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REGIONAL POWERS CAST LONG SHADOWS: ASEAN GRAPPLES WITH NEW DYNAMICS

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In the early months of 2022 the Russian invasion of Ukraine had a major, if indirect, impact on Southeast Asia and its relations with the major powers. Rising commodity prices and added disruptions in global supply chains caused by the invasion threatened to erase economic gains following the damage of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. ASEAN splintered in its response to the invasion, putting further strain on an institution already buckling under the worsening conflict in Myanmar. A year past the coup in Naypyidaw, the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan has barely moved forward.

Beijing's apparent, if cautious, support for Moscow following the invasion added new tensions in a region already on edge with growing Chinese assertiveness and a reinvigoration of US alliances. Chairing the G20 for the first time this year, Indonesia faces demands from the West to expel Russia from the group, a proposal that China vigorously opposes. The Ukraine conflict exacerbates ASEAN's fear of being caught between the West and China, but adds a new concern that the Asia-Pacific region might further nuclearize with the threat of a nuclear standoff between Russia and NATO.

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US relations with Southeast Asia began the year on a positive note following the stream of visits from high-level officials from the Biden administration in the second half of 2021. By late March, however, the US-ASEAN Special Summit had been postponed, in part because of ASEAN uneasiness over Washington's intense focus on Ukraine. The campaign for Philippine elections was launched officially in February, and Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos, son of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, maintained a steady lead and realized a substantial win in the presidential race on May 9, with Sara Duterte as his vice president. Politics in both Malaysia and Thailand were less straightforward, but by the end of April both countries appeared to be heading for early elections. A political transition of a different sort took place in Singapore, when President Lee Hsien-Loong named Finance Minister Edward Wong as the new leader of the People's Action Party, effectively making Wong his political heir and the next prime minister.

Ukraine Through A Regional Lens

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 quickly became the singular focus of many Western governments, even surpassing the COVID pandemic. ASEAN reacted with a [statement](#) on Feb. 26, drafted by Phnom Penh in its capacity as the 2022 chair, whose blandness hinted at divisions within the group. Modeled after Beijing's own statement, it called upon both parties to demonstrate "restraint" with no mention of a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. However, three ASEAN states—[Singapore](#), [Indonesia](#), and [Brunei](#)—issued more forceful statements with reference to sovereignty, and on Feb. 28 Singapore announced that it would impose unilateral export controls on Russia on items that were potentially dual use, and that it would also block some Russian banks and financial transactions. With Washington's urging, the Philippines [criticized the invasion](#), while it also endeavored to remove Filipino workers in Ukraine from harm's way. The Malaysian foreign ministry's [initial response](#) was to comment that it was "saddened" by the invasion. Bangkok too adopted a [low-key position](#) on the crisis.

Myanmar's State Administrative Council in Myanmar carved out a unique position in the region by siding with Moscow in a [statement](#) that maintained the invasion was justified to preserve Russian sovereignty. Since the 2021 coup,

Moscow has [extended](#) *de facto* recognition to the junta and remains its primary source of weapons.

The mixed—and sometimes [muted](#)—[response](#) in Southeast Asia is rooted in three concerns. The most widespread of these is the economic impact of the invasion on the region, which derives from disruptions in trade with both Russia and Ukraine.

Southeast Asia's role in Russia's global trade is insignificant, at roughly 1%, but Russia is the region's top arms vendor and, for a few countries (such as Vietnam and the Philippines) an energy supplier. Russian companies have been aggressively [marketing](#) both arms and energy in Southeast Asia since the invasion. Both Russia and Ukraine have supplied nickel and other critical minerals for Southeast Asian production of semiconductors. Southeast Asia's agricultural trade with Russia and Ukraine are also significant. Indonesia is the world's fourth-largest importer of wheat from Russia and Ukraine, and the Philippines the 10th-largest. Ukrainian grains account for nearly 10% of the cereals consumed in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asian relations with China also figure heavily in the region's response to the invasion. Although Beijing's [apparent support](#) for Moscow is more complicated than a simple return to a Cold War alliance, the region's governments are wary of antagonizing China by allying too closely with the West on Ukraine.

Indonesia's dilemma, chairing the G20 for the first time this year, is illustrative. Washington [proposed](#) that Moscow be expelled from the group, as it did in 2014 after the Russian annexation of Crimea. Although the West did [expel](#) Russia from the G8 in 2014, Australia was unable to find a consensus for doing so when it chaired the G20 that year. Jakarta has remained resolutely in the middle and, with China [refusing](#) to consider Russia's expulsion, Moscow is likely to remain in the G20.

Apart from economic and geostrategic considerations, two Southeast Asian countries - [Vietnam](#) and [Myanmar](#)—will attempt to preserve core relations with Russia. Myanmar's motives are immediate and apparent, but Vietnam's are most deeply rooted in its wartime alliances and its inclination to balance relations with China with those of other powers. Moscow and Hanoi have been in talks on the possibility of

[granting access](#) to Cam Rahn Bay to a Russian naval detachment, and the two countries cooperate on energy exploration in the South China Sea, which tends to draw Chinese interference. Vietnam is not unsympathetic to the plight of Ukraine, and the two countries have a shared past in the Eastern bloc as well as a growing trade relationship. However, as with other Southeast Asian governments, Hanoi must consider China in any geostrategic calculation.

The Pandemic Wanes and Washington Steps Up

Anxiety over great power competition rose in the early months of 2022 in Southeast Asia. When Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong visited Washington in late March he [warned](#) that the Asia-Pacific region was going in “a dangerous direction.” The Russian invasion of Ukraine—and Vladimir Putin’s threat to use tactical nuclear weapons there—stoked worry within ASEAN that the threat of nuclear competition between Moscow and the West would encourage US allies in the region (Japan, South Korea, and Australia) to seek limited nuclear capacity as a backstop to the US nuclear umbrella.

The invasion of Ukraine also [raised fears](#) that Beijing would follow suit in Taiwan, with collateral damage throughout the region. Moreover, the finalization of [China’s agreement](#) with the Solomon Islands, which opens the door to Chinese basing rights there, could provide China with a strategic outpost in the South Pacific. This brings fresh scrutiny to the Chinese refurbishment of Ream Naval Base in Cambodia, in a year when Phnom Penh is chairing ASEAN.

This heightened security environment was the backdrop for the Biden administration’s efforts to return its presence in Southeast Asia to pre-pandemic levels. In early 2022 the multilateral [Cobra Gold](#) exercises, co-chaired by Thailand and the United States, marked its 41st year, and the US-Philippine [Balikatan](#) (“shoulder-to-shoulder”) exercises brought the two militaries together in the 37th iteration, with several smaller bilateral and trilateral exercises as well.

Washington’s [donation](#) of COVID-19 vaccine and other support to fight the pandemic continued at regular intervals. Three Southeast Asian countries—Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines—were [among the top](#) five recipients of US COVID assistance. Moreover, the

administration’s long-awaited [Indo-Pacific Strategy](#), released in February, called out several Southeast Asian partners for attention, and vowed to contribute to “an empowered and unified ASEAN.”

However, the administration’s [initial attempt](#) to convene a Special US-ASEAN Summit in late March stumbled and was [rescheduled](#) for mid-May. Apart from scheduling differences, the United States and ASEAN likely had opposing agendas for the summit. Washington [made clear](#) that the war in Ukraine and China’s rise would be key topics of discussion, both of which ASEAN would prefer to avoid.

For its part, ASEAN is hoping for major “deliverables” that would open trade -- and market access—[further](#). The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) came into effect on Jan. 1. With China at the center, RCEP promises to [increase Beijing’s economic leverage](#) in the region, and Southeast Asian governments look to both the United States and the European Union for balance. Washington will likely [disappoint](#) on that score in the near-term. The administration is [preparing to release](#) its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and has foreshadowed several areas, including [digital trade](#). Some Southeast Asian countries may be early entrants to the Framework, but the IPEF is [unlikely](#) to be the base for a US-ASEAN trade agreement.



Figure 1 President Joe Biden and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong take questions from the press at the White House on March 29. Although the US-ASEAN Summit was postponed, the urgency of the Ukraine war prompted Lee to keep his travel plans for Washington. Photo: Patrick Semansky/AP

Myanmar: A Reality Check on the ASEAN Plan

As the 2022 ASEAN chair, Cambodia was determined to kickstart the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan on Myanmar, which had [languished](#) since April 2021, primarily because State Administrative Council Prime Minister and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing had [refused permission](#) to ASEAN Special Envoy, then Brunei Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof, to visit with opposition leaders in his visits to Myanmar. Under those conditions, Erywan did not visit the country in his tenure as the envoy.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen was blunt in articulating his belief that any strategy to mitigate the conflict in Myanmar should begin with the junta and build out from there. On Jan. 7-8, he visited Naypyidaw and met with Min Aung Hlaing, [declaring](#) that he intended to “plant trees, not cut them down.” It is not clear if Hun Sen had requested a meeting with former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and other National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders in detention, or with the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), but he made no public mention of them. His trip further [exacerbated divisions](#) within ASEAN on Myanmar, which ultimately led to the [cancellation](#) of the first ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting of the year, which had been scheduled for late January.



Figure 2 Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen (L) and Myanmar military chief Min Aung Hlaing meet in Naypyidaw on Jan. 7, 2022. Hun Sen is the first Southeast Asian leader to visit Myanmar since the Feb. 2021 coup. Photo: AFP

Since Hun Sen had advertised the visit as only an “ice-breaker,” no concrete deliverables were expected, but he did meet with international aid officials on the issue of humanitarian assistance, one of the five points of the ASEAN plan. He also [discussed prospects](#) for a ceasefire, but between the government and armed ethnic groups, rather than with the NUG's People's Defense Force (PDF). This was no doubt to Min Aung Hlaing's

liking, since resuming peace talks with the ethnic groups, but without the opposition, would be to the junta's advantage.

The trip was [followed on](#) March 20-23 by the first visit of the ASEAN Special Envoy for Myanmar, currently Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn. He met with Min Aung Hlaing and requested that he speak with NUG officials; he was denied but was allowed to [meet](#) with Ko Ko Gyi, a longstanding, if sidelined, democracy activist. Following his visit, Prak was candid in his [assessment](#) that neither peace negotiations nor a ceasefire were a near-term possibility. He also pointed out that the conflict made distribution of humanitarian assistance impossible at present; moving the assistance out of the warehouses will be his focus for the time being.

Although there is general agreement across ASEAN that the situation in Myanmar is unlikely to improve in the near-term, the members continue to [disagree](#) over representation. Following the failure of Cambodia's first attempt to convey a foreign ministers' meeting, Hun Sen was successful in organizing a foreign ministers “[retreat](#)” on Feb. 16-17, to which Naypyidaw was not invited. This was a turnabout from Phnom Penh's *de facto* recognition of the junta. In late April Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah announced that Kuala Lumpur had established contact with the National Unity Government and [proposed](#) that ASEAN set up informal talks with the NUG, not with the intention of recognizing the opposition as the legal government of Myanmar but to advance the ASEAN Plan's point on encouraging dialogue to end the conflict.

Throughout the new year, conflict has continued across the country, with the PDF targeting military installations and other key points. Much of the fighting is based in key ethnic areas, particularly bordering [China](#) and [Thailand](#). On April 25 the PDF [detonated](#) a car bomb at the foot of the Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Bridge in Mae Sot. The intention was in part to deprive the Tatmadaw of its share of illicit cross-border trade, but the attack also risked drawing the Thai Army into the conflict.

In the meantime, the regime [continues the trials](#) of NLD leaders arrested in the coup. On April 27 Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to five years in detention on one of the charges of corruption, adding to the six years she had previously

received. With several more corruption trials ahead and facing more serious charges of violating the Official Secrets Act, the total of the 76-year-old Suu Kyi's sentences could exceed 100 years. Shortly after the coup, the junta promised new elections in 2022; those have now been [postponed](#) for at least another year. The regime will likely move the goalposts repeatedly until it is confident that the opposition has been weakened; they are likely to find that decapitating the pre-2021 democracy movement will not quell the NUG and its insurgency.

External Responses

In January, two Western energy companies, Total and Chevron, [announced](#) that they would withdraw from the Yadana pipeline they had built and maintained that ships natural gas from Myanmar into western Thailand. International pressure and an operating environment that was increasingly untenable forced a reversal of the companies' position following the coup that they would keep the pipeline open, to provide energy to Thailand and revenue to Myanmar. Believed to have been built partly with forced labor provided by the Tatmadaw, the pipeline was hugely controversial when it was constructed in the late 1990s.

In early 2022 an unexpected move by foreign energy companies put Myanmar's oil and gas on the block for sanctions. Total, the major partner in a consortium that included Chevron; Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE); and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT), followed the announcement with the recommendation that sanctions be imposed on the sale of oil and gas to Myanmar, a key demand of overseas Burmese and human rights groups. On Feb. 22 the European Union [expanded](#) its sanctions on Myanmar to include MOGE and the 10 companies affiliated with it. In late April Thailand's oil and gas conglomerate PTTEP and Malaysia's Petronas announced they would [withdraw](#) from the Yetagun gas project. Russia will likely [make up](#) for immediate shortfalls in Myanmar's natural gas, but maintenance of the country's pumping facilities is another matter.

Although the United States has yet to sanction MOGE, this year Washington has expanded its sanctions regime in Myanmar in two stages. To mark the first anniversary of the coup, on Jan. 31 the US joined with the UK and Canada to [add new individuals](#) and entities connected to the regime to the sanctions list. The next tranche,

[announced](#) on March 25, expanded the scope of sanctions to arms dealers supplying weapons to the junta.

The March sanctions were groundbreaking in that they were paired with the Biden administration's declaration that the Tatmadaw had committed genocide, only the eighth such designation ever by the United States. Embedded in the Treasury Department's announcement of sanctions, the designation refers both to the military's crackdown on Muslim Rohingya in 2017 and the massacre of ethnic Karen in December 2021. The designation lends support to the case against the Tatmadaw for genocide in the 2017 crackdown currently before the International Court of Justice. That process has been complicated by the coup: [public hearings](#) in The Hague in February were overshadowed by disagreement over recognition of a government in Naypyidaw.

Political Transitions: Return of Old Orders?

The [landslide victory](#) of Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos, Jr., in the Philippines' May presidential race, and the equally strong victory of Sara Duterte-Caprio as vice president were hardly electoral upsets. Marcos and Duterte had held onto sizable margins in approval polls throughout the campaign, despite a number of [petitions](#) before the Election Commission (COMELEC) to disqualify Marcos because of a prior conviction for tax evasion.

Marcos [flooded social media](#) with campaigns to promise the return of a "golden era" in the Philippines, which he linked to his father's era, when the senior Marcos moved from an elected president to a dictator under prolonged martial law. His election as president completes a concerted campaign over three decades to rehabilitate the image of the Marcos family following their exile in the mid-1980s.

Another political ghost in the campaign, who has yet to depart, is current President Rodrigo Duterte, who appeared ambivalent over Marcos' candidacy, although his political faction, PDP-Laban, [officially endorsed](#) him. Duterte had contributed to burnishing the reputation of the late senior Marcos, by [granting permission](#) for him to be buried in Manila's National Heroes Cemetery in 2016. Duterte's support of Marcos will depend in large part on the degree to which the new president embraces his predecessor's

brand of populist authoritarianism and is willing to protect the Duterte family. Although the 2022 election is historic in that it brings together two political dynasties, each will guard its own position and power.

Marcos' main rival, current Vice President Leni Robredo, was the target of frequent [disinformation campaigns](#). She narrowly defeated Marcos for vice president in 2016; Marcos contested her win in the courts but the case was dismissed. Robredo's support includes Philippine human rights groups and an *ad hoc* coalition of Catholic priests, acting in their individual capacities, who urged voters to vote for her. Despite Marcos' resounding victory, he is aware that another "people's power" movement could imperil his administration. His father was deposed by a popular uprising in 1986, as was President Joseph Estrada in 2001. If Marcos cannot hold onto a critical mass of public support in his six-year tenure as president, which will commence in late June, Robredo would be an obvious choice to lead a new "people's power" movement.

When he takes office, Marcos will face multiple challenges. Foremost among these is continuing the Philippines' economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the "black swan" impact of the Ukraine crisis on the global economy. After five consecutive quarters of contraction, economic growth was 7.7% for the last quarter of 2021; the Asian Development Bank estimates that growth for 2022 could total 6%. Any slippage from that expectation, whether because of poor policy or circumstances beyond Manila's control will affect Marcos' public support negatively.

Foreign policy is another question mark. During his campaign he made vague promises that he would seek a midpoint between Washington and Beijing in his foreign policy, but signaled that he would [follow](#) Duterte's policy of [disregarding](#) the 2016 UNCLOS [arbitration ruling](#) in Manila's favor on the South China Sea. Although Duterte's approval ratings were the highest of any recent Filipino president, [public disapproval](#) of his policy on the South China Sea grew significantly in the last years of his term. Moreover, the Philippine defense sector is not likely to back a leader who disregards Chinese incursions into Philippine Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) or harassment of Filipino fishing vessels.

Another issue will be Marcos' response to two accountability exercises still in train. The case against Duterte in the International Criminal Court (ICC) for extrajudicial killings in his campaign against drug dealers was [suspended temporarily](#), to give Manila an opportunity to curb such excesses, but it will not go away. Marcos has said that he will keep the drug campaign but focus instead on root causes of addiction rather than apprehension of dealers. It is not clear whether this will satisfy the ICC. Another issue is the ongoing Presidential Commission on Good Governance, [launched](#) by the late President Cory Aquino, to investigate and recover government funds that may have been embezzled by the Marcos family. To date the Commission has found over \$3 billion and believes there is an even larger amount to be recovered. Abolishing the Commission outright would be difficult for Marcos without handing the political opposition a potent weapon.

In early 2022 [Malaysia](#) and [Thailand](#) approached elections that are less definitive than the Philippine polls but also with echoes of political dynasties. On April 14 the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) announced that it had selected current Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as its candidate for the upcoming general elections. The party also [terminated](#) its Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan, in which they had agreed to defer elections until the fall. The MOU had been set to expire on July 31. The announcement was a sign of UMNO's increasing confidence, as the lead party in the Barisan Nasional coalition, of reclaiming some of its historic strength. In three state elections, most recently on March 12 in Johor, UMNO won against a flagging and dispirited opposition.

However, this resurgence of Malaysia's once-dominant party includes the public reappearance of former Prime Minister Najib Razak. Still a member of Parliament, despite his [resignation](#) in 2018 during the 1MDB scandal, Najib campaigned for UMNO in Johor. Himself the son of a former prime minister, it is not clear whether he is seeking a return to power and the strengthening of his family dynasty, or a strong UMNO victory in general elections that would enable him to persuade the judiciary to drop corruption charges against him.



Figure 3 Barisan Nasional's top leaders at a press conference after the coalition won the Johor state election on March 12, 2022. The BN's victory in Johor, and in other state elections, signals renewed political strength in UMNO, the lead party in the coalition. Photo: Amir Yusof/ CNA

Although elections in Thailand are not formally required until March 2023, earlier polls are likely as Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's popularity wanes: a recent poll conducted by the National Institute for Development Administration showed that only slightly more than 12% of those surveyed would vote for him. In reality there is no clear favorite, but the poll showed that the two most significant opposition parties, Move Forward and Pheu Thai, would draw slightly more than 25%.

More interesting was the appearance of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's youngest daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, as the Pheu Thai candidate. Although both Thaksin and his daughter are coy about her possible run for election, her [appearance signals](#) the emergence of a new generation in the Shinawatra political dynasty. However, the candidacy of a family member—with Thaksin and his sister, former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, still in exile—would raise the temperature of the election and put the military on edge.

In contrast to the tumultuous politics of its neighbors, Singapore quietly signaled the approach of a critical political transition when Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong [announced](#) in a Facebook post on April 14 that Finance Minister Lawrence Wong had been chosen as the new leader of the People's Action Party's "fourth-generation team." This is widely interpreted as a signal that Wong will become the country's next prime minister, succeeding Lee. The next elections are due in 2025, but with this announcement Lee will likely move them up when he feels that Wong is sufficiently prepared

to assume his new role and political conditions are favorable for PAP.

Looking Ahead

The US-ASEAN Summit, scheduled for May 12-13, will have modest "deliverables," but it will provide a timely boost to US relations with Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, if the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework does not offer a significant role for Southeast Asia, the administration will come under increasing pressure to define and advance a US-Southeast trade agenda. This will be all the more important if new COVID variants emerge to hinder economic recovery from the pandemic in ASEAN.

Relations will be equally, if not more, challenged by the changing security environment. Growing concern from the United States and its allies over China's assertiveness—in the South China Sea; Taiwan Straits and Eastern Seas, and the South Pacific—will exert new pressure on Washington's security partners in Southeast Asia and has the potential to widen the gap between US relations with the maritime states and those on the mainland. As the conflict in Ukraine perseveres, the Biden administration will need to tailor its efforts to enlist support from Southeast Asia for its positions to the region's economic needs and relations with China.

There are no signs that the internal conflict in Myanmar will ease, much less approach reconciliation. Washington will continue to add to its sanctions list of junta and military leaders but will retain a targeted approach. ASEAN will likely reconsider the Five-Point Consensus Plan with an eye to formulating a more informal and short-term approach. Through the remainder of 2022, political transitions in Southeast Asia will loom large in the Philippines and possibly in Thailand and Malaysia, and relations with external powers could take a back seat.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

JANUARY—APRIL 2022

Jan. 1, 2022: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) [goes](#) into effect. The world's largest trade agreement, it includes Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. India [dropped out](#) of negotiations in 2021.

Jan. 7-8, 2022: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen [visits Myanmar](#), the first ASEAN head of state to do so since the February 2021 coup. He meets with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and international relief officials in the hope of jumpstarting the ASEAN Five Point Consensus Plan.

Jan. 21, 2022: Biden administration [announces](#) new sanctions on Myanmar, in concert with Canada and the UK, adding seven individuals and two entities connected to the junta to the list.

Feb. 16-17, 2022: Cambodia [hosts](#) ASEAN Foreign Ministers “retreat.” Since ASEAN member states cannot agree on representation from Naypyidaw, Myanmar is not represented.

Feb. 20 – March 5, 2022: US and Thailand [host](#) a scaled-down version of the *Cobra Gold* Exercises, with a focus on humanitarian training drills instead of traditional war games. 1,200 US and 2000 Thai troops were joined by military personnel from India, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Australia, and China. Launched in 1982, *Cobra Gold* is the longest-running multinational military exercise.

Feb. 26, 2022: ASEAN [releases](#) a joint statement on the Ukraine crisis, urging all parties to show “restraint” but not mentioning the Russian invasion of the country.

Feb. 28, 2022: Singapore [announces](#) that it will impose unilateral export controls on Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

March 14 – 15, 2022: US, Singaporean and Thai militaries [participate](#) in the 26th iteration of *Exercise Cope Tiger* at Korat Royal Air Force Base in Thailand.

March 20-23: Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn makes his first [visit](#) to Naypyidaw in his capacity as the ASEAN Special Envoy for Myanmar.

March 22, 2022 – April 8, 2022: US and Philippine Armed Forces [conduct](#) the 37th iteration of the *Balikatan* (“Shoulder-to-Shoulder”) Exercises. This year’s exercises focus on maritime security, amphibious operations, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance.

March 25, 2022: US Treasury Department [announces](#) a new tranche of sanctions against Myanmar, which include entities providing arms to the military regime. The announcement also serves as a designation that the Tatmadaw committed genocide against the Muslim Rohingya in 2017 and Karen villagers in December 2021.

March 28 – April 2, 2022: State Department Counselor Derek Chollet [visits](#) the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan to discuss regional issues, Myanmar and the crisis in Ukraine.

March 29, 2022: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong [visits](#) Washington and meets President Biden to discuss the invasion of Ukraine, China, Myanmar, and other issues of concern.

March 30, 2022: Indonesian Chief of Navy Adm. Yudo Margono makes his inaugural [visit](#) to the Pentagon and meets US Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday. Indonesia currently has two midshipmen at the US Naval Academy for the first time.

April 12-14, 2022: US and Indonesian navies [conduct](#) three days of at-sea operations in the South China Sea.

April 14, 2022: United Malays National Organization (UMNO) [announces](#) that it will put forward Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob as its candidate in general elections. The announcement all but ensures that elections will be held before the end of the year.

April 14, 2022: In a Facebook posting, Singapore Prime Minister Lee [appoints](#) Finance Minister Lawrence Wong as head of the People's Action Party (PAP), effectively anointing Wong as the next prime minister.

April 18, 2022: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Philippine Secretary of Defense Delfin Lorenzana [meet](#) at the Pentagon to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation under the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty.

April 20, 2022: Philippines and the United States [launch](#) an inaugural maritime dialogue in Manila, covering topics such as the need to strengthen a rules-based order in the South China Sea.

April 27, 2022: Former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and leader of the National League for Democracy is [sentenced](#) to five years in detention on corruption charges, adding to a previous sentence of six years. She faces other corruption charges as well as trials for violation of the Official Secrets Act.

April 30, 2022: Malaysia [recommends](#) that ASEAN open informal talks with the National Unity Government in Myanmar, to promote dialogue between the two sides of the ongoing conflict. Regime head and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing objects strenuously to the proposal.

May 9, 2022: Philippines [conducts](#) general elections and Ferdinand “Bong Bong” Marcos, Jr., is elected president with a resounding margin. Sara Duterte-Carpio, daughter of current president Rodrigo Duterte, is elected vice president.

