

# COMPARATIVE

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## C O N N E C T I O N S

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL  
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

### US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

## WASHINGTON REVS UP DIPLOMACY WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA

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The Biden administration's diplomatic campaign in Southeast Asia kicked into high gear in the late spring and continued through the summer. On May 12-13 President Biden co-hosted, with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen as the 2022 ASEAN chair, the first-ever US-ASEAN Special Summit to be [held](#) in Washington, DC. US relations in the region were also boosted when the Biden administration [launched](#) the long-awaited Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) on May 23; seven Southeast Asian countries indicated interest in joining, although few are likely to accede to all four pillars of the framework in the near-term. Two Cabinet officials made [visits](#) to two US treaty allies: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to Thailand in June and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to the Philippines in August. Notwithstanding continuing differences over human rights, the visits served to reaffirm the bilateral alliances. However, global and regional tensions remained high, over the persistent crisis in Ukraine; brinkmanship in the Taiwan Straits; and the internal conflict in Myanmar which has only deteriorated further. These pressures only divided ASEAN further as the region looks ahead to a trifecta of international meetings—APEC, East Asia Summit, and the G20—in the fall.

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Political activity was also at high levels, with elections in the Philippines; a surprise move by the Constitutional Court of Thailand to [suspend](#) Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha; and a prison sentence for former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak. In Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia and possibly Myanmar, current political dynamics will help set the stage for elections in 2023 and 2024.

### Political Transitions and Trials

The results of the presidential and vice-presidential contests in the May 9 elections in the Philippines came as no surprise, to Filipinos or the international community. Prior to the official launch of the campaign in February, polls predicted that Ferdinand “Bong Bong” Marcos, Jr., would win the presidential race and Sara Duterte-Carpio, daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, the separate vice-presidential election. The margin of victory for each closely followed the polls: Marcos won with 31 million votes, 58.7% of the vote with his main rival, current Vice President Leni Robredo, winning 27.94%. In the vice-presidential race, Sara Duterte took 61.13% of the vote; the next-highest [vote getter](#), Francis Panrilian, received 17.82%.

The 2022 elections were notable, drawing a record turnout of 82.6% of registered voters, even more remarkable because it took place during a pandemic. Marcos and Duterte were the first presidential and vice-presidential candidates to be elected by a majority since 1986 (when Cory Aquino defeated Bong Bong’s father, Ferdinand Sr.) and the first presidential ticket to win together since 2004.

Equally historic is the union of two powerful political dynasties at the top of the new administration. The need to protect these legacies will likely influence some of Marcos’ policies. In his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) on June 25, he outlined his domestic policy plans but avoided mention of the anti-drug [campaign](#) of his predecessor which, by the government’s count, has led to the deaths of over 6,000 people, although the estimates of human rights groups are much higher. However, the International Criminal Court will likely force a policy statement from Marcos: on June 24 the Court announced its intention to resume investigation into the killings.

The immediate challenge, however, is for Marcos to translate a strong mandate at the polls to approval for his administration’s early performance. His victory was due largely to his construction on social media of a “golden era” in the Philippines during his father’s rule, which often misrepresented the country’s economic state at the time. To transition to present reality, he has assembled a Cabinet, some of whom are veterans from pre-Duterte administrations. In economic policy, he has relied upon “technocrats” with experience in both government and the private sector.



Figure 1 US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. during their meeting in Malacañang on Saturday, Aug. 6, 2022. Photo: Facebook/Bongbong Marcos

### Thailand

When Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha [survived](#) his fourth no-confidence vote in Parliament in July, he was assumed to have cleared the last hurdle posed by the opposition before the next general elections, which must be held by May 2023. However, on Aug. 22 the opposition made a last stand with a petition to the Constitutional Court, arguing that Prayuth had exhausted his term limit and should be removed immediately.

Section 158 of the charter, crafted by the military regime arising from the 2014 coup, holds that a prime minister can serve eight years total and that terms need not be consecutive. The opposition petition counts back to 2014, when the coup was launched and Prayuth became the appointed prime minister. He argued that his term began in 2019, when he was selected in general elections, the first polls to be held under the new constitution. Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan has suggested that Prayuth’s term cannot be considered to have begun before 2017, when the constitution was promulgated. However, it was assumed that the

Constitutional Court would dismiss the petition out of hand.

On Aug. 24, however, the Court accepted the petition and relieved Prayuth of his responsibilities as prime minister pending a final decision. Prawit, Prayuth's fellow coup-leader and his strongest political ally, has been appointed as caretaker prime minister but Prayuth remains in the Cabinet, since he held the position of defense minister concurrently.

Prayuth's only hope of salvaging his political career is a court decision that finds his tenure as prime minister began in 2019, which would enable him to finish his current term and serve a second four-year term, if he were re-elected. If the Court adheres to the 2014 date, he will be removed permanently and Parliament will appoint a caretaker prime minister to organize new elections. If the court uses 2017 as the base, Prayuth can serve another three years, which would get him only halfway to a second term and make him a doubtful candidate in the next election.

The Court's acceptance of the petition for consideration is undeniably a victory for the opposition; however, even if Prayuth is removed immediately the result could well be another military-backed prime minister rather than the leader of an opposition party. Under the current constitution, the Senate, which is dominated by military appointees, must concur in the selection of a prime minister. However, even if the Court accepts 2019 as Prayuth's start date, he may lose the support of the military-influenced political establishment. For several months, polls have shown him to be deeply unpopular; in late August, after the opposition had submitted its petition, a survey conducted by the National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA) showed that two-thirds of respondents believed he should be removed from office immediately.

### *Malaysia*

If Prayuth was placed in limbo in August, former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's fate was more clearly defined. Najib's [appeals](#) in the criminal trial against him for embezzlement of 1MDB funds were exhausted and he was ordered to begin serving a 12-year prison term. He announced that he would seek a royal pardon, although that appears doubtful.

Najib's imprisonment complicates dynamics within the UMNO party and could influence general elections, which Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob must call by the spring of 2023. Although UMNO has been restored as the leading political party in Malaysia, its continued dominance depends upon its ability to rehabilitate its image after the 1MDB scandal. The UMNO party leader, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, is himself under a cloud of suspicion of corruption and has urged party members to support Najib's petition for a pardon. Still a member of Parliament after he was charged, Najib was active on the campaign trail this year, promoting UMNO in state elections, and his faction was gaining strength within the party. His motivation was likely the hope that by rebuilding his political base he could persuade the court to drop charges against him. With that hope now dashed, UMNO will likely go into general elections a divided party, which would hand the flagging opposition—and Anwar Ibrahim in particular—an unexpected advantage.

### **Great Power Competition Steps Up as Southeast Asia Attempts to Step Aside**

As the war in Ukraine dragged on, Southeast Asian countries held fast to their original response: deploring the continuing violence and calling on both sides to exercise restraint. Few have been willing to call out—or even mention—Russia for the February invasion and are wary of antagonizing China over the issue as well. That said, the spectrum within ASEAN ranges from Myanmar, which has strengthened relations with both China and Russia since the invasion, to the Philippines, which was the only ASEAN member to vote for the UN resolution to exclude Russia from the Human Rights Council. Also on that end of the spectrum is Singapore, which has explicitly condemned Moscow and even imposed some sanctions on Russia.

States in the middle of the ASEAN spectrum are more conflicted. In recent years, Vietnam had rekindled its relationship with Russia in part to help reduce the threat of China to energy exploration and extraction activities in the Vietnamese Exclusive Economic Zone. Russia is also Vietnam's primary arms supplier. More broadly, Russia has traditionally been one of Southeast Asia's top arms vendors.

Indonesia exemplifies the dilemma that the Ukraine war presents to the economies of

Southeast Asia. Indonesia buys most of its imported wheat from Ukraine, for production of noodles and cereal, and is dependent upon both Ukraine and Russia for imports of cooking oil. Jakarta's reluctance to criticize Russia publicly is due not only to the economic costs but also because there is a high degree of support for Russia in the Indonesian public. However, in salvaging economic relations with Moscow, Southeast Asian countries worry that they could be subject to Western sanctions against Russia.

Beyond domestic economic and political issues, Indonesia's image as a leader on the global stage is also impacted by the war. Jakarta has resisted pressure from the West to refuse an invitation to Vladimir Putin to [attend](#) the G20 Summit in Bali in November but has issued a special invitation to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Both Putin and Zelensky have said they will attend, as has Chinese President Xi Jinping. The economic and diplomatic impact of the Ukraine crisis led President Joko Widodo to [visit](#) Ukraine and Russia in late June, to propose a "grain corridor" to ease food shipments and to stabilize other key commodities such as fertilizer.

Southeast Asian leaders faced an equally complex, but more lethal, balancing act in their response to the heightened tensions in the Taiwan Straits in August. The ASEAN Regional Forum in Phnom Penh coincided with the [visit](#) to Taipei of the US Congressional delegation led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. On Aug. 3 the ASEAN Foreign Ministers issued a statement on the situation which called upon all parties to exercise restraint and avoid provocation, and which expressed member states' support for the One-China Policy.

However, the region is bracing for intensified US-China rivalry. In August China and Thailand [conducted](#) an iteration of the *Falcon Strike* air force exercises, while officers from Indonesia and the United States and a dozen other armed forces—including Japan for the first time—participated in *Super Garuda Shield* [exercises](#). Military training exercises in Southeast Asia that include the US military are increasingly multilateral, while those involving China tend to be bilateral. Although Southeast Asian countries will continue to balance relations with the US and with China, insisting that bloc behavior raises the threat level in the region, on an informal basis some states appear to see greater safety in numbers in balancing against the China threat.

## Big Deliverables: Summit and The Framework

The US-ASEAN Special Summit in May in Washington did not produce notable new "deliverables," other than the Summit itself. Nine ASEAN member states attended—Myanmar declined to send a "politically neutral" representative and so did not participate—although only 8 leaders were present. Then-President Rodrigo Duterte begged off, insisting that a lame duck president should not attend, and Manila was represented by Teodoro Locsin, Jr., foreign secretary at the time. Some leaders complained that the summit lacked the retreat atmosphere of the Sunnylands US-ASEAN Summit with then-President Barack Obama in 2016; however, they benefitted from the Washington location and met Vice President Kamala Harris and other Cabinet officials, as well as members of Congress.

The Special Summit created greater pressure upon the administration to [release](#) the long-promised Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). On May 23 the IPEF was unveiled, although in the preceding weeks informal discussions with target countries had lined up an initial slate of members. IPEF is a complex but opaque undertaking, designed to address short-term issues such as supply chain shortages but also billed as a far-reaching "rules of the road" for trade, investment and other economic relations.

The Framework is comprised of four "pillars"—trade (which includes digital trade); supply chain coordination; infrastructure and clean energy; and tax and anti-corruption issues. The pillars are stand-alone: members may choose those in which they will participate, but they must sign onto all the provisions of that pillar. IPEF is not a comprehensive agreement, although most of the advanced countries will doubtless participate in all four pillars. IPEF is expected to contain a digital trade agreement within the trade pillar; the administration resisted pressure to negotiate one outside the framework, despite the growing importance of the digital economy. Negotiations among IPEF began this summer and are estimated to wind up in late 2023.

At the launch, the IPEF included seven Southeast Asian entrants: Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and Brunei. If these members have a common complaint, it is that IPEF will not be a



multilateral trade agreement and so will not offer greater market access. The IPEF therefore lacks a major “carrot” to soften the “sticks” of demands for structural reforms that the trade pillar will likely contain. As a result, some Southeast Asian countries—such as Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia—will likely sign up for the supply chain and infrastructure pillars first. Regional leaders have also expressed nervousness that the IPEF is grounded only in executive action and lacks the guarantees of law that a formal trade agreement requiring Congressional approval would offer. They fear that the framework could be easily abandoned by the next administration. Despite these drawbacks, the IPEF offers the prospect of deeper economic engagement with the United States in a more systematic way than has been the case in recent years.

### **Rebooting the Alliances**

Within the Biden administration’s current outreach to Southeast Asia is a particular focus on shoring up relations with the two US treaty allies in the region, the Philippines and Thailand. This is in keeping with the administration’s focus on relations with allies, but it also addresses perceptions in some quarters in Manila and Bangkok that Washington lavished more attention on more recent security partners in the region, particularly Singapore and Vietnam, than on its traditional allies.

Washington has multiple reasons for stepping up attention to the Philippines. The return of the Marcos dynasty to power brings added complications to the relationship, a hurdle that the administration seemed determine to clear as quickly as possible. President Biden was the first leader to make a congratulatory phone call to Marcos following his election. When she visited Manila in June, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman reassured Marcos that his status as head of state [gave](#) him immunity, and that he would be “welcome” to enter the United States as a result. (In 2012 the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit issued a contempt judgement against Marcos and his mother Imelda for violating an injunction that barred them from dissipating assets of the estate of Ferdinand Marcos, Sr., that had been earmarked to pay damages to human rights victims of martial law during his administration. The judgement also prohibited both Marcos’ from entering US territory.)

Apart from fence-mending, the administration seeks to clarify Marcos’ policy on China, an issue he scarcely mentioned during the campaign and one he neglected to mention in his first State of the Nation Address in July. Marcos was believed to favor a close relationship with China, but one that was more balanced with Philippines relations with the United States. However, concern over China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea and growing concern in the Philippine public over the government’s response will make such balance elusive. Just days before leaving office President Duterte implicitly acknowledged this when he ended talks with Beijing on joint exploration of oil and gas in the South China Sea, [negotiations](#) that had been ongoing since 2018.

Mounting tensions in the Taiwan Straits will give the Philippines greater salience in US security policy in the region. Marcos himself referenced this when he met with Secretary of State Blinken in Manila in early August and remarked that the “volatile” situation “points to the...importance of the relationship between the United States and the Philippines.” If conflict in the Straits intensifies and spreads, there is little chance that the Philippines will not be affected, with refugee flows; the rapid return of overseas workers; and even the spread of conflict to Philippine territorial waters. Moreover, the United States could look to the Philippines for access if it mounts a military response to a mainland attack on Taiwan.

Apart from the risk of conflict in Taiwan, China’s maritime actions in the South China Sea against Philippine vessels are unlikely to abate. During his visit, Blinken reaffirmed the US commitment to the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty and to working with Manila on “shared challenges.”

### *Thailand*

Remedial attention from Washington to Bangkok, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, is no less necessary, although unlike the Philippines it is not driven by a direct security threat to Thailand. The US-Thailand alliance has been adrift for decades, initially because the end of the Vietnam War dismantled the nine joint bases on Thai territory, and more recently because military coups in Bangkok—in 1991, 2006, and 2014—required the US to restrict security assistance by law.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [visited](#) Bangkok in mid-June, following the Shangri-La Security Dialogue in Singapore, followed by a visit from Secretary of State Blinken in July. Both met with Prime Minister Prayuth. During his visit Austin announced that the *Cobra Gold* exercises, co-hosted by the United States and Thailand, would return to full strength in 2023, having been downgraded after the 2014 coup, and that space and cyber cooperation would be introduced into the exercises. Blinken signed a US-Thailand Communique on Strategic Alliance and Partnership which covered cooperation over a sweeping range of issues, from [combatting](#) trafficking to fighting climate change, although it was silent on conventional security threats. However, it is likely those threats and Thailand's growing security relations with China through the expansion of joint exercises and large-scale purchases such as submarines, have prompted the administration to revitalize the alliance.



*Figure 2 Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin meets Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha during his visit to Bangkok on June 12-13, 2022. Photo: US Indo-Pacific Command*

### The “Other” Southeast Asia

The current IPEF membership begins and ends with the seven Southeast Asian countries that have the deepest relations with the United States. Despite a robust attempt to increase engagement, US influence is uneven across the region, particularly in mainland Southeast Asia. China views mainland Southeast Asia as its geostrategic “backyard,” and Beijing’s influence in three countries in particular—Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—has grown in recent years. The poorest and least developed countries in Southeast Asia, all three are Mekong countries and two share land borders with China. Moreover, the human rights

situations in each country have created political distance from the West, particularly in Myanmar following the February 2021 coup. Although the internal conflict arising from the coup poses a threat to Chinese interests, particularly the safety and function of its energy pipelines, both Beijing and Moscow have moved into the vacuum created by Western withdrawal and sanctions.

In Myanmar there continues to be no sign of softening on either the military or the opposition side, much less the political will to seek a resolution to the internal conflict. The opposition National Unity Government (NUG) maintains that it controls over 50% of Myanmar’s territory and that the Tatmadaw has less than 20%, with the remainder in contention; these figures cannot be verified. The junta has control of the state apparatus but is unable to gain recognition from the international community, except for Russia and, indirectly, China. The NUG as well does not have diplomatic recognition, although Western countries are increasing contact with the opposition group.

ASEAN continues to be divided over Myanmar. The ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan, developed in the spring of 2021, has made little, if any, dent in the conflict. Malaysia continues to advocate for greater engagement with—but not necessarily official recognition—of the NUG. Cambodia, the current ASEAN chair, is pressing to mobilize humanitarian assistance that has arrived in the country but remains in warehouses. Phnom Penh favors distributing this assistance through the military but there is no consensus on that.

The junta appears ready to push the issue of legitimacy by promising elections in August 2023. By then Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior NLD leaders in detention should be safely sidelined with long prison sentences following multiple secret trials each: to date, the 77-year-old former State Counselor has been sentenced to a total of 20 years (three of which come with hard labor) and will likely receive additional time. The regime has announced new regulations that forbid political parties to have contact with foreigners or international organizations without prior permission from the Union Election Commission (UEC) or risk having the party dissolved. But the most sobering sign that the military has no intention of yielding power to another civilian democratic

order was the execution in July of 4 pro-democracy activists who had been convicted of “treason” because of political [activities](#). The government indicated that it may execute as many as 40 more activists in the coming months; over 100 activists are presently on death row.

While Myanmar has been in a downward spiral, Laos has suffered an economic one. In June Moody’s Investment Service [downgraded](#) Vientiane’s rating as a currency issuer from Caa2 to Caa3, referencing Laos’ “very high debt burden and insufficient coverage of external debt maturities by foreign exchange reserves.” The World Bank reported that Laos’ total public and publicly guaranteed debt reached 88% of GDP in 2021 at \$14.5 billion, roughly half of which was owed to China for large-scale infrastructure projects. Laos is at risk for default, although the government is determined to avoid that through various strategies, foremost of which is negotiation of its debt with China. Beijing is historically averse to lowering interest rates and other forms of debt relief, but Beijing may do so to prevent its competitors in the region, who fear Laos falling into a “debt trap” with China like that in Sri Lanka, from stepping in.

Although China is an increasingly central player in the Laotian economy, it is not Laos’ most important economic partner. That top slot goes to Thailand. In 2021, Laos-Thailand trade amounted to \$5.18 billion, against \$3.47 billion in trade with China. Bilateral trade with Vietnam was \$1.71 billion. Moreover, Laos’ two most important economic partners in Southeast Asia have additional advantages over China. Thailand has strong cultural, linguistic, and religious ties with Laos and, because of the similarities in language, is an important destination for Lao migrant labor and education. Vietnam has strong party-to-party relations, although those are fading as the revolutionary generations in both countries die out.

US-Laos economic relations have expanded since the Bilateral Trade Act of 2004 went into effect, raising the level of trade from \$14 million in 2004 to \$251 million in 2021. Washington included Laos in the circuit of high-level diplomatic travel this summer when Deputy Secretary of State Sherman [visited](#) in June. However, barriers such as transportation costs make it unlikely that trade with the United States will be a major driver in the Laotian

economy: in the near-term the race for influence in Laos will remain with Thailand, China, and Vietnam.



Figure 3 Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman helps to complete a mural at the US Embassy in Vientiane during her visit to Laos on June 10, 2022. Photo: US Department of State/Public Domain

### Looking Ahead

There is little to suggest that the external and regional tensions that erode ASEAN unity and challenge the economies of individual Southeast Asian states will ease in the remainder of 2022. On the contrary, with three high-profile summits in region in November, these tensions will likely increase, if only because rhetorical battles between China and Russia on one hand and the West on the other will continue. However, the mid-term fundamentals are more encouraging: possibility of closer US–Southeast Asian trade relations through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework; negotiation of a US–ASEAN comprehensive strategic partnership; and closer cooperation on clean energy through bilateral mechanisms and through multilateral means such as the Quad and the G7. When Jakarta assumes the ASEAN chair for 2023 it will build upon its history as a strong ASEAN leader, although Myanmar’s continued political and economic deterioration will present ASEAN with the challenge of having a failed state within its membership.

The course of US–Philippine relations will have particular significance as a test case for balancing growing security concerns with issues of human rights and good governance, a situation Washington will likely face with several Southeast Asian partners in the near future. Moreover, as the administration seeks to strengthen relations with countries in the region, it may find that they are turning

increasingly inward with internal politics, particularly in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.



# CHRONOLOGY OF US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

## MAY—AUGUST 2022

**May 9, 2022:** General elections are [held](#) in the Philippines, with victories for Ferdinand “Bong-Bong” Marcos, Jr., as president and Sara Duterte as vice president, both by sizable margins.

**May 12–13, 2022:** US–ASEAN Special Summit is held in Washington, DC., [bringing](#) together 9 of the 10 ASEAN states, with Myanmar not invited. It is the first US bilateral summit with ASEAN to be held in the capital.

**May 15, 2022:** Indonesian President Joko Widodo, in the United States for the US–ASEAN Special Summit, [visits](#) Texas to meet Elon Musk at the SpaceX Launch Center. Indonesia hopes to attract investment from Tesla for its aerospace program. Jokowi invites Musk to visit Indonesia in November.

**May 22, 2022:** Elections in Thailand are held for the governor of Bangkok, the first gubernatorial race since 2013. Chadehart Sittipunt, a former transportation minister in the administration of Yingluck Shinawatra, [runs](#) as an independent candidate and wins.

**May 23, 2022:** President Biden [launches](#) the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in Tokyo, on the heels of the G7.

**June 5, 2022:** Cambodia [holds](#) communal elections, the first polls in a political cycle that will culminate in national elections in 2023. Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) wins, but by a margin—80%—that was lower than expected.

**June 5–14, 2022:** Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman [travels](#) to the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, Vietnam and Laos.

**June 10–12, 2022:** Shangri-La Dialogue [reconvenes](#) in Singapore, after a hiatus of three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**June 12–13, 2022:** Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [visits](#) Thailand, his first trip to the country in his current role.

**June 14, 2022:** Moody’s Investment Service downgrades the Laotian Government’s long-term local and foreign currency issuer ratings from Caa2 to Caa3, [changing](#) the outlook from stable to negative. The shift is based on Laos’ high level of debt, nearly half of which is owed to China, and institutional and governmental weaknesses that compound the situation.

**June 15, 2022:** Opposition parties in the Thai Parliament [enter](#) a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and several of his Cabinet members. This is the 4th attempt by the opposition to remove Prayuth in the current legislative term.

**June 24, 2022:** President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte [orders](#) an end to talks with China over joint oil and gas explorations in the South China Sea. Negotiations under a 2018 agreement with Beijing had failed to temper China’s actions in the Philippines’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

**June 24, 2022:** Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court [signals](#) that he will reopen the investigation into the killings and other suspected human rights violations connection to Philippines President Duterte’s anti-drug campaign. The court had suspended the investigation in December 2021, responding to a request from the Philippine government, which maintained that its own investigation into the killings would suffice.

**June 27–30, 2022:** Indonesian President Joko Widodo [visits](#) Ukraine and Russia, the first Asian leader to do so since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February.

**June 30, 2022:** Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., is [inaugurated](#) as president of the Philippines and Sara Duterte as vice president.

**July 10, 2022:** On the heels of the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Bali, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken [visits](#) Thailand and meets Prime Minister Chan-ocha as well as his counterpart, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai.

**July 13-14, 2022:** 13-member group of nations in IPEF hold first senior officials [meeting](#) in Singapore.

**July 20, 2022:** State Department releases 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP). Vietnam, Cambodia, and Brunei are placed in Tier-3, the lowest category, [joining](#) Malaysia and Myanmar in the tier. In Southeast Asia, only the Philippines and Singapore receive a Tier 1 rating.

**July 22, 2022:** International Court of Justice [determines](#) that it has jurisdiction over a petition brought by The Gambia against Myanmar for genocide against Muslim Rohingya, and that it will try the case.

**July 23, 2022:** Thai PM Chan-ocha [survives](#) the 4th no-confidence vote against him.

**July 25, 2022:** Military regime in Myanmar [executes](#) four pro-democracy activists it had convicted on charges of “terrorism” because of their political activities in secret trials. Regime officials indicate they are prepared to execute as many as 40 more activists in the near future; more than 100 activists under detention have been sentenced to death.

**July 30, 2022:** Ministerial Regulation 5 goes into effect in Indonesia, which requires social media platforms and other internet entities to [register](#) with the government and to remove user data at the government’s request.

**Aug. 5, 2022:** ASEAN [holds](#) 29th ASEAN Regional Forum in Phnom Penh, which gives rise to the US-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and other bilateral ministerial between ASEAN and its external partners.

**Aug. 5-6, 2022:** Secretary of State Blinken [visits](#) the Philippines following the ASEAN Regional Forum in Cambodia and meets with President Marcos.

**Aug. 11, 2022:** Military regime in Myanmar [announces](#) that political parties will not be permitted to have contact with foreigners or international organizations without prior permission from the Union Election Commission (UEC).

**Aug. 11-15, 2022:** Adm. John C. Aquilino, commander of US Indo-Pacific Command, visits Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In Indonesia he [attends](#) *Super Garuda Shield 22* exercises.

**Aug. 14, 2022:** Thailand and China [open](#) 10-day *Falcon Strike* air force exercises based at Udorn Royal Thai Air Base.

**Aug. 15, 2022:** Vietnam issues Decree 53/2022/ND-CP which requires internet companies to [store](#) data onshore; open representative offices in-country; and remove data from the internet that the government deems harmful.

**Aug. 22, 2022:** Opposition parties in the Thai Parliament [submit](#) petition to the Constitutional Court of Thailand requesting that the court remove PM Chan-ocha from office because he has exhausted his 8-year term limit. On Aug. 24 the Court accepts the petition and suspends Prayuth from his responsibilities as prime minister until a decision on the petition is reached. Prayuth remains in the Cabinet, however, as defense minister.

**Aug. 23, 2022:** Former Malaysian Prime Minister Razak Najib fails to win appeal in his criminal case and [begins](#) 12-year prison sentence for involvement in the 1MDB scandal. Najib announces his intention to seek a royal pardon.

**Aug. 30, 2022:** United States and Vietnam [hold](#) 9th Asia-Pacific Dialogue in Washington, DC, co-chaired by State Department Assistant Secretary for East Asia Daniel Krittenbrink and Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Minh Vu.