

War in Ukraine

Indonesia floats Ukraine peace plan, triggering sharp western criticism

Divergent responses to proposal illustrate deep divides between US, Europe and global south over the conflict



Indonesian defence chief Prabowo Subianto said some reactions to the war were 'too emotional' © AP

Mercedes Ruehl and Kathrin Hille in Singapore JUNE 3 2023

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An Indonesian defence minister has floated a peace plan for Ukraine, triggering fierce criticism from western security officials but praise from China and highlighting the deep divide between the west and global south over Russia's invasion of its neighbour.

In a speech on Saturday at the [Shangri-La Dialogue](#), an annual defence conference in Singapore, Prabowo Subianto proposed a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, followed by the creation of a demilitarised zone between current front lines, a UN mission and referendums in "disputed territories".

The pitch from Prabowo, a former special forces commander who is a leading candidate for Indonesia's presidential election next year, comes as the US and Europe struggle to persuade many developing countries to criticise Russia's assault on Ukraine.

Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's defence minister, scoffed at the proposal. "I will try to be polite," he said on a separate panel at the conference. "It sounds like a Russian plan." He added that "we don't need these mediators suggesting such a strange plan" before Russia was driven out of Ukraine.

EU high representative for foreign policy Josep Borrell, speaking directly after the Indonesian defence chief, said there must be “just peace”, not “a peace of surrender”.

Although Indonesia, south-east Asia’s largest economy, has officially condemned Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, Prabowo’s comments underscore the growing ambivalence by countries outside the west towards the conflict.

While Prabowo emphasised that he did not “equate the invader and invaded”, he said some reactions to the war were “too emotional”.

“We in Asia have our share of conflict and war, maybe more disastrous, more bloody than what has been experienced in Ukraine,” Prabowo said. “Ask Vietnam, ask Cambodia, ask Indonesians how many times we’ve been invaded.”

African and Latin American countries have increasingly been opposed to framing the conflict as a global, rather than European war.

Several nations in south-east Asia have abstained or even voted against draft resolutions in support of Kyiv at the UN. Other developing countries have been reluctant to impose sanctions against Russia.

Brazil’s top foreign policy adviser criticised the west’s tough stance against Moscow, telling the Financial Times that Russian president Vladimir Putin’s security concerns had to be taken “[into account](#)” by western powers.

In May, a diplomatic spat between South Africa and the US erupted after Washington’s ambassador alleged that armaments had been loaded on to a ship docked in Cape Town that was bound for Russia.

Kajsa Ollongren, the Dutch defence minister, insisted that in this conflict, “neutrality is not an option. All countries here expect their sovereignty to be respected,” she said at the conference. “But Ukraine’s sovereignty is not being respected.”

Delegates from China, whose mediation efforts were greeted with deep scepticism in the west, lauded Prabowo’s plan and chided Europe for its criticism.

“I appreciate very much efforts from our friends in the region, like Indonesia and South Africa,” said Cui Tiankai, China’s former ambassador to the US.

“With all due respect to our Euro-Atlantic friends: I don’t think you are managing effectively your own security situation. Maybe mismanaging is better word.”

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