aligns with the US government's increasing emphasis on harnessing AI for national security, articulated in a National Security Memorandum on AI released by the Biden administration. The memorandum asserts the necessity for the US to lead in developing advanced AI models due to their critical importance in national security contexts.<sup>44</sup> Despite this policy shift, Meta reiterated that its Acceptable Use Policy remains in force for the general public, which specifically prohibits military applications.<sup>45</sup> However, exceptions were made for government collaboration aimed at ethical and responsible use of the technology.<sup>46</sup>

**Adarga Analysis:** ChatBIT's successful development reflects a growing trend in China to leverage Western technologies to enhance military capabilities. The broader integration of AI in various military and security applications, including predictive policing and electronic warfare, demonstrates a robust commitment to advancing military technology in China.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the research referenced has investigated how Llama can be employed for strategic military simulations and cyber operations, indicating a comprehensive approach towards utilising AI across different defence and security domains.<sup>48</sup>

The Chinese military's fine-tuning of Meta's Llama model does not represent a game-changing capability – ChatBIT appears to be a simple question-answering capability, trained on a relatively small military specific dataset, using an old foundation model<sup>49</sup> – and the misuse of LLMs by hostile actors is not a problem reserved for open-source models, as OpenAI has confirmed on a number of occasions.<sup>50 51</sup>

As Reuters reported, this is not the first time actors linked to the Chinese military have used open-source models developed in the US.<sup>52</sup> The tension that exists at the core of the open-source philosophy – and noting the debate on whether the Llama models are truly 'open-source'<sup>53</sup> – is that it cedes control whilst promoting innovation.

In building Llama, Meta has made a historic contribution to open-source software and the development of LLMs in a way that very few organisations could have done. In doing so, they have committed billions of dollars for the compute required to train the model and have hired some of the best talent from around the world. All the while, the main guardrail against improper use – such as by affiliates of the Chinese military – was licensing terminology that placed mitigations on usage.<sup>54</sup>

It appears that a scenario has occurred in which Meta's policy barred compliant militaries from the US and its allies from accessing their state-of-the-art open-source LLM, whilst leaving access readily available for adversarial forces and nefarious actors. The net result of this was the temporary stagnation of military LLM innovation in the West – the value of open-source models being their applicability for secure, air-gapped environments – whilst at the same time, the Chinese military ecosystem was able to benefit from the investment made by Meta in their model architecture. It is in this context that Meta announced that Llama would be available to US government agencies that are working on defence and national security applications' thereby ensuring a level playing field at the geostrategic level whilst maintaining their commitment to the open-source philosophy.<sup>55</sup> It is likely the White House's recent Memorandum on Advancing the United States' Leadership in Artificial Intelligence was a symptom of this same irony.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of geopolitics and specifically the perceived AI rivalry between the US and China, Meta's strategic commercial decision has broader ramifications. Much has been made of the fact that Chinese model development lagged behind that of the US prior to the release of Llama and there is no doubt their model ecosystem has benefited from Meta's decision to open-source the software.<sup>57</sup> But such is the interconnected nature of the AI research community, it is likely knowledge of the architecture would have found its way to Chinese technology companies eventually. Indeed, despite the headline attention for ChatBIT, it is worth highlighting that there doesn't appear to be an imminent security threat.

In an environment where AI's role in national and global security is increasingly recognised, the developments at Meta and the responses to military adaptations of its technology signify an evolving discourse regarding the balance between open-source innovation and stringent security measures.<sup>58 59</sup>

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