

# COMPARATIVE

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## CONNECTIONS

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US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

## Political Changes May Roil Security Dynamics

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In the second half of 2024, Southeast Asia faced growing headwinds that challenged its longstanding principles of neutrality in external conflict and, above all, “ASEAN Centrality” in regional affairs. Maritime competition between the Philippines and China around the Second Thomas and Sabina Shoals intensified, causing Philippine President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., to warn Beijing that there would be serious repercussions if Chinese naval vessels crossed a “red line” in the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Overtures from Moscow to several Southeast Asian nations for increased security cooperation presented two worrisome complications: a more pro-active Russian military role and the implications of the strengthening China-Russia alliance on the region’s security. A threat internal to the region, the civil war in Myanmar, developed new complications when China stepped up its diplomatic and security presence in the country to protect its economic interests. In Indonesia, however, an internal threat may be abating as the Jemmah Islamiyah publicly agreed to dissolve.

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During these challenges, political shifts could color Southeast Asian responses to security threats. Political transition in Vietnam and Indonesia ushered in new leaders whose geopolitical alignments are not yet clear. Thailand underwent a peaceful shift of prime ministers, but the process demonstrated that the country could remain internally focused for the near-term. The political transition in Japan raised questions of whether Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru would continue Tokyo's growing security relations with its Southeast Asia partners. Throughout the summer and into the fall, US presidential politics loomed over the region. The election in November of Donald Trump raised concerns in Southeast Asia over Washington's future relations with its security partners; the impact on Southeast Asia of a stiffer US posture toward China; and blanket tariffs, which could erode bilateral relations and impede cooperation in security and other key policy areas.

### The Increasing Centrality of the Philippines



Figure 1 The Philippines reaffirmed its position on Sabina Shoal in the South China Sea even as it agreed with China to explore ways to lower tension in the area, its foreign ministry said on September 12, 2024. Photo: Reuters

By mid-year the Philippines was rapidly gaining salience in US policy paradigms for maritime security in the Asia-Pacific. China's accelerating attacks on Philippine vessels, especially those around on Second Thomas Shoal; the proximity of the Philippines (and its bases) to the Taiwan Strait; and the warming US-Philippines alliance all contribute to this focus. Beyond that, President Marcos had styled himself as a negotiator of the conflict in the South China Sea, a vision that neither China nor the other Southeast Asian claimants appeared to share. Lastly, in the heated political environment in

the United States, the Philippines had become the poster child for a US ally threatened by China, although Taiwan remained the greater focus. However, many statements from both the executive branch and Congress paired Taiwan and the Philippines together.

Maritime conflict between China and the Philippines this year has larger been around Philippine attempts to resupply the *Sierra Madre*, to provide the naval personnel aboard with water, food, and other essentials. China has claimed that Manila is attempting to restore the ship and use it as the foundation for a military base in Second Thomas Shoal. This is not without some foundation--in the past Philippine officials have occasionally said just that. A small number of US politicians have also surfaced the idea, although some suggest that the wrecked ship would not be useable, and that a new dock and pier would have to be built on Second Thomas Shoal.

In May a clash between Chinese and Philippine vessels resulted in injuries to Filipino sailors, prompting Marcos to issue his "red line" warning to Beijing when he delivered the keynote address at the Shangri-la Security Dialogue on May 31. This was presumed to mean that Manila would invoke the self-defense clause of the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), although it is not clear that China's "grey zone" tactics in the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rise to that level in Washington's view.

Nevertheless, the May incident was the catalyst for opaque discussions between Manila and Beijing in June to avoid accelerating the conflict around Second Thomas Shoal. Earlier in the summer China claimed that it had forged a "gentleman's agreement" with former President Rodrigo Duterte, in which they agreed that Manila would only resupply the *Sierra Madre* with essential supplies, and that Marcos was abrogating that agreement. There is no such agreement on record, and Duterte has not confirmed the existence of any. The outcome of these negotiations closely paralleled the hypothetical Duterte agreement: Manila agreed to resupply the *Sierra Madre* only with essential goods for the naval personnel on it, and Beijing agreed not to interfere with that process. On July 27 the Philippine Navy conducted a resupply mission, and for the first time in several months China did not interfere.

However, the agreement covered only the Second Thomas Shoal. While China conspicuously did not interfere with the resupply mission on July 27th, it anchored its largest coast guard vessel at Sabina Shoal east of Second Thomas Shoal. Some Filipino officials have said they believe that China is attempting to build on Sabina Shoal which, although smaller than Second Thomas Shoal, is still strategically important.

### Defense Cooperation Intensifies

As “grey zone” activity accelerated so did US-Philippines defense diplomacy. On July 30 the Philippines and the United States completed its fourth “2+2” Ministerial Dialogue, bringing together cabinet secretaries for foreign affairs and defense from both countries. The dialogue was held in Manila for the first time, a signal of the maturing alliance. The most notable deliverables from the meetings were in the flow of funds to come from the United States to the Philippines. Washington to provide \$500 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and \$128 million for infrastructure related to the expansion of EDCA sites. The generous FMF pledge—which US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken described as a “once in a generation” sum—was intended to support the modernization of the Philippine armed forces and Coast Guard as, in Blinken’s words, “they transition to focus on external defense.”



Figure 2 Secretary of State Blinken, Secretary of Defense Austin, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Manalo, and Senior Undersecretary and Officer in Charge (OIC) of National Defense Galvez convened the third U.S. Philippines 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in Washington, D.C., on April 11, 2023. Photo: The America Times

This uptick in defense diplomacy was matched by the eighth iteration of the US-Philippines Sama Sama Exercises, which were a statement of solidarity between Manila and Washington, as well as like-minded security partners. The two-week maritime exercises on Oct. 7-18, also included Australia, Canada, France, the United

Kingdom, and Japan. The exercises were particularly notable for the equipment deployed. Participating assets from the United States included the Navy’s Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS *Howard* (DDG 83), the presence of which drew sharp protests from Beijing and claims that the United States was attempting to escalate conflict in the South China Sea.

### Intra-ASEAN Efforts

Attempts among the Southeast Asian states to calm tensions in the South China sea have been largely ineffectual. In keeping with his higher profile on the South China Sea, President Marcos proposed that the Southeast Asian claimant countries run the South China Sea might resolve their disputes among themselves first. Vietnam and Malaysia rejected this idea out of hand. Marcos’ response was to petition the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Arbitration Tribunal to declare that the Philippines’ EEZ extends across the continental shelf to the shores of Sabah, a Malaysian province. This keeps alive the Philippines’ claim that Sabah was leased but not given to Malaysia during the British colonial period and that Manila had a right to reclaim it.

In the meantime, ASEAN delayed finalization of the ASEAN-China Code of Conduct on the South China Sea until 2026, when the Philippines will chair the group, following Malaysia’s chairmanship in 2025. Laos, this year’s chair, appeared to be more focused on the Myanmar civil war and, as a landlocked country, would not be inclined to tackle a complicated maritime conflict. In any case, expectations for a COC remain low in ASEAN, even if the agreement is finalized. Southeast Asian leaders have tended to view the Code of Conduct (and its predecessor, the ASEAN-China Declaration on a Code of Conduct on the South China Sea) not a treaty but as a dialogue mechanism.

### Russian-Indonesian Naval Ties

Forging new security ties or expanding existing ones with external powers is a common theme in the Southeast Asian states, particularly the maritime ones. On November 4-8, on the heels of the inauguration of President Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia initiated a new phrase in relations with Russia with Orruda Joint Training, a five-day joint exercise in the Java Sea near Surabaya. The Russian Navy brought

three corvette-class warships and a medium tanker to the exercises, which were divided into harbor and sea phases.

The exercises were a strong signal from Prabowo that he intended to follow Jakarta's traditional posture of non-alignment in Indonesian foreign and defense policy. Jakarta has declined to take a position on the war in Ukraine. The Orudda exercises were one in an expanding defense portfolio that recently has also included joint exercises with Germany. In scope, they are dwarfed by the Super Garuda Shield Exercises that Indonesia has conducted with the United States since 2006. That said, they follow recent developments in the Indonesia-Russia relationship that could complicate Jakarta's relations with the United States and Europe in the near-term. In 2023 Prabowo, in his capacity as Defense Minister in the administration of former president Joko Widodo, quietly revived a \$1.1 billion agreement with Russia to purchase eleven Su-35S fighter jets that had been dormant since 2019, defying international sanctions on Moscow over Ukraine.



Local dancers welcome Rear Admiral Alexei Sysuev (right), Commander of the Primorsky Flotilla of the Pacific Fleet, and Andrei Kazazev (center), Commander of the Russian corvette Gromkiy, upon their arrival at Tanjung Perak port on Nov. 3, 2024, for a five-day joint military exercise between Indonesia and Russia, in Surabaya. Photo: VCG

### Has Indonesia Rolled Back Terrorism?

On June 30, 16 leaders of the Jemah Islamiyah (JI), Southeast Asia's regional terrorism network, announced that they were dissolving the group. JI's origins were in the *mujahideen*, the global Muslim resistance to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan in the 1980s; the group, led by Indonesian and Malaysian fighters, was allegedly tutored by Osama bin Laden. JI has been the most important terrorist group in

Southeast Asia for three decades; has been active in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen; and even has a presence in Australia.

JI's long-term goal has been to develop cells across Southeast Asia and eventually establish an official Islamic state—a caliphate—in the region. Although the joint Indonesian-Malaysian leadership has endured, the group is more Indonesian than Malaysian and its most famous attacks—such as the 2002 Bali bombing and the 2004 bombing the Marriott hotel in Jakarta. JI is on most international terrorist sanctions lists and was officially outlawed by the Indonesian government in 2007. Several JI leaders are in prison in Indonesia but most will be released in the next few years.

Most Southeast Asian leaders and analysts doubt that JI will disappear altogether, and many think the announcement is a ruse. That said, it is probably no accident that the announcement comes after the election of Prabowo Subianto in February, since Indonesia's extremists may fear a particularly strong response from him to terrorist attacks. Prabowo has a complicated relationship with Indonesia's Muslim community: he has considerable political support from Muslim groups, but he has a history of repressive tactics. Moreover, as Minister of Defense he has been the link between the Indonesian military and international partners on counter-terrorism cooperation.

A major break-up of Jemah Islamiyah could significantly lower the terrorist threat to Indonesia. It would be the most benign outcome to the announcement, and it is within the realm of possibility. However, many Indonesians believe that the dissolution could be a tactic that would enable the leadership to regroup while it continues to pursue its long-term goals. In addition, appearing to dissolve the group and reorganizing with different leadership under a new name could make JI less a target for arrest. In the past decade, over 30 Indonesian civil servants, military officers and police officers were arrested for suspected ties to JI.

Many also argue that it is immaterial if JI does dissolve, because it will likely have splinter groups, of younger and more radical extremists who disagree with the dissolution. This is often the case with terrorist networks—JI was itself a splinter from the Darul Islam network in the

1990s. In that case, terrorism could rise with JI's dissolution.

The Indonesian security sector has improved its counter-terrorism response considerably since the early 2000s, and even if JI recoups under other auspices, the government will likely take it in stride. Countering new splinter groups will be more difficult but still within Jakarta's bandwidth. Because it has been the lynchpin for Southeast Asia terrorism for three decades, however, the impact of JI's dissolution could be greater on some Southeast Asian countries, because they will be tempted to become more extremist and more violent:

- The greatest impact would likely be on Philippine *jihadi* groups in Mindanao. These groups are often prey to larger terrorist networks, and would likely ally themselves with more radical groups if JI dissolves. This could be complicated by the growing rivalry between the Marcos and Duterte clans, and Duterte's determination to keep Mindanao on his side.
- Singaporeans were shocked in 2002 to uncover a homegrown JI cell in their territory—prior to that, they tended to view Islamic extremism as an external threat. A rise in Islamic extremism on the island would challenge Lawrence Wong's new administration to crack down on the terrorism threat without alienating the country's Muslim population.

### China Moves More Deeply into Myanmar

As Myanmar moves toward the fifth anniversary of the military coup in February 2021 there are no signs that the internal conflict is moving toward a peaceful resolution. In recent months the opposition forces and the ethnic armed organizations (EAO's) allied have made significant gains on the battlefield, particularly in eastern Myanmar. On Aug. 3 the resistance captured the northern city of Lashio in northern Shan State after a month's battle. It represented the first time that had a Tatmadaw command had been seized by resistance forces; moreover, it underscored the reality that the Tatmadaw had become one of several armed groups contesting for power rather than the major block to an opposition assault. Their defeat in Lashio raised alarm not only within the military but also in Beijing.

China has much to worry about in the current political and security environment in Myanmar. The China-Myanmar border has become increasingly less secure over the past four years, with upticks in trafficking in illegal drugs and other forms of international crime. The Chinese pipelines that extend through Rakhine State to deliver oil and gas to Kunming have been targeted by opposition forces, occasionally prompting China to rely on their own security forces to guard them. Armed ethnic groups opposed to the junta are attacking Chinese mining operations that extract critical minerals vital to electronics manufacturing in China. Although they have been curtailed, Chinese criminal gangs continue to operate "scam campuses" on Myanmar territory near the border with Thailand. Beijing has conducted police and military actions to break up the camps, as has Interpol.

China still intends to build an economic corridor with Myanmar, which includes road and rail projects and a deep sea port that will give the PLA-Navy a strategic outpost on the Indian Ocean. Although the two countries agree in principle to go forward with this cluster of projects, full implementation is deferred until a peaceful resolution of the conflict is in sight. Lastly, both China and Russia have increased their economic stake in Myanmar, particularly in arms sales; however, the war in Ukraine has reduced Russian supplies, which China is now obliged to replace.

With this deterioration of the security environment--and the military's control of territory--after the Lashio battle Beijing adopted a more pro-active role in attempting to revoke the conflict that unabashedly tilts toward the junta. Accordingly, China has increased its presence in Myanmar in several states and for multiple. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the country in August, and a special Chinese envoy for the ethnic armed groups was dispatched to urge that those fighting with (or parallel to) the People's Defense Force (PDF) refrain from attacking the junta forces. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing was invited to visit China, a clear sign of Beijing's partisan support for him, and did so in November.





Myanmar's military chief Min Aung Hlaing (R) meeting with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Naypyidaw on Aug. 14, 2024. VOA File

Beijing appears to have little confidence in Min Aung Hlaing, but Chinese officials continue to back him. Beijing is pressing the junta to organize elections, presumably an attempt to legitimate Min Aung Hlaing and the junta in the eyes of the international community. However, organizing elections would be extremely difficult, particularly given the fact that the military controls only a corridor of territory, from Yangon to Mandalay and could not ensure adequate conditions for polls in other territories.

In any case, there is little likelihood that neither the international community nor the significant portion of the Myanmar public that supports the opposition would accept the legitimacy of elections conducted under these circumstances. At present the junta appears reluctant to schedule new polls, but Beijing will likely step up pressure on Min Aung Hlaing to move forward with them.

In and among this flurry of diplomatic activity, Beijing secured an agreement from Myanmar to deploy Chinese private military corporations (PMCs) to operate in the country. A minimum of four Chinese PMC are believed to be operating in Myanmar. These mercenary groups provide static security, each stationed at a specific point to protect the interests of Chinese companies. Despite their narrow commercial mandate, the presence of foreign forces in Myanmar of any kind has the potential to destabilize the conflict further.

In the second half of 2024 Washington cautiously expanded support for the Myanmar opposition. The current budget authorization, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provides for funds “to support the people of Burma in their struggle for democracy,

freedom, human rights and justice”; authorizes additional sanctions; and permits the provision of “non-lethal, technical assistance” to resistance groups. Although humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, totaling more than \$140 million since the beginning of the conflict, make up the bulk of American aid, US officials began to make cautious contact with opposition groups in late 2024.

On August 17, three days after Ming Aung Hlaing's visit to Myanmar, two US officials -- Tom Sullivan, Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Blinken, and Michael Schiffer, Assistant Administration for Asia of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), met with officials of the National Unity Government and with key ethnic groups, including the Karen National Union. They promised to “expand direct support and assistance to pro-democracy actors” in Myanmar, although the administration has not made public precise plans. That said, the United States has little interest in entering a proxy war with China in Myanmar, although Washington will watch carefully for developments that affect the strategic balance between the US and China in this area of the Indo-Pacific.

### Key Political Transitions

In late 2024 Southeast Asia underwent three political transitions: a change of party secretary-general in Vietnam, from Nguyen Nhu Trong to Tô Lâm; an internal reshuffle in the Pheu Thai Party in Thailand, leader of the parliamentary coalition, that brought Thaksin Shinawatra's 38-year-old daughter Paetongtarn to power; and the inauguration in October of Prabowo Subianto as President in Indonesia.

Of these three, the transition most likely to have an impact on US security interests in Southeast Asia is the move from Joko Widodo to Prabowo Subianto in Indonesia. Although closely allied politically—Joko's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, is Prabowo's vice president—the new president will take a more pro-active approach to foreign relations and national defense.

Prabowo will be influenced by his most recent position as minister of defense but as well by his and his family's deep involvement with the New Order of former president Suharto. In his inaugural address, he promised to strengthen Indonesia's neutrality in foreign affairs. In the near term, this has translated into deepening

Jakarta's relations with both Moscow and Beijing, although he promises to balance deeper ties to China and Russia with stronger relations with the West and Japan,

Prabowo has made two moves in the direction of China and Russia. Joint naval exercises with the Russian Navy were the most obvious step. Additionally, on Nov. 13, Jakarta also signed an agreement with China to jointly develop maritime resources near the Natuna Islands. Indonesian security experts have warned that it will undermine Indonesia's territorial rights and reinforce Beijing's claims to a "nine-dash-line." They point out that Jakarta might learn from the experience of the Philippines, which has periodically attempted to conduct joint oil exploration projects with China in the South China Sea, all of which were abandoned when Beijing proposed terms that were overwhelmingly in their favor.

Prabowo's other foreign policy goals are less defined, but he has floated several possibilities. Although Jakarta maintains formal neutrality on the war in Ukraine, in June Prabowo renewed his interest in helping to settle that conflict in his address at the Shangri-la Security Dialogue. He is unlikely to play a prominent role, but Moscow will seek Jakarta's support in any solution they pursue. As well, Prabowo appears to be more inclined to bring Indonesian into BRICS than was Joko, although he also will also seek entry for Jakarta in the OECD.

Vietnamese Communist Party Secretary-General Tô Lâm began his climb to the top in July, when he made the transition from minister of public security to president in July, largely the result of his successful management of the "Burning Furnace" anti-corruption purge that has consumed Vietnam in recent years. When Party Secretary-General Nguyen Phu Trong died shortly thereafter, on July 19, Lam became acting secretary-general and was subsequently confirmed as the permanent leader by the Party Central Committee on Aug. 4. In 2026 he will face re-election as party secretary-general at the National Party Congress.

Lam's longtime experience as public security minister has raised expectations that he will keep tight control over political dissent, and that he is likely to continue the anti-corruption purge in some form. However, his goals in foreign policy are less clear. In contrast to Trong, who was a strict doctrinaire, Lam is more

pragmatic and is likely to seek a middle lane between China and the West. In the near-term, he will tread delicately on relations with Washington, not least because Vietnam will be in the crossfire for potential tariffs in the Trump administration because of its \$102 billion trade surplus with the United States.

Former Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin's removal as prime minister was a function of the increasing politicization of Thailand's judiciary, but the Constitutional Court stopped short of dissolving the Pheu Thai Party. His replacement by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, was not surprising but raised inevitable questions of whether Thaksin himself would be the *de facto* leader of the Pheu Thai Party and thus the parliamentary coalition. This issue was settled legally when the Constitutional Court ruled in Thaksin's favor on a petition charging that he had improperly influenced the party. However, for the time being, the Thai military appears to accept Pheu Thai's continued role in leading the government, if only because it is a hedge against more pro-democracy parties. However, the military will watch closely for signs that Thaksin is accruing greater political power and could take measures to depose Pheu Thai, in the courts if not on the streets, if he crosses a red line.

### Looking Ahead to Trump 2.0

Southeast Asian leaders watched the US presidential election campaign with marked nervousness. In contrast to Europe, fewer leaders believed that the United States would abandon or seriously downgrade its security alliances in the Indo-Pacific if Trump won, although they do anticipate greater pressure on burden-sharing. Moreover, the Pentagon's efforts to reconfigure the US alliance system in the Indo-Pacific from a hub-and-spokes to a "lattice" configuration had encouraged the expansion of security cooperation to include Japan and Australia in US-Southeast Asian security relations. This new dynamic offers some scaffolding even if bilateral defense relations with Washington deteriorate.

However, Southeast Asians worry about a hardening of the US position toward China, and the greater likelihood that they would be drawn into US-China conflict in the region, however much they insist that they should not be made to choose. The specific concern is that greater

conflict in the Taiwan Strait would inevitably draw in the Philippines; however, the silver lining to such a scenario is that the Pentagon would likely seek to maintain, or even strengthen, the US-Philippines alliance as a result.

Although trade does not usually have a direct connection to security, many Southeast Asian leaders fear that a rigid tariff regime, of the kind that Trump has promised, could upend the region economically and, at the least, damage some bilateral relations and security cooperation within those relations. Vietnam and Thailand have the largest trade surpluses with the United States and expect to be the prime targets of tariff increases. In that case, both countries are likely to bring their security relations into negotiations on trade, reminding Washington that damage on the trade side would inevitably be felt in security.

If there is a Southeast Asian country that is least impacted by these policy changes, it is likely to be Singapore. The country continues to run a trade deficit with the United States and its relative wealth makes it a more equitable security partner. Moreover, US “flexible basing” in Singapore is a powerful card that Prime Minister Lawrence Wong will likely play if relations with the new administration become rocky.



# CHRONOLOGY OF US-SOUTHEAST ASIA RELATIONS

## MAY - NOVEMBER 2024

**May 7, 2024:** Reports say Undersecretary of the Treasury Brian Johnson will express concern that Iran using Malaysian companies to sidestep sanctions and transship oil to Singapore, and that Hamas is raising funds through Malaysian channels. Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail meets with Johnson and says that Malaysia will not recognize international sanctions in this issue area.

**May 31-June 2, 2024:** IISS Shangri-la Dialogue is convened in Singapore, with Philippine President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., presenting the keynote speech. Marcos slams China for its actions around Second Thomas Shoal.

**June 4, 2024:** US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Cambodia, on the heels of the Shangri-la Security Dialogue in Singapore. He met with Prime Minister Hun Manet, Senate President Hun Sen, and Defense Minister Tea Seiha.

**June 30, 2024:** Indonesian leaders of the Jemah Islamiyah, Southeast Asia’s regional terrorism network, announces they are dissolving the group. Although the JI itself may disappear, the possibility for splinter groups could increase.

**July 19, 2024:** Vietnamese President Tô Lâm becomes Acting Vietnamese Communist Party secretary-general upon the death of his predecessor, Nguyen Phu Trong. On Aug. 4 is confirmed as the Permanent Secretary-General by the Party’s Central Committee.

**July 27, 2024:** Following talks between Beijing and Manila to forge an informal agreement on conduct around Second Thomas Shoal, the Philippine Navy launches a resupply mission to resupply the *Sierra Madre*, without interference.

**July 30, 2024:** United States and the Philippines conducts the fourth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue on foreign affairs and defense in Manila.

**Aug. 3, 2024:** Forces of the resistance in Myanmar—the People’s Defense Force and allied armed ethnic groups—take the city of Lashio in northern Shan State, marking the first time that the opposition has captured a regional military command.

**Aug. 7, 2024:** Thailand’s Constitutional Court’s dissolves the Move Forward Party and bans 11 of its senior party leaders, including Pita Limjaroenrat, from politics for 10 years. The banishments effectively decapitated Move Forward, although 143 Members of Parliament remain in the legislature.

**Aug. 13, 2024:** Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin is dismissed from his position as prime minister by the Thai Constitutional Court for having appointed an official with a criminal conviction to his cabinet.

**Aug. 14, 2024:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits Myanmar and meets with junta leader Ming Aung Hlaing and Foreign Minister U Than Swe.

**Aug. 16, 2024:** Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra is elected prime minister by a two-thirds majority of parliament.

**Aug. 17, 2024:** Tom Sullivan, Senior Advisor to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Michael Schiffer, Assistant Administrator of USAID, meet with Myanmar’s shadow National Unity Government and allied ethnic groups to discuss US non-lethal assistance.

**Aug. 27, 2024:** Chinese vessels block Philippine patrol boats attempting a resupply mission on Sabina Shoal in the Philippines EEZ.

**Oct. 6-11, 2024:** ASEAN conducts a series of major meetings with Laos as the 2024 chair. These included the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting; the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits; and at the East Asia Summit. At the ASEAN Summits for the first time since the 2021 coup Myanmar is invited to send a representative from the career ranks of the Foreign Ministry. Permanent Secretary Aung Kyaw Moe attends but does not speak at the Summits. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken represents the United States at the East Asia Summit.

**Oct. 7-18, 2024:** United States and the Philippines hold the 8th iteration of the Sama Sama Exercise, which also include Australia, Canada, France, the United Kingdom and Japan. The United States deploys the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer *USS Howard*.

**Oct. 20, 2024:** Prabowo Subianto is sworn in as Indonesia's eighth president. Gibran Rakabuming Raka, son of outgoing president Joko Widodo, is sworn in as vice president.

**Nov. 4-8, 2024:** Indonesia and Russia hold their first-ever joint naval exercises in the Java Sea off Surabaya.

**Nov. 13, 2024:** Indonesia signs an agreement with China to jointly develop maritime resources near the Natuna Islands.

**Nov. 22, 2024:** Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is acquitted by the Constitutional Court of charges of having improperly influenced the Pheu Thai Party.