



Counterpoint Southeast Asia

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Can ASEAN pave a path to peace in Myanmar five years after the Five-Point Consensus?

By Barbora Valockova

More than five years after the February 2021 coup, Myanmar has a new administration led by former military chief Min Aung Hlaing. The military-organised **general election**, held in three phases between December 2025 and January 2026, excluded major opposition parties, and voting did not take place in 67 of the country's 330 townships, largely because of fighting. It delivered a landslide for the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Min Aung Hlaing was sworn in as president on 10 April 2026. An **April amnesty** freed former president Win Myint, while successive amnesties reduced Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence.


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Counterpoint Southeast Asia is published regularly by the Centre on Asia and Globalisation at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. It seeks to answer major questions of strategic significance for Southeast Asia by bringing in diverse voices from around the region. Each issue will tackle one question from three different perspectives.

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While Min Aung Hlaing presents the transition as progress towards democracy, International Crisis Group [describes](#) it as a consolidation of military rule under the 2008 constitution.

The election has not ended Myanmar's conflict. Fighting continues across multiple regions, while the Arakan Army controls most of Rakhine State despite a renewed military [counteroffensive](#). Humanitarian needs remain [severe](#). Narcotics trafficking and cyber-scam operations extend the crisis's consequences across borders. China has brokered ceasefires in northern Myanmar and explicitly supported the new government, while the European Union maintains targeted sanctions. Naypyidaw has also strengthened ties with Russia, signing a five-year [military cooperation agreement](#) in February 2026, and with [India](#), which hosted Min Aung Hlaing on an official visit from 30 May to 3 June.

For ASEAN, Myanmar remains a major test of its credibility. The [Five-Point Consensus](#) (5PC), agreed in April 2021, called for an immediate cessation of violence, dialogue among all parties, special-envoy mediation, humanitarian assistance, and an envoy visit to meet all parties. Implementation remains limited, although some humanitarian assistance has been delivered. ASEAN continues to restrict Myanmar to non-political representation at summits and foreign ministers' meetings. Its attendance at permanent-secretary level at the [May 2026 summit in Cebu](#) followed that policy. Diplomatic engagement has nevertheless increased.

On 12 July, ASEAN foreign ministers met Myanmar's foreign minister in Bangkok for their [first such in-person meeting](#) since the coup and called for "concrete and measurable steps" towards implementing the 5PC. Later that month in Manila, ministers [proposed](#) a benchmarking mechanism and considered a longer-term special envoy to improve continuity beyond the annual rotation. Individual member states have also pursued bilateral engagement with Naypyidaw, including Indonesia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

Myanmar's government has challenged ASEAN's approach. On 31 July, Min Aung Hlaing [told](#) parliament that some ASEAN member states had discriminated against Myanmar and that his government would respond to actions it considered discriminatory on a case-by-case basis. On 8 August, the foreign ministry [declared](#) the appointment and continued role of a new ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy no longer necessary, while pledging continued cooperation with the current envoy. These statements, alongside bilateral diplomatic outreach, suggest an effort to gain international legitimacy while resisting ASEAN's collective conditions for normalisation, not a withdrawal from the bloc.

This "[constructive and principled engagement](#)" raises several questions. Is ASEAN creating an opening for peace, or normalising relations with a military-backed government that controls only part of the country and has challenged the framework

ASEAN continues to uphold? Can implementation of the 5PC be adapted to the new landscape while preserving its principles? Does bilateral outreach by individual members strengthen ASEAN's leverage or dilute it? And how can engagement ensure meaningful participation by resistance forces and ethnic armed organisations that shape conditions on the ground? Singapore, which assumes the ASEAN chairmanship in 2027, will face the challenge of sustaining engagement while seeking meaningful progress towards the 5PC.

Given these developments, a central question is: **Can ASEAN pave a path to peace in Myanmar five years after the Five-Point Consensus?** To address it, the Centre on Asia and Globalisation (CAG) convened its 20th Counterpoint Southeast Asia (CSA) webinar on 15 September 2026, featuring Kyi Sin (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute), Samuel Hmung (Australian National University), and Surachanee “Hammerli” Sriyai (S&I Strategic Advisory).

Kyi Sin examines differing expectations of ASEAN within Myanmar. He argues that the regime seeks to avoid its 5PC commitments through bilateral engagement, while the National Unity Government calls for more effective implementation. Drawing on regional and Myanmar surveys, he identifies respondents' disappointment with ASEAN alongside continued expectations of its involvement. He highlights broader dialogue, institutional continuity and measurable benchmarks as ways to strengthen engagement.

Samuel Hmung analyses how the evolving conflict shapes ASEAN's options. He attributes the 5PC's lack of meaningful progress primarily to the regime's refusal to cooperate, yet sees continuing value in a framework backed by both China and the United States. He advocates benchmarks with consequences, channels of equal political weight with the regime and resistance, and engagement with the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), warning that bloc-wide adoption of Thailand's calibrated re-engagement would undermine the 5PC.

Surachanee “Hammerli” Sriyai examines the crisis's interconnected regional dimensions: armed conflict, transnational crime, illicit mineral extraction, digital repression and humanitarian crisis. Her central concern is how and on whose terms ASEAN engages: without meaningful conditions and inclusive dialogue, engagement risks normalising and legitimising military rule. ASEAN, she concludes, cannot sustain a credible path to peace by treating these issues separately or letting engagement become an end in itself.

Three threads connect these contributions. First, together they locate a central weakness of the 5PC in its implementation, highlighting the need for greater continuity, measurable benchmarks and consequences for non-compliance. Second, the contributions favour engagement that is inclusive and tied to tangible outcomes, while warning that poorly coordinated outreach may weaken ASEAN's collective leverage.

Third, they emphasise Myanmar's regional significance, whether through its diplomatic repercussions or the cross-border effects of crime, displacement and resource extraction. Taken together, the arguments suggest that ASEAN's contribution to peace will depend on translating commitments into sustained action, ensuring meaningful participation by resistance actors, and making bilateral engagement support rather than substitute for a coordinated regional approach.

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