



# Myanmar and ASEAN

(Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

- Myanmar
  - Demography
  - Military rule
- Myanmar's trading partners:
  - China
  - ASEAN
  - North Korea
- US policies
  - Sanctions
  - Leveraging ASEAN
- Questions
- Our next Topic





Myanmar's People





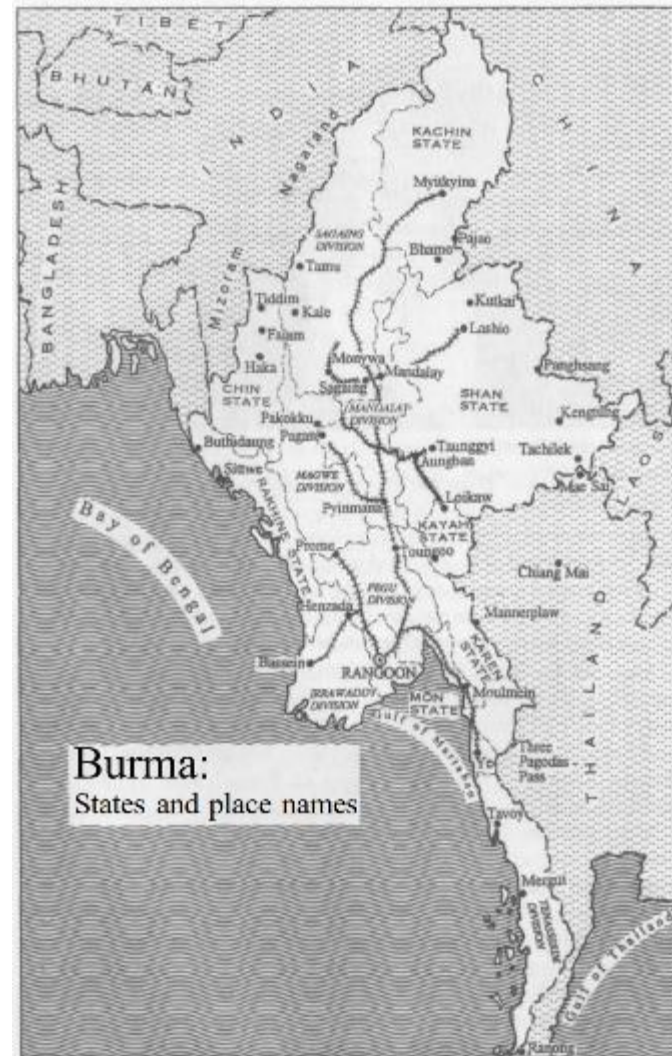
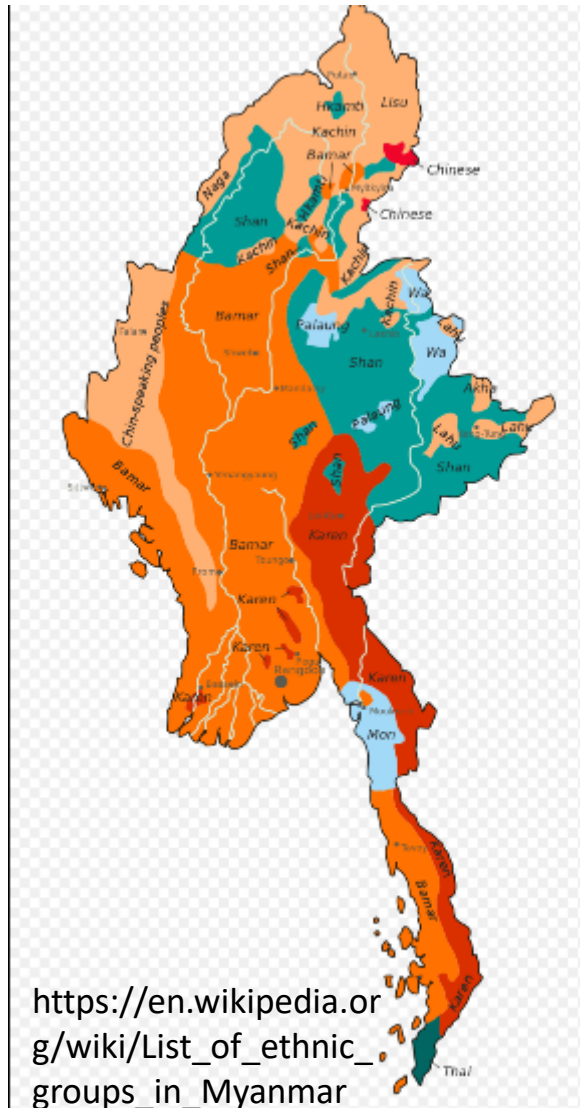
Diverse Lifestyle



# Diverse Lifestyle



# A Little Background



Ethnic Composition in Myanmar (Rough Estimate)

Bamar	68.00%
Shan	9.00%
Karen	7.00%
Rakhine	1.7%
Chinese	2.50%
Mon	2.00%
Kachin	1.50%
Burmese Indians (majority Myanmar Tamils)	1.25%
Kayah	1.83%
Other groups including Wa, Naga, Lahu, Lisu and Palaung	4.50%

## Unrecognized ethnic groups.

The Government of Myanmar (Burma) does not recognize several ethnic groups as being among the list of 135 officially recognized ethnic groups:

- [Anglo-Burmese people](#)
- [Burmese Chinese](#)
- [Panthay<sup>\[7\]</sup>](#)
- [Burmese Indians](#)
- [Taungtha people](#)
- [Rohingya people](#)
- [Burmese Gurkhas/Nepalese](#)

# Myanmar's administrative structure needs to change

- Ethnicity and conflict inextricably linked in Myanmar, creating a vicious cycle of violence
- State's **inability to provide adequate security to communities** has created an arms race among minority groups. **Half Million Rohingyas displaced, 30K killed.**
- The country now has scores of powerful non-state armed groups around most of its periphery.
- To break the cycle of ethnic conflict, Myanmar should launch a reform process addressing citizenship, the country's administrative structure and the peace
- Myanmar's leaders can begin with more manageable changes, such as the language and narratives they use when discussing ethnicity and conflict
- Changes will be deeply controversial.
- Myanmar needs to resolve its decades-old armed conflicts, now structured along ethnic lines.
- National leaders need to take bold, visionary steps to shake off the divisive legacies of the past and shape an inclusive vision for the country

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/312-identity-crisis-ethnicity-and-conflict-myanmar>

# Myanmar and North Korea

- North Korean **embassy** in Myanmar.
- Myanmar **one of the top-10 recipients of exports from North Korea**
- Myanmar–North Korea relations have affected Myanmar's relations with the US and Japan.
- US and Japan have supported normalization of relations with Myanmar so as to deter North Korea from gaining an ally in Southeast Asia
- Myanmar and North Korea are often compared to one another.
- Both neighbor China, **both are heavily militarized societies with ongoing conflict, and with isolationist policies**
- In 2018, however, the UN found that **North Korea is selling ballistic and surface-to-air missiles and other weapons to Myanmar** through its weapons export arm Korea Mining and Development Trading Corporation.
- **What can the US do to discourage the North Korea partnerships with some ASEAN members**
  - The Biden administration could **offer other incentives to nudge ASEAN** states into compliance by:
    - Tailored **economic, political or military** benefits.
    - Pledges to **buy more products**
    - Support for **these state's foreign policies**
    - Military-to-military interaction.
  - In addition to UN sanctions, Washington needs to successfully tighten the thumbscrews on North Korea by convincing ASEAN nations to **faithfully implement international sanctions**



# ASEAN and Authoritarianism

**Southeast Asia** a **HOTSPOT** is located in the middle of the Indo-Pacific region, and **ASEAN**, as an **organization of 10 Southeast Asian** countries for regional cooperation, is **playing a pivotal role** in international arrangements such as the **East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum**, as well as the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement**

- **Authoritarian Resurgence and the erosion of democracy**
- **Freedom House 2021 Rankings:**
  - Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore were partly free
  - Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam were not free
- **Good Read:**
  - Durable Authoritarianism in non democracies: Thomas Pepinsky Cornell Univ.





# ASEAN Adrift

Special summit meeting of the ASEAN in **Nov. 2021**, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared a "**comprehensive strategic partnership**" with ASEAN countries.

• **U.S.** announced its **Indo-Pacific strategy** in **February 2022**, which included the strengthening of the partnership with ASEAN along with its allies such as Japan and Australia.

ASEAN **adrift due to a number of reasons.**

• **Differences in the geopolitical positions of its member countries.**

1. The territorial dispute in the South China Sea. **Beijing is trying to make the South China Sea "China's Lake."**
2. Japan, the United States, Australia, and India are cooperating to protect the "free and open Indo-Pacific."
3. For ASEAN, the only position that can be taken on this issue is one of ambiguity.
  1. There are countries that **have territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, namely Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei,**
  2. **Indonesia** is having a dispute over **the exclusive economic zone.**
  3. And those **without territorial disputes such as Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Singapore.**
  4. **Cambodia and Laos are not willing to offend China** by joining Vietnam, the Philippines, and other regional players

# ASEAN Adrift

## Differences in their politics and economics.

- In the past 20 years, the economies of the ASEAN countries expanded substantially. Myanmar, the figure grew 4.3 times, Vietnam did 2.8 times, Indonesia and the Philippines 2.1 times, and Thailand and Malaysia 1.8 to 1.9 times.
- The governments are bent on **avoiding anything that will negatively affect economic growth**.
- **In 2000**, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, exports to Japan accounted for 15-23% of total exports, exports to the U.S. was 14-30% and China just 2-5%
- **In 2019**, China was one of the top three export destinations for all of Southeast Asian countries. In Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam, exports to China were 12-17% of the total, while exports to Japan were just 8-15% and the U.S. received 10-22 %
- **Growing differences** in the positions of the ASEAN countries own policies toward China, each member country has come to employ its OWN approach rather than as a GROUP.
- In other words, geopolitically, they are trying to avoid being in the crossfire of conflicts as much as possible, while taking whatever they can get economically.



# How Should US Play the Game With ASEAN Adrift

## 1. Intensifying cooperation with individual countries

- **South China Sea issue**. Countries that are in dispute with China over territorial rights and exclusive economic zones -- the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia, welcome the U.S. and its allies getting involved in peace and security, freedom of navigation, and territorial issues in the South China Sea. However, they do not want to choose between the U.S. and China.

## 2. **Economic cooperation**. A MUST for engagement with the ASEAN countries. China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative in offering huge funds for infrastructure development.

- As a result, the **debt to China may become a political issue** in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and other countries. **In addition, the global economic tide is also turning.** The U.S. Federal Reserve Board has announced it will resume raising interest rates. When this happens, import prices rise and inflationary pressures intensify. As a result, the economy decelerates, and some countries may end up in a debt crisis. We need to prepare to extend support in such a situation.

## 3. **Political change**. **Thailand, North Korea and Cambodia** deserves attention here.

- **Thai politics has been in flux** for the past 20 years. Democracy with the king as head of state, based on a coalition of the military, royal family, and conglomerates, has stalled. What happens to Thailand will substantially affect the politics of mainland Southeast Asia.
- **Cambodia's Hun Sen government and the Kim regime** has **the revenue generated** by the North Korean-built Angkor Panorama museum **remitted back to North Korea**. Washington needs to convince Phnom Penh to withhold the revenue stream 'in trust' until the Kim regime implements nuclear disarmament.

# ASEAN and Myanmar

- An ASEAN special envoy will visit Myanmar this week, to lay the groundwork for a peace process
- Prak Sokhonn, Cambodia's foreign minister and envoy for ASEAN, wants to hold Myanmar's military boss Min Aung Hlaing to his commitment to end hostilities in the wake of a coup he led last year.
- ASEAN has barred Myanmar's generals from regional summits since late last year, must remain sidelined until progress is made, including granting the envoy access to all parties
- The ruling junta is accused of delaying the peace process while it tries to consolidate power and crush its opposition.
- <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/asean-envoy-seeking-favourable-conditions-myanmar-peace-process-2022-03-18/>



# Feb 17, 2022 Summit postponed, US announces the summit be held on March 28/29 ?

- **Weeks before planned ASEAN summit with US President Joe Biden**
  - **China warns ASEAN countries not to be pawns in major power confrontation**
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi tells:
  1. Indonesian counterpart Retno Marsudi that Southeast Asian nations should cherish their region's peace and stability
  2. Major powers should not use smaller countries as 'tools'

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3170549/china-warns-asean-countries-not-be-pawns-major-power>



# Could US/UK Sanctions On The Myanmar Military Work?

- **Human rights groups and democracy activists pushed for sanctions**, arguing that they fund the military's repression of protesters.
- **As violence against Myanmar's civilians mounts, Western powers have ratcheted up economic pressure on the country's military following its internationally condemned coup that killed 600**
- **The US and UK, have imposed sanctions** on Myanmar's two military conglomerates - Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (MEHL) - which control significant portions of Myanmar's economy and have interests across many major industries.
- **The US Treasury Dept. has blocked assets** and transactions with Myanmar's state-run gem company, a key source of income for the military authorities, while the **EU has imposed sanctions on several individuals linked to the military.**
- **"These actions will specifically target those who led the coup, the economic interests of the military, and the funding streams supporting the Burmese military's brutal repression," Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said. "They are not directed at the people of Burma."**
- While the West, most notably the US, has been keen to take the lead in imposing sanctions, Myanmar's biggest trade partners in Asia have rejected that approach.

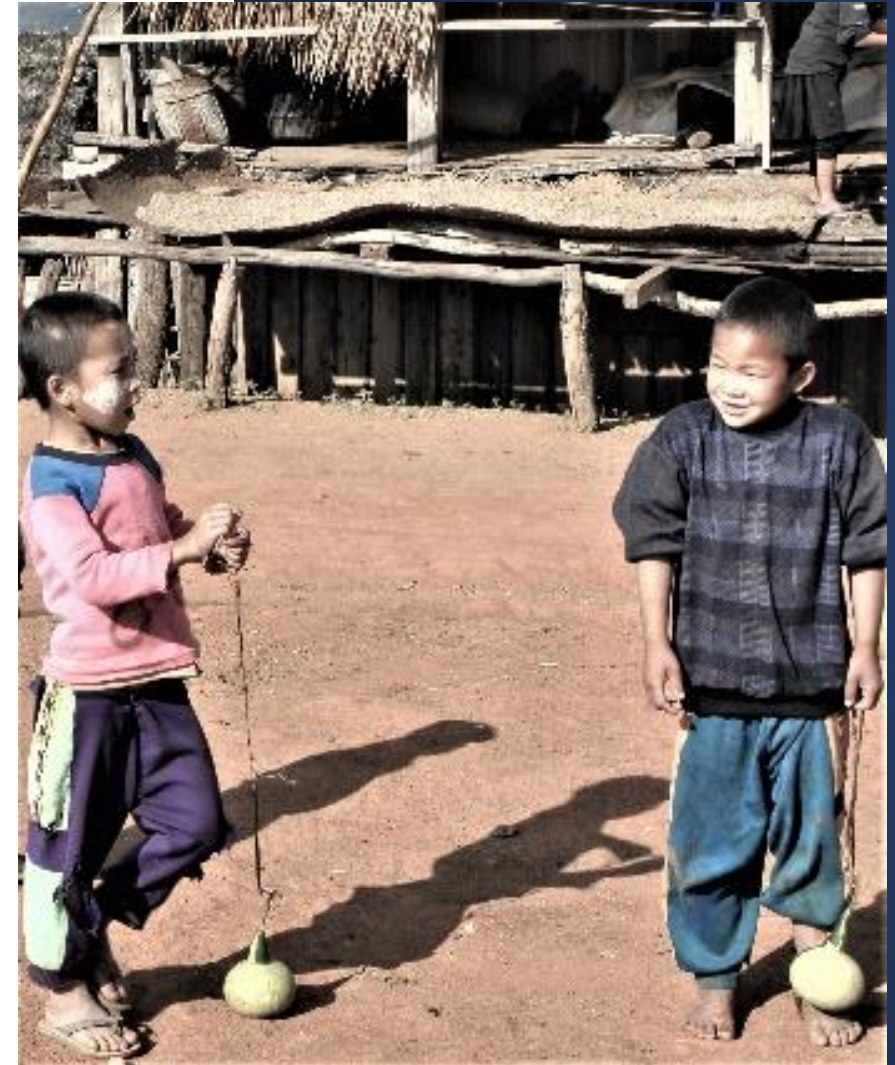


# Could US/UK Sanctions On The Military Work?

- For example: The **complexity of imposing sanctions** and enforcing them is **Golden City, a Yangon mixed-use development** with an unobstructed view of the city's most famous landmark Schwedagon Pagoda.
- The **activist group Justice for Myanmar** says the development is a cash cow for Myanmar's military that channels millions into the military department "which buys weapons of war that are used on the people of Myanmar in the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity."
- Singapore-listed company Emerging Towns and Cities (ETC) - which owns a 49% stake in the development - halted trading in February after Justice for Myanmar published the allegations
- The company admits its partner in Myanmar has ties to the military. It makes lease payments for Golden City into an account administered by the Quartermaster General's Office, which reports to the Ministry of Defense.
- The row over the development is a reflection of the fragmented international response to the coup.
- The company can't be in breach of sanctions because Singapore hasn't imposed any.

# Could US/UK Sanctions On The Military Work?

- **Both critics and proponents agree** that up until now the sanctions - which only targeted Myanmar's top brass - **have been fairly weak.**
- "The Myanmar military are not going to fall down on the floor, cry and say 'oh my god, I've lost my visa to the US, my life is over'. They'll probably laugh," said Kishore Mahbubani, a former Singapore diplomat and a Distinguished Fellow at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.
- More broadly, sanctions as a policy tool have a patchy record.







## Questions

1. There is a long history of authoritarianism in southeast Asia, knowing this trend do you think it is possible for democracy to prevail in Myanmar?
2. Aung Suu Ki has been criticized of undemocratic tendencies herself in the past. Does this fact damage her ability to be a strong opponent to the junta?
3. Does the reconciliation between the ethnic minorities and the Burmese represent a hope for a future in Myanmar in which there is less in-fighting?
4. The US has utilized targeted sanctions and the freeing of military assets to send a strong message to the State Administration Council (SAC). Have these policies proven effective? What other actions should the US take toward the situation in Myanmar?





## Great Decisions 2022 plans

Great Decisions IG homepage -- [https://gk.eoing.com/olli/great\\_decisions/](https://gk.eoing.com/olli/great_decisions/)

<b>February 28</b>	<b>Changing Demographics</b>	<b>Sally B</b>
<b>March 7</b>	<b>Outer Space</b>	<b>Guenter V / Kris S</b>
<b>March 14</b>	<b>Biden's Agenda</b>	<b>?? All??</b>
<b>March 21</b>	<b>Industrial Policy</b>	<b>Mark O and Brian H</b>
<b>March 28</b>	<b>Myanmar and ASEAN</b>	<b>Bijoy C and Joya C</b>
<b>April 4</b>	<b>The Quad Alliance</b>	<b>John S and Jackie S</b>
<b>April 11</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Sandy Mc</b>
<b>April 18</b>	<b>Drug Policy in Latin America</b>	<b>Dave D/ Gary O</b>
<b>April 25</b>	<b>Climate Change</b>	<b>Nancy K / Gaby L</b>
<b>May 2</b>	<b>Lunch at Bijoy and Joya's</b>	

# Resources

*Chinese investment*

*Port Development*

*Free trade Zone from China*

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-china-port-exclusive/exclusive-myanmar-scales-back-chinese-backed-port-project-due-to-debt-fears-official-idUSKBN1KN106>

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/understanding-the-relations-between-myanmar-and-china/>

<https://www.porttechnology.org/news/china-and-myanmar-to-build-new-deep-sea-port/>

<https://www.nti.org/countries/myanmar/>

<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-burma/>