

# COMPARATIVE

---

## 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

## EXTERNAL ORDER, INNER TURMOIL

CATHARIN DALPINO, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

In November three ASEAN states—Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand—drew favorable marks for their chairmanship of high-profile regional and global meetings: the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Leaders Meeting; the G20 Summit; and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting, respectively. Helming these meetings was particularly challenging for Southeast Asian leaders—who are naturally inclined to avoid strong alignments with external powers—in the current global environment of heightened tensions between the United States and China in the Taiwan Strait and the war in Ukraine. However, the year was a difficult period for ASEAN internally, with uneven economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the intractable conflict in Myanmar. The last quarter of 2022 saw two political shifts in the region: in general elections in Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim achieved a longstanding ambition to become prime minister but will have to manage a difficult coalition to retain power. At the year’s end, Laos changed prime ministers, but it is not clear if the transition will solve the country’s debt problems, which were revealed to be more dire than estimated.

---

This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections*: A Triannual E-Journal of Bilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific, Vol. 24, No. 3, January 2023. Preferred citation: Catharin Dalpino, “US-Southeast Asia Relations: External Order, Inner Turmoil,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp 71-80.

## ASEAN's Diplomatic Spotlight

At the beginning of 2022, the three chairs of the November summits no doubt harbored hopes that the fall events would showcase progress that ASEAN had made over the challenges of 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic had come late to the region; in the spring of 2021 Southeast Asia had become a global hotspot of the virus. By mid-2022 the region had largely re-opened and, although still lagging pre-pandemic growth rates, the economy was again in the positive column. Indonesian President Joko Widodo drafted an agenda for the G20, which Jakarta would chair for the first time, that focused on trade, investment, and climate change assistance from the West that would.

Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha envisioned a similar agenda, focused on the Indo-Pacific region; moreover, facing re-election with low approval ratings, Prayuth was in need of a boost to his international image. Hun Sen had little hope that the conflict in Myanmar would end in 2022 but hoped that ASEAN, with Cambodian leadership, could have some impact on the situation with the Five-Point Consensus Plan agreed upon in April 2022. Above all, the three summits, tightly choreographed to enable world leaders to hop easily from one to another in less than a week, would enable Southeast Asia to act as a diplomatic fulcrum, if only temporarily.

Many of these hopes were dashed with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February and, to a lesser extent, a crisis in the Taiwan Strait in August. For the first half of the year international attention was focused primarily on the war in Ukraine. Southeast Asia felt its impact in new divisions among regional powers; the global energy crisis; supply chain disruptions; and higher fuel and food prices in the region. Jakarta in particular came under pressure from the West to refuse an invitation to the G20 summit to Vladimir Putin, presumably the first step to expelling Russia from the group, a proposal that Beijing predictably opposed. The situation in Taiwan caused all three leaders to fear confrontation between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden at the meetings.

By the fall it was clear that ASEAN had made no progress in mitigating the conflict in Myanmar; the ASEAN Leaders Meeting in November was attended by nine of the 10 member states: by then

it had become common practice for ASEAN to request that Naypyidaw send “politically neutral” representatives to ASEAN meetings and for the military regime to refuse to participate.

Despite these considerable obstacles, the three meetings had a series of successes. Although Putin had been invited to all three, he attended none and sent Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in his place. US-China tensions were evident, but a meeting between Biden and Xi on the margins of the G20 in Bali, Biden's first in-person [meeting](#) with Xi since his inauguration in 2021, calmed Southeast Asian nerves about great power rivalry for a brief time.

Joko and Prayuth were able to salvage their economic agendas by the skillful [negotiation](#) of leaders' consensus statements, which took full note of the profound impact the Ukraine crisis exerted on the international community without listing too far in any one direction. The APEC statement said that “most members” condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine but that “there were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions.”

Although the East Asia Summit and its adjacent bilateral [meetings](#) paid due attention to the ongoing crisis in Myanmar, Phnom Penh was lauded for organizing the first major in-person summit in the region since the start of the pandemic and was able to advance ASEAN relations with its external partners in some cases. The United States and ASEAN finalized the US-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Included in the statement was the Biden administration's intention to seek approval from Congress to classify ASEAN as an international organization, which would give the group full diplomatic recognition and enable it to [open](#) an embassy in Washington. Biden accrued a small amount of “soft power” when he attended the Cambodian meetings while Xi and Putin did not, but Bangkok was disappointed that he left the region before the APEC meeting, passing the baton to Vice President Kamala Harris to represent the US.

ASEAN was also able to agree at the November Leaders Meeting to a future expansion. East Timor was granted admission “in principle” as the 11th ASEAN member and will [participate](#) in the group as an observer until its formal ascension. Indonesia, which is nervous about having a smaller state on its perimeter that could be a target for Chinese attention, is anxious to

admit Dili as soon as possible. However, some members worry about the impact on ASEAN economic integration of admitting another poor country. The earliest that East Timor is given full admission is likely to be 2025, after Laos chairs ASEAN in 2024 and when the chair rotates to Malaysia.



Figure 1 President Biden takes a selfie with labor officials on the margins of the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on Nov. 13, 2022. Photo: Twitter/@POTUS

### ASEAN's Albatross

In the closing months of 2022, the conflict in Myanmar showed no openings for reconciliation and no indication that ASEAN could play a significant role in it. Cambodia's modest ambition to get humanitarian assistance flowing, one provision of the Five-Point Plan, had sputtered and ultimately failed. By October then-Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah renewed his calls for ASEAN engagement with the opposition National Unity Government and recommended that the junta be excluded from the November ASEAN Leaders Meeting.

Since July, the military regime had adopted the [practice](#) of executing high-profile protest leaders, usually educated and younger members of the resistance. Human rights groups believe that the junta's list of death sentences presently has 130 names. In October the military [conducted](#) an aerial bombing of an ethnic community event in Kachin State, killing an estimated 100 people. By year's end, NLD leader and former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi had received convictions and prison sentences over a range of charges that, if implemented, could keep the 77-year-old in detention for 33 years.

Although the West continues to support the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan for Myanmar, there is little optimism that it can be operationalized in the near-term. The junta's apparent strategy is to seek creeping normalization of its regime with the regional group, specifically the other countries of mainland Southeast Asia. Prime Minister and Armed Forces Commander Min Aung Hlaing continues to hold out the possibility of elections in the summer of 2023, which would likely be confined to military-backed parties. He calculates that the authoritarian ASEAN states, and possibly Thailand, would accept the outcome of the polls.

In mid-December Bangkok appeared to second that notion when the government organized a "non-ASEAN" [meeting](#) on the crisis in Myanmar inviting junta officials and the foreign ministers of other ASEAN members. Only Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia sent officials; the other ASEAN states declined. The Bangkok meeting invited comparisons to ASEAN's "cocktail party" approach to ending the Cambodian civil war in the late 1980s, before the United Nations assumed responsibility for the transition. ASEAN employed a division of labor, in which member countries were responsible for bringing different factions and their external patrons to the negotiating table.

If ASEAN were to apply this model to Myanmar, Thailand would presumably be the primary contact for the junta, while Indonesia and Malaysia handled the National Unity Government. However, the differences between the two wars are greater than the similarities. The Cambodian civil war was highly internationalized, and forging agreement among the external sponsors was the primary task. Despite China's and Russia's stronger relations with Naypyidaw since the 2021 coup, the conflict in Myanmar is internally driven and neither the military nor the NUG shows willingness to consider a shift in its position.

The United States and other Western countries continue to support the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan as the centerpiece of their Myanmar policies. In the last quarter, Washington added sanctions, tailored to shifts in the conflict and targeting direct participants. These targets included arms dealers who helped sell Russian weapons to the Tatmadaw and an aircraft company that supports the military with equipment for its aerial bombings.

However, in the last quarter of 2023 the United States made two policy shifts toward Myanmar. On Dec. 8, the State Department [announced](#) that it would downgrade relations with Myanmar by not replacing the US Ambassador to Naypyidaw Thomas Vadja when he left his post at the end of 2022. The Embassy will be led by Deputy Chief of Mission Deborah Lynn, acting as Chargé d’Affaires. This is a soft form of de-recognition but not a complete break of diplomatic relations and was a strategy that Washington employed in the 1990s and 2000s when Aung San Suu Kyi was in detention. Washington will likely return an ambassador to Myanmar if and when a free and fair election is conducted, although the exact terms for this were not spelled out. The US was not the first to use attrition as a means of de-recognition since the 2021 coup: Germany, Italy, Australia, Canada, and South Korea have also done so.

In addition, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, passed by Congress in mid-December, not only broadens the authority for the administration to [apply](#) sanctions to the military and its supporters but also to provide non-lethal aid to the National Unity Government and other quarters of the resistance. This is not a formal call to recognize the NUG but implicitly encourages the administration to engage more deeply with the opposition.

### Washington Expands a Critical Alliance

Following the APEC meeting in Thailand, Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Manila to meet with President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., and to visit Palawan, the Philippine island that faces the South China Sea. Just prior to Harris’s arrival the Pentagon announced that it would earmark \$65 million to help the Philippines refurbish several military bases under the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which authorizes access for US forces to locations in the Philippines on a rotational basis. The new projects will expand the Pentagon’s “flexible basing” in the region, adding new EDCA sites in Palawan in Cagayan, which faces Taiwan. Harris also signaled that negotiations to allow civil nuclear cooperation would commence.

The selection of the new EDCA sites represents a leap in bilateral cooperation in the US-Philippines alliance. It also signals that, in security matters at least, Marcos intends to move more closely to Washington; former President Rodrigo Duterte episodically attempted to stall

and disrupt EDCA and even at one point tried to terminate the VFA. However, Marcos is determined to balance the Philippines’ relations with the United States and with China and by year’s end he had announced that he would make his first state visit to Beijing in January.

Marcos envisions a division of labor in which Washington is a close security ally but Beijing is a major provider of infrastructure investment. To that end, he has conducted talks with China on reviving three rail projects under the Belt and Road Initiative that had lapsed in the Duterte era for lack of financing. However, this separation may not suit either the United States or China. At the urging of the US government, US companies purchased sites around Subic Bay that Chinese companies had planned to acquire.

Nor is there any indication that closer economic relations would change Chinese behavior in the South China Sea. Despite friendly rhetoric between Beijing and Manila on economic relations, in December PRC vessels, described in a State Department statement as “escalating swarms,” menaced Filipino vessels in the vicinity of Iroquois Reef and Shabina Shoal in the Spratlys. Moreover, there is little doubt that the EDCA expansion will antagonize Beijing.



Figure 2 US Marines with Battalion Landing Team 2/5, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, and Philippine Marines return to the Amphibious Transport Dock USS New Orleans (LPD 18) in October during KAMANDAG 6, in the Philippine Sea. Photo: US Marine Corps/Cpl. Yvonne Iwae

### Decarbonizing the Region (One Country at a Time)

The global energy crisis, combined with the increasing severity of natural disasters around

the world, raised international awareness of the urgency of transitioning to cleaner energy sources. This awareness is particularly acute in Southeast Asia. For the past two decades, energy demand in the region (averaging 5% per year) has exceeded economic growth (an annual average of 5.7%). This discrepancy will only grow as Southeast Asian middle classes expand and with them the demand for energy. These realities are revisited annually at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP), last year in October at COP17 in Sharm-El-Sheik, Egypt.

Southeast Asia is one of the most beleaguered regions in terms of climate change disasters; the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar are placed in the top 10 most vulnerable in the world.

Nine of the 10 Southeast Asian countries have set targets under the Paris Agreement to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 to meet the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change target of keeping the rise in temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. (The Philippines is the only ASEAN country that has not committed to a net-zero target.) However, emissions will continue to climb, reaching a peak in 2029, before they begin dropping by 2041. This calls into question whether the goals set by the region's governments are achievable by 2050.

Approximately 75% of Southeast Asia's electricity supply comes from fossil fuels, and coal makes up roughly 50% of that. Coal remains the dominant fuel in the region, and since the early 2010s, the pace of Southeast Asia's coal power expansion has been among the fastest in the world. The region aims to have 23% of its primary energy supplied by renewables by 2025, but that goal is likely unrealistic. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimates that Southeast Asian nations would need to more than double their investments in renewable energy to meet it.

With this in mind, in the final months of 2022 Indonesia and Vietnam engaged with multilateral institutions to embark on long-term plans to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels. Indonesia is the top polluter from carbon-based fuels in the region and the world's 8th-largest emitter; it is also a top exporter of thermal coal. Carbon emissions are expected to increase in the country by roughly 25% until 2030. Vietnam is the second-biggest polluter in Southeast Asia.

Under the umbrella of the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) concept that emerged from COP26 in 2021, in November the Asian Development Bank [announced](#) that it would refinance and then prematurely retire the Cirebon 1 coal-fired power plant in West Java in Indonesia, which provides some power to Jakarta. Climate change experts estimate that the deal could remove as much as 30 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions over a 15-year period, the equivalent of taking 800,000 cars off the road. In December the G7 announced it would pledge \$15.5 billion to help Vietnam transition away from coal through a similar process. The agreement aims to enable Vietnam to source 47% of its power from renewable energy by 2030.

The JETP approach is controversial because of its central paradox: to reduce reliance on coal the program first guarantees its production for several years. However, supporters of the program argue that economic, social, and infrastructure issues will all affect a transition away from Southeast Asian dependence on coal and will need time to resolve, and that JETP builds those realities into the program.

### Political Trends and Transitions

Although the outcome of the Nov. 19 elections in Malaysia was not immediately clear, the polls eventually delivered the country's first elected prime minister in two years. Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the multi-ethnic Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition and of the People's Justice Party (PKR) achieved a decades-long ambition and was sworn in as Malaysia's 10th prime minister. The election also marked Anwar's emergence at last from the shadow of the legendary former Prime Minister Mahathir: losing election for his parliamentary seat, the 96-year-old Mahathir retired from politics to write a book.

However, resolution of the Nov. 19 polls shed light on the continued divisiveness in Malaysian politics. The election results left a hung parliament, with the PH winning a plurality of 83 of 222 seats. Anwar cobbled together a "unity" coalition that included former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition, which received the second-highest number of votes; and UMNO and the Barisan National coalition, which came in third.

It will be a challenge for Anwar to keep this coalition together, while Malaysia's

longstanding Islamist party, the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), presents a challenge of a different nature. PAS is the dominant party within Muhyiddin's PN coalition and made a stronger showing than expected; moreover, it won more votes than any single party, including Anwar's PKR. PAS has never held national power, but when it won majorities in two northern states in 1999 it attempted to impose *sharia* law in those states, for both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, but the system of government is secular rather than theocratic; if PAS were to win a national election, it could attempt to change the constitution to [remove](#) the firewall between civil and religious law. PAS's strong showing in the November elections and the Indonesian Parliament's revision of the country's Criminal Code in December, which criminalizes adultery and imposes other social restrictions, raises fears of a new surge of Islamism in the region.

#### *Thailand*

Thailand's Election Commission has set polls for May 2023, but movements among the political parties in Parliament could force Prayuth to call an early election. On Sept. 30 the Constitutional Court ruled that Prayuth's must leave office no later in 2025, because he will have exhausted the eight years permitted to serve as prime minister, but he is likely to run for re-election even though his tenure would be curtailed.

In preparation for his final campaign, in December Prayuth left his political base, the Phalang Pracharath Party (PPRP), and allied himself with the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party, a new party that was likely created with Prayuth's jump in mind. Reportedly, 94 PPRP Members of Parliament are ready to move to Ruam Thai with Prayuth. Phalang Pracharat may run Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan, co-leader with Prayuth in the 2014 coup, as their candidate for prime minister in the [election](#). Although this would pit the two former allies against one another, Prayuth and Prawit are likely to end up in the same coalition after the election, to keep the military's influence in politics strong. Regardless, the split could advantage the opposition and even tilt the election toward the opposition Pheu Thai Party, the party of the Shinawatra family. However, Thai politics are extremely fluid, and even if elections are called ahead of May 2023, all the main players will keep their options open.

#### *Cambodia*

As Cambodia looks ahead to general elections in July, Prime Minister Hun Sen has signaled that he may step down after general elections in July 2023, which his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) will inevitably win. If he does, his son, 44-year-old Armed Forces Commander Hun Manet, will likely become prime minister, with Hun Sen maintaining a senior advisor role. Hun Manet has already been acknowledged by the CPP as Hun Sen's political heir, but the succession process had been assumed for 2028.

Hun Sen has several reasons to move the succession up four years. He is in a relatively strong position at this point, having chaired ASEAN in 2022. The CPP won local elections this year but its vote share (80%) was less than expected; a successful transfer of power to Hun Manet would underscore the stability of the CPP to the Cambodian public and the international community and head off challenges to Hun Sen's supremacy within the party.

#### *Laos*

On Dec. 30, Laotian Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh [resigned](#) and was replaced by Deputy Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone. The 72-year-old Phankham had come under increasing criticism from the party for his handling of the country's twin crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and the debt crisis that has pushed Laos close to default. In October the World Bank calculated that Vientiane's debt obligations to China, primarily loans for the China-Lao Rail Line, were greater than originally estimated and that the country's total debt could exceed annual GDP. Phankham had been unsuccessful in persuading Beijing to defer the debt or lower the interest rate. Sonexay will come under intense pressure—from the party as well as from Laos' Southeast Asian neighbors—to mitigate the debt crisis and avoid pushing Laos into a Chinese "debt trap." In addition to this domestic pressure, the new prime minister must prepare to assume the ASEAN chair in 2024 when it rotates to Laos from Indonesia.



Figure 3 Anwar Ibrahim emerges victorious in the Nov. 19 elections after smaller blocs agree to back him to form a unity government. Photo: John Shen Lee/AP Photo

### Looking Ahead

In the first quarter of 2023 Jakarta will show its broader plan for ASEAN during its tenure as the year's chair. There is no reason to believe that this timeframe will be sufficient for ASEAN to make an impact in the Myanmar conflict, but Indonesia will signal whether the group will continue on the path of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan or make a major mid-course correction. However, Jakarta will avoid the issue of official recognition of one side over another in Myanmar, as will the international community; in all likelihood, the first ASEAN Summit of the year, in the spring, will see the Myanmar chair empty.

As Anwar Ibrahim attempts to stabilize his coalition in Malaysia, Thailand will move closer to general elections. Before the planned May polls, Prayuth's ruling coalition could collapse with defections to outside parties, causing Prime Minister Prayuth to call early elections. In the run-up to July elections in Cambodia, Hun Sen will tighten his grip on the opposition but there is little chance of the CPP losing power.

One wild card for Southeast Asia in early 2023 will be the impact of China's reversal of its lockdowns and other stringent measures of its "Zero-COVID" policy. These policies had disrupted some supply chains and ASEAN leaders are hopeful that trade with China will stabilize as restrictions are lifted. At the same time, the new policies risk the spread of COVID across the region, and Southeast Asia will feel an early impact. In contrast to some Western countries, ASEAN states--particularly those with tourism sectors—are not likely to consider imposing travel restrictions on Chinese.

Compared to the last quarter of the year, the first quarter is a relatively fallow period for US-Southeast Asian relations. This will be all the more the case in 2023, with a new Congress that is divided and an administration focused more on domestic than foreign policy as a result. Nevertheless, the security environment in the Indo-Pacific will continue to demand close attention, ensuring that Southeast Asia remains on the screen.

# CHRONOLOGY OF US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

## SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER 2022

**Sept. 5-7, 2022:** US State Department Undersecretary for Arms Control Bonnie Jenkins [travels](#) to the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore.

**Sept. 8-9, 2022:** The third ministerial (and first in-person meeting) of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is held in Los Angeles. The 14 members declare which pillars that they will [negotiate](#) in and agree upon the main issue areas for each pillar.

**Sept. 30, 2022:** Thailand's Constitutional Court rules that Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's term as prime minister terminates in 2025, [resolving](#) disputes over whether his years as junta leader after the 2014 coup were to be counted.

**Oct. 1, 2022:** US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin [conducts](#) a Defense Ministers Meeting in Hawaii with his counterparts in Japan, Australia and the Philippines.

**Oct. 3, 2022:** US and Filipino Marines [kick off](#) large-scale joint drills in and around Philippine Islands facing the South China Sea and in Japan, with Japanese and South Korean military participating as observers.

**Oct. 3, 2022:** US State Department Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism Timothy Betts [visits](#) Indonesia for a counterterrorism dialogue with the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency.

**Oct. 6, 2022:** US Treasury Department [announces](#) sanctions on three individuals for procurement of Russian-made arms from Belarus for the military regime in Myanmar.

**Oct. 9-14, 2022:** Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Daniel Kritenbrink [travels](#) to Vietnam and Laos. In Vientiane he co-chairs the 10th US-Laos Comprehensive Dialogue.

**Oct. 21, 2022:** Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., announces that Manila will drop a \$215 million helicopter deal with Russia and instead purchase military helicopters from the United States.

**Oct. 27, 2022:** ASEAN foreign ministers (minus Myanmar) meet in Jakarta at the ASEAN Secretariat to discuss the conflict in Myanmar. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi expresses “disappointment” that the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus Plan has not advanced, and acknowledges that the situation in Myanmar is worsening.

**Nov. 3, 2022:** United States and Singapore [conduct](#) the first US-Singapore Cybersecurity Dialogue, in Singapore, co-chaired by Cybersecurity Agency of Singapore Chief Executive David Koh and US Ambassador at Large for Cyberspace and Digital Policy Nate Fick.

**Nov. 8, 2022:** After an aerial bombardment by the Burmese junta in Kachin State on Oct. 23, the US Treasury Department targets Sky Aviator Company, Ltd., for sanctions for [operating](#) in Myanmar's defense sector.

**Nov. 12-13, 2022:** President Biden participates in the East Asia Summit in Cambodia and the adjacent US-ASEAN Summit. Presidents Xi Jinping of China and Vladimir Putin of Russia do not [attend](#) the EAS.

**Nov. 12, 2022:** At the 10th Annual US-ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, President Biden and ASEAN leaders [elevate](#) US-ASEAN relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

**Nov. 13, 2022:** At the ASEAN Leaders Summit in Cambodia ASEAN agrees “in principle” to admit East Timor as its 11th member. Dili [will have](#) observer status until its formal admission, which will likely come in the middle of the decade.

**Nov. 15-16, 2022:** Indonesia [hosts](#) the G20 Summit in Bali. The meeting focuses on the global economic situation but does not dodge the



war in Ukraine in the consensus Leaders' Declaration.

**Nov. 15, 2022:** Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) for Indonesia, which will [facilitate](#) Indonesia's transition to clean energy, is launched on the margins of the G20 Summit.

**Nov. 16-17:** Thailand [hosts](#) the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting and brokers a consensus statement that calls Russia out for the war in Ukraine. The group adopts the Bangkok Goals on the Bio-Circular-Green Economy.

**Nov. 17, 2022:** Myanmar junta [releases](#) 5,800 prisoners, 400 of whom are estimated to be political detainees including Australian economist Sean Turnell and US citizen Kyaw Htay Oo.

**Nov. 19, 2022:** Malaysia [holds](#) general elections and Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the multi-ethnic Pakistan Haraphan (PH) coalition and of the People's Justice Party (PKR) becomes prime minister after complicated negotiations to assemble a ruling coalition. Anwar is sworn in on Nov. 24.

**Nov. 21-22, 2022:** Following her [visit](#) to Thailand to represent the United States at the APEC meeting, Vice President Kamala Harris travels to the Philippines and visits Palawan, a Philippine military base on the edge of the South China Sea.

**Nov. 24, 2022:** ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) is hosted in Siem Reap, Cambodia, with participation from 9 of 10 ASEAN states (Myanmar being absent), plus 8 "dialogue partners."

**Dec. 6, 2022:** Indonesian Parliament votes to [revise](#) the country's Criminal Code to criminalize adultery, sex outside marriage, and insults to the president or other state authorities.

**Dec. 6, 2022:** In an address to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong chastises the United States for lackluster economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Dec. 8, 2022:** US State Department [announces](#) that it will downgrade relations with Myanmar by not replacing US Ambassador to Naypyidaw

Thomas Vadja when he leaves his post at the end of December. The embassy will be led by the Deputy Chief of Mission Deborah Lynn, acting as Chargé d'Affaires.

**Dec. 14, 2022:** ASEAN and the European Union [hold](#) their first in-person summit in Brussels, to commemorate 45 years of relations.

**Dec. 15, 2022:** Thai government [conducts](#) a "non-ASEAN" meeting on the Myanmar conflict, inviting officials from the military time in Naypyidaw and other regional leaders. Among the other ASEAN states, only Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia send their foreign ministers.

**Dec. 16, 2022:** 2023 National Defense Authorization Act [passes](#) in Congress and incorporates the Burma Unified Through Rigorous Military Accountability Act (BURMA Act) of 2021.

**Dec. 19, 2022:** Malaysian Parliament approves prime ministership of Anwar Ibrahim in a vote of confidence.

**Dec. 30, 2022:** Laos Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh [resigns](#) and is replaced by Deputy Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone.

