



# Counterpoint Southeast Asia

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 CENTRE ON ASIA AND GLOBALISATION

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## *Can the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus end the crisis in Myanmar?*

*By Evan A. Laksmana*

Southeast Asia sits at the heart of the Indo-Pacific strategic flux—featuring great power politics, maritime disputes, and a whole host of non-traditional security challenges. And yet, there is very little understanding of how Southeast Asian themselves define and debate major questions facing their region. Existing debates tend to be framed narrowly by the US-China strategic competition—or worse, by extra-regional voices telling Southeast Asians what they should care about.

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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As part of our efforts at the Centre on Asia and Globalisation (CAG) to focus on strategic policy developments in Southeast Asia, we are proud to welcome you to our new publication and webinar series, **Counterpoint Southeast Asia**. Once every two months, we will invite three Southeast Asian analysts to speak and write about one major question facing the region from three different perspectives.

We are mindful however of the lack of diversity in Southeast Asian strategic policy debates. So, over the series, we will bring in more Southeast Asian analysts, while also giving a spotlight to female and up-and-coming scholars. We believe that they will bring fresh insights and expertise to the key debates surrounding our region.

In that spirit, our inaugural Counterpoint Southeast Asia tackles one of the most difficult questions facing the region today, can the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus end the crisis in Myanmar?

Since the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar continues to be embroiled in violence and instability. Thousands have been arrested, injured, or killed over the past year. Meanwhile, ASEAN has put forward the “ASEAN Five-Point Consensus” (ASEAN 5PC) to help end the crisis following the ASEAN Leaders’ Meeting in Jakarta in April 2021. The 5PC calls for:

1. Immediate cessation of violence with all parties enjoined to exercise utmost restraint.
2. Constructive dialogue among all parties concerned to seek a peaceful solution.
3. A special envoy of the ASEAN Chair to facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the ASEAN Secretary-General of ASEAN.
4. ASEAN to provide humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre.
5. The Special Envoy and delegation to visit Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned.

No significant progress has been made on these calls except for the appointment of the Special Envoy. There was little to no traction on the other calls under Erywan Yusof, Brunei’s Second Foreign Minister and the first Special Envoy last year. Prak Sokhonn, the current Special Envoy and Cambodia’s Foreign Minister, visited Myanmar in March 2022, following an initial visit by Prime Minister Hun Sen in January 2022. But no significant progress was made during both visits.

Cambodia and the rest of ASEAN seem prepared to let the Myanmar military decide on how and when they could fully implement the 5PC. Rather than providing better mechanisms to implement the 5PC as a whole, ASEAN seems prepared to wait until there is “progress” inside Myanmar—even though there is no clear sign that the military or pro-democracy resistance will claim absolute victory soon.

So, can the ASEAN 5PC end the crisis in Myanmar? We invite three Southeast Asian analysts to answer this question from different perspectives.

**Elina Noor** of the Asia Society Policy Institute in Washington, DC, argues that the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus is not Myanmar's silver bullet, but its objectives should be supported rather than obstructed in the absence of other good options. It is, after all, the "only structured and collective diplomatic framework" to defuse the aftermath of the coup.

But **Jeremie Credo** of the Philippines' Foreign Service Institute views the ASEAN 5PC as "an ideal solution on paper". She also makes the case that ASEAN has thus far only been using its persuasion tools and will now need to consider using the stick if the situation does not improve.

**Lina Alexandra** of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta takes the argument further. She claims that the 5PC could only address the crisis after "extensive repair". She creatively argues for changing the implied "sequence" of how the 5PC could be implemented, and calls for the strengthening of the Special Envoy's role and mandate.

Our three authors do not take the 5PC's implementation and success at face value. They evaluate the promises and perils of the current institutional and diplomatic set-up surrounding the 5PC. While each has different lines of argument, they collectively call for new ideas and better mechanisms for ASEAN to push the process forward, rather than surrendering the initiative to the junta.

They made their case during a public webinar last month (the video can be viewed [here](#)). The essays you are about to read draw on the feedback and debate generated by the webinar. We hope that students, analysts, and policymakers find the webinar and the essays insightful and useful in thinking more clearly about major strategic questions facing Southeast Asia.

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