

Guest Column

Realistic Entry Points: What Myanmar's Conflict Dynamics Mean for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus

By Samuel Hmung

Myanmar's evolving conflict has narrowed the prospects for dialogue, exposing the limits of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus. ASEAN's realistic entry points lie in measurable benchmarks and engagement that gives the regime and resistance equal political weight.

ASEAN's peace plan, the Five-Point Consensus (5PC), for resolving Myanmar's conflict has lost its relevance in the current landscape, as it has brought no meaningful result since its adoption in April 2021. However, it remains the only viable regional framework that exists and is backed by all regional and international actors, including China and the United States. Despite criticism and pushback, both the regime and the National Unity of Government of Myanmar (NUG) continue to engage with ASEAN, although their positions on the 5PC differ fundamentally. Whether this ASEAN-led framework brings peace to Myanmar depends on how strongly ASEAN nations, as a bloc, commit to this plan and build implementation mechanisms that could realistically function as a pathway to peace.



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Myanmar's conflict has escalated and become more violent despite growing calls for ceasefire and dialogue from ASEAN and the international community following the junta-led elections in late 2025. Violence, including indiscriminate and intentional aerial attacks against civilians, is ramping up as the military regime's nationwide counteroffensive operations gain momentum following [China's intervention to end the resistance's Operation 1027](#) and the regime's implementation of a forced conscription campaign. This allowed the regime to regroup and recruit to conduct large-scale operations on multiple fronts. According to the [UN agency](#), Myanmar's conflict ranks second behind Ukraine in terms of conflict intensity and is the fourth-deadliest conflict, resulting in over 3 million internal displacements.

This conflict situation further cripples the 5PC framework, which has yielded no result primarily because the military regime refuses to cooperate. For the regime, the framework does not serve its own terms; rather, it undermines its legitimacy and narrative since the coup in 2021.

For instance, the framework's call for "Inclusive dialogue" means treating the NUG and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) as legitimate negotiating partners. Although the regime's leader offered peace talks as part of his 100-day plan in April, the invitation is limited to ethnic armed groups while demanding the NUG's People's Defence Forces surrender. Ultimately, the regime's overarching goal is to recapture all of its lost territories since the coup and consolidate its grip on power before entering the dialogue from a position of power.

On the other side, major resistance forces that are actively involved in the Spring Revolution show no interest in any dialogue with the military regime. The peace offer was also rejected immediately. They perceive the military regime as an unreliable and untrustworthy negotiation partner because the regime shows no good faith in meaningful dialogue and its invitation does not differ from its previous calls for talks. In addition, many resistance forces remain confident in continuing their armed struggle, given they have reached their strongest military, political, and territorial positions since the country's independence. Nevertheless, the resistance camp has decided neither to reject the 5PC nor to abandon the process; rather, it continues to anchor its diplomacy to the framework because it remains the only viable regional framework and the resistance camp prefers dialogue facilitated and monitored by the international community.

So how can ASEAN's peace plan move forward while there is no commitment from the military and while both parties show no interest in dialogue? ASEAN acknowledged that the limitation is due to the lack of the military regime's political will. ASEAN Foreign ministers agreed to continue to exclude the military regime from top-level meetings and develop a benchmarking mechanism to assess "meaningful progress", which is due at the Summit in November. This benchmarking exercise could turn the 5PC into something with measurable criteria. But ASEAN still needs to set clear benchmarks on critical issues, such as ending airstrikes and artillery shelling against civilians and granting humanitarian access to conflict-affected populations, and specify real consequences if those conditions are not met.

While there is no meaningful progress, ASEAN as a bloc needs to keep its stand on treating the military-led elections as illegitimate and maintain two separate channels with the military regime and the resistance forces, but with equal political weight. Maintaining two channels avoids conceding the junta's framing that the 5PC is obsolete now, while keeping resistance forces relevant to any eventual negotiations and settlements. Allowing engagement with Naypyidaw to outpace engagement with resistance forces risks undermining the relevance of the 5PC and, ultimately, ASEAN's credibility in resolving the conflict.

To implement a co-equal track toward meaningful dialogue, ASEAN needs to institutionalise Malaysia's model set in 2025, which gives resistance actors equal political weight. During his visit to Thailand as the chair of ASEAN, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim met Myanmar's regime leader in person in Bangkok and held a virtual meeting with the NUG's Prime Minister the next day. This is the clearest evidence of showing the same political weight for both parties, not just a symbolic side-meeting for resistance actors. This approach can be followed by other member states.

ASEAN should treat the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) as a credible dialogue partner and give it equal political weight to the military regime. By uniting the NUG, the CRPH, and major ethnic armed groups—the Karen National Union (KNU), Karenni Nationalities Progressive Party (KNPP), Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), and Chin National Front (CNF)—and emerging local units—the Interim Magway Federal Unit, the Interim Sagaing Federal Unit, and Mandalay Region, the SCEF consolidates the previously fragmented resistance into a single bloc capable of directly contesting the regime's post-election legitimacy claim.

Lastly, ASEAN needs to address concerns surrounding Thailand's new calibrated re-engagement approach. This approach is controversial and carries great risk. Thailand has reaffirmed its commitment to the 5PC and offered to facilitate and host future peace talks. Yet doubts are mounting over the bloc's commitment to the 5PC as more and more members pursue diplomatic and economic ties with the junta. As of mid-September, four ASEAN nations—Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia—have held bilateral visits with the junta's leader. Should ASEAN adopt this approach bloc-wide, it will validate the junta's push to replace the 5PC with its own post-election political roadmap and ultimately undermine the framework as a viable peace plan.

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