



# Adapting the ASEAN Geoeconomics Task Force: From Assessment to Action

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## **Adapting the ASEAN Geoeconomics Task Force: From Assessment to Action**

*By Gordon Kang*

### **SYNOPSIS**

*ASEAN's establishment of the ASEAN Geoeconomics Task Force (AGTF) reflects growing recognition that intensifying geoeconomic competition demands enhanced regional coordination across both economic and security spheres. However, amidst the potential for future economic disruptions, questions persist about how the AGTF can adapt to support ASEAN's collective response while maintaining ASEAN Centrality.*

### **COMMENTARY**

ASEAN's economic stability and growth have historically been predicated on a globalised, rules-based multilateral order. However, an increasingly securitised economic environment and intensified US-China strategic rivalry have seen these foundations come under mounting pressure.

As Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong [noted](#), "Economic instruments – like tariffs, export controls and sanctions – are being used not for market purposes, but as instruments of statecraft to advance national interests".

Such dynamics accelerated ASEAN's establishment of an ASEAN Geoeconomics Task Force (AGTF) to assess the implications of these evolving geoeconomic realities for its strategic futures. However, important questions remain regarding the AGTF's role, its institutional limitations, and how it might adapt – perhaps through a ["similar high-level mechanism"](#) – to support ASEAN's geoeconomic coordination over time.

The idea for the AGTF first [originated](#) in an Indonesian non-paper tabled at the 31st ASEAN Economic Ministers' (AEM) Retreat on 28 February 2025. It was subsequently [formalised](#) as a Track 1.5 body at the Special AEM Meeting on 10 April 2025, just eight days after the [announcement](#) of US reciprocal tariffs.

As its initial mandate, the AGTF was [tasked](#) with preparing a report to assess the impact, risks, and opportunities posed by external uncertainties, formulate policy recommendations for ASEAN, and coordinate responses to strengthen regional resilience. The AGTF has since published the [ASEAN Geoeconomics Report \(AGR\) 2025](#) at the Joint ASEAN Foreign and Economic Ministers' (AMM-AEM) Meeting on 25 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur.

Conceptually, the AGTF performs three interrelated functions for ASEAN. First, it operates as a regional risk-mapping platform, enabling ASEAN Member States (AMS) to assess exposure collectively and generate expert-informed recommendations. Second, it creates a coordination channel for issues that span both economic and security domains. Third, it contributes toward cohering ASEAN's emerging geoeconomic approach and reinforcing ASEAN Centrality, reducing incentives for fragmented bilateral responses that may cumulatively weaken regional leverage.

Importantly, as the AGR emphasises, "The strongest message is that ASEAN should deliver on existing commitments". In this regard, the AGTF complements ASEAN's broader geoeconomic orientation under the [ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future](#) vision, particularly the [AEC Strategic Plan 2026–2030](#).

## **Bridging Strategy and Implementation**

Yet, in an increasingly disruptive geoeconomic environment, a central question is the extent to which the AGTF can operationalise the AGR's stated priorities more substantively.

The need to demonstrate effective action underpins the AGR's core recommendations, which are: i) managing short-term risks, ii) advancing regional integration and resilience, iii) strengthening multilateral rules and institutions, and iv) pursuing ambitious goals that transform the region. The AGR correspondingly highlights the need for a broader mindset shift towards implementation, supported by monitoring and evaluation mechanisms capable of ensuring policy impact.

To this end, the AGR specifies the AGTF's potential contribution to strengthening cross-pillar coordination by engaging, providing inputs, and reporting to both the political-security and economic pillars and to the AMM-AEM. However, although the AGTF can be well-placed to provide strategic assessments, it remains unclear how it might directly support ASEAN's sectoral bodies and technical workstreams in accelerating implementation.

Beyond the broader oversight of the ASEAN Secretariat's ASEAN Integration Monitoring Directorate (AIMD) and the ASEAN Economic Community Council (AECC), several sectoral ASEAN bodies – such as the [Coordinating Committee on](#)

[the Implementation of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement \(ATIGA\) \(CCA\)](#), the [ASEAN Trade Facilitation Joint Consultative Committee \(ATF-JCC\)](#), and [the ASEAN Single Window Steering Committee \(ASWSC\)](#) – already undertake coordination, implementation and monitoring functions across specific priorities identified in the AGR.

On external priorities, such as accelerating the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the AGR likewise highlights the need for more technically focused task forces, such as those working towards full cumulation of provisions under Rules of Origin (RoO).

Furthermore, although ministerial statements over the past year – including those made at the [first Joint AMM-AEM Meeting](#) and the [57th AEM Meeting](#) – have acknowledged the AGTF's contributions, its influence has yet to translate clearly into ASEAN's sectoral implementation.

Major initiatives on the horizon, such as the [ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement \(DEFA\)](#), the [ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement \(ATIGA\) Upgrade](#), and the [ASEAN-China Free Trade Area \(ACFTA\) 3.0 Upgrade](#), do not yet explicitly reference AGTF inputs within their institutional processes and associated policy materials. This suggests that, at present, the AGTF's contributions remain only loosely linked to ASEAN's implementation mechanisms.

### **Adapting the AGTF for an Uncertain Future**

These trends may partly reflect the AGTF's early institutional stage and the indirect transmission of Track 1.5 recommendations into ASEAN's formal processes. Yet, the AGTF's longer-term value may lie beyond macroeconomic sense-making or policy assessment alone. Importantly, it could consider expanding its mandate to include emergency response coordination and preparedness.

Such a role would enable the AGTF to build the necessary inter-agency networks, response protocols and technical expertise to inform emergency ministerial deliberations and coordinate regional responses, while providing ongoing cross-pillar assessments of geoeconomic developments. In doing so, the AGTF would help build sustained preparedness in a geoeconomic environment characterised by persistent volatility and emerging risks.

To support this function, the AGTF could be enhanced with greater capacity, supported by a dedicated Track 2 stream that leverages ASEAN's wider policy ecosystem, including ASEAN sectoral working groups and relevant organisations, think tanks, regional academic networks, and the private sector. This would facilitate experimentation through pathfinder arrangements, sandbox pilots, and coalition-of-the-willing initiatives in areas where regional readiness remains uneven.

Institutions such as the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), the ASEAN + 3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO), and the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) would represent particularly relevant technical partners given their established roles in regional economic analysis and

surveillance. In this way, the AGTF could function as a discipline-enhancing mechanism within ASEAN's institutional architecture, complementing existing institutions.

Ultimately, however, fulfilling its mandate requires ASEAN to confront certain fundamental realities. As eleven small and middle powers with distinct geoeconomic characteristics, ASEAN's collective agency depends on recognising national constraints while maintaining shared commitments where possible.

With the prospect of further economic shocks and systemic disruptions arising from technological transformation and climate change, AMS must adopt as firm a commitment to navigating evolving geoeconomic realities in its self-interest as it does towards upholding ASEAN's core principles.

In this regard, a measured adaptation of the AGTF could provide a more coherent structural framework to coordinate regional responses, safeguarding ASEAN Centrality from the strains of geoeconomic fragmentation.

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