The strategic competition between the United States and China is often seen as a rivalry confined to the two great powers alone, in which secondary states such as those in Southeast Asia have little influence and will inevitably end up “choosing sides”. However, this assumption overlooks how the domestic politics of Southeast Asian states shape their foreign policies. Furthermore, if the United States or China are to attain a leadership role and legitimacy in the region, they require the validation, support and deference of smaller states, none of which can be achieved without consideration of domestic politics. Thus, this Special Issue—including case studies of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Laos, Thailand and the Philippines—underscores the domestic determinants of the foreign policy of Southeast Asian states, identifying how their concerns about economic security, political legitimacy and regional stability mediate their engagement with the United States and China.