Regional Bodies

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CHAIR: Parker Brandenburg

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Letter from the Chair

Background on the Committee

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, is a regional organization of ten different states from around the Southeast Asian region: Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma).

ASEAN is far less internally integrated than many other regional bodies that delegates may be familiar with. There is no formal ASEAN parliament, like there is for the Arab League or the European Union. Instead, ASEAN serves more as a negotiating forum of its members, with Heads of State and Cabinet Ministers meeting bi-annually to discuss regional issues and integration. Each summit is chaired by a Head of State, and it is currently Anwar Ibrahim for the year 2025. Obviously, no delegates will be chairing this committee- although Anwar Ibrahim's delegation may make reference to his position. ASEAN also periodically holds meetings of Cabinet Ministers from around Southeast Asia- for example, sometimes ASEAN member states have a meeting with just all of their Defense Ministers to discuss regional security.

Generally speaking, ASEAN is tasked with improving regional cohesion in three main fields, through ASEAN's three key frameworks, known as "communities". These "communities" are: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), which primarily deals with treaties between ASEAN members that make the region more stable from armed conflict, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which focuses on making ASEAN more economically integrated, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), which deals with everything else, including social issues, climate change, cultural and religious issues, and more.

History of ASEAN

ASEAN today looks quite different from what it was originally intended to look like by its founding member states. ASEAN was preceded by the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), which was formed by Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia, which was formed in 1961. However, in 1967, Singapore and Indonesia would sign a new deal with the original three ASA members to form ASEAN as we know it today.

ASEAN was originally meant to form an alliance of anti-Communist states in Southeast Asia, attempting to stop the influence of the Soviet Union and Communist China. Indeed, most of ASEAN's original members were pro-Western pro-Capitalist dictatorships at the time.

However, with the end of the Cold War as well as the Vietnam War and the Cambodian Civil War, membership began to open up, and countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos (who previously had hostile relations with ASEAN) applied and were accepted to join the community.

The acceptance of these new members effectively transformed ASEAN from an anti-Communist economic alliance into an alliance more focused on bringing Southeast Asia together and increasing regional cohesion, rather than focusing on what divides Southeast Asia.

Topic 1: Myanmar's Civil War

The nation of Myanmar is a country located on the fringe of Southeast Asia, between India and Thailand. It sits at a crossroads of cultures, identities, religions, and languages, and is perhaps the most diverse country in Southeast Asia, with over 139 ethnic groups. It is a beautiful country filled with swathes of tropical rainforest and rolling hills, and has a rich culture that goes back hundreds of years.

But today, Myanmar finds itself engulfed in conflict. Myanmar's civil war is one of the longest-running in the world, going all the way back to 1948, and has become increasingly complex as time has gone on.

Myanmar has a problem with its military. The Armed Forces of Myanmar (or the "Tatmadaw", as they are known) has a long history of interfering in Myanmar's government. In 1962, General Ne Win overthrew Myanmar's democratically elected government and installed himself as Myanmar's new president. Ne Win ruled his country for 26 years as a brutal dictator, throwing his political opponents into jail and rigging elections in order to stay in power. And although he stepped down in 1988, his successors would continue to rule the country in the same brutal way until 2011.

In 2008, a series of massive protests known as the Saffron Revolution forced the military to negotiate with pro-democracy protests to create a new constitution that would return some aspects of democracy to Myanmar. Although this new government would be democratic on paper, the military still got to keep significant influence behind the scenes. The military would still get to appoint half of the representatives in Myanmar's congress, and would get to appoint the minister of defense and choose the head of the Army by themselves. The military also created fake political parties that were aligned with their interests in order to keep.

Things would change in 2015, when the National League for Democracy (NLD) party led by Aung San Suu Kyi, a famous political activist that fought against the military, would be elected to power by Myanmar's people. Aung San Suu Kyi sought to limit and decrease the power of the military within Myanmar's democratic system, and freed many political prisoners, but she was always limited by the fact that the military got to retain so much influence in Myanmar's political system. However, in 2020, the NLD won the next election again by an even larger margin. The NLD now had enough members in congress to change the constitution without the military's permission, and could theoretically place stringent limits on the military's power.

The military got scared by this, and instead of accepting the outcome of the election, overthrew the government again in 2021. The military dissolved the congress, declared General Min Aung Hlaing to be the legitimate leader of Myanmar, and threw Aung San Suu Kyi in prison.

However, the NLD was not about to just give up and surrender. The NLD formed the National Unity Government (NUG) and appointed their own President, claiming to be the legitimate government of Myanmar. They also formed their own rebel group, the People's Defense Forces (PDF) and launched a rebellion against the military government. The result has, so far, been a brutal four-year long civil war, with Myanmar's military being backed by Russia and China, and the PDF being supported (at least officially) by the United States and the West.

Myanmar is also an exceptionally diverse country. Although 60% of the country's population belongs to the Burmese ethnic group and speaks the Burmese language, 40% of the country belongs to people of other ethnicities. Some of the largest ones are the Shan people (10%), the Karen people (7%), the Rakhine people (5%), and the Mon people (3%).

These ethnic groups have often felt discriminated against by the majority Buddhist Burmese ethnicity, who has historically controlled Myanmar's government and make up most of the military. As a result, many of these ethnic groups have various rebel groups associated with them that are fighting for either increased autonomy within Myanmar, or to create their own unique country all together.

What this means is that, in addition to the war between the pro-democracy rebels and the military government, there are also dozens of different ethnic militias fighting for their ethnic group around the country. Some of them are allied to the pro-democracy rebels, some are allied to the military government, and some have refused to take a side.

Issues to Consider

There is much for delegates to discuss and consider regarding the conflict that is raging within Myanmar, including the elephant in the room: the absence of a delegate from Myanmar.

ASEAN will have to make a choice regarding which government of Myanmar it wants to recognize: the military government, that remains in control of most of the large cities, or the civilian government, which is currently in the midst of waging a war against the Military Government. As an ASEAN member, Myanmar deserves a seat at the table: but which government should ASEAN recognize? The military junta, or the government in exile? Furthermore, should ASEAN recognize any of the separatist areas that potentially want to leave Myanmar, and should it allow them to join ASEAN?

There is also the question of what ASEAN's role in solving this conflict should be. ASEAN historically has had a policy of not intervening in the business of other member countries. However, ASEAN has frequently served as a forum for negotiations between

members. ASEAN could choose to try to mediate negotiations between Myanmar's military and the rebels, or ASEAN could choose to sit by and wait to see what happens.

The conflict in Myanmar has also destabilized the entire region. The instability and lack of government in some areas of the country, along with the participation of armed groups, has made Myanmar the global leader in organized crime. Gangs and crime syndicates in Myanmar continue to engage in highly illegal activity, such as illegal gambling, opioid production, and cyber-scamming. This, in turn, affects other nations in ASEAN and empowers organized crime around the region. While ASEAN has a longstanding policy of non-intervention, some have begun to wonder if a peace-keeping force should be deployed to the region in order to stop crime from continuing within Myanmar.

In addition, refugees from Myanmar continue to arrive in the thousands into bordering countries such as Thailand, fleeing the terrible conflict conditions that exist within Myanmar. These people have the right to do so under international law, but Thailand is feeling the strain of having to care for a very large refugee population, and ASEAN member states may need to come to an agreement on how to adequately care for this growing population.

This speaks to the broader deteriorating human rights situation within Myanmar. As pro-democracy rebels have gained ground, the Military has cracked down on pro-democracy protests and dissidents within Myanmar. In addition, the Myanmar military government has also historically shown very brutal treatment towards ethnic minorities in Myanmar, including the Rohingya people who have been the subject of brutal discrimination by the regime. ASEAN could play an important role in sanctioning Myanmar's military regime by refusing to trade with its current government- but should it, given the non-intervention policy?

Guiding Questions

- *Should ASEAN recognize Myanmar's military government as the legitimate government, or should ASEAN pivot to instead recognize Myanmar's civilian government?*
- *What can (or should) ASEAN do to protect human rights in Myanmar? Should sanctions be instituted?*
- *What should ASEAN's role be in facilitating negotiations between Myanmar's military and the pro-democracy rebels, as well as with the ethnic separatist rebels?*
- *What kind of solution should ASEAN promote to end the Myanmar conflict? Should ASEAN promote a multi-state solution*
- *Should ASEAN organize a peacekeeping force to prevent the Myanmar conflict from destabilizing the entire region?*
- *If any of the ethnic separatist rebel groups in Myanmar declare independence, should those new countries be allowed into ASEAN? What are the implications of that for other countries with multi-ethnic populations?*
- *How can ASEAN meet the demands of the thousands of refugees fleeing Myanmar?*
- *How should ASEAN handle the increase in regional crime committed by groups operating from Myanmar?*

Topic 2: South China Sea Conflict

The South China Sea is a region of the Pacific Ocean that is located in between mainland Southeast Asia and the Philippine Islands. It is characterized by several small islands and island chains that have been uninhabited for all of their existence, but are claimed by various different groups and powers who sought to exercise influence over the region.

Within the South China Sea, there are many resources such as natural gas and oil deposits, some of which are exploited in moderate amounts by nations claiming the South China Sea. Additionally, the sea has long served as a source of fish for the people of the surrounding nations, both for subsistence and commercial fishing.

The South China Sea is also immensely strategically important. The South China Sea leads into the Strait of Malacca, the narrow passageway between the Malay peninsula and Indonesia's Sumatra island. This has historically served as the main trading route between the societies of East and Southeast Asia, and the rest of the world. It is especially important today because it is the shortest route between the Middle East and East Asia, which sources much of its oil from there.

For much of its early history, the South China Sea was used as a trading route by several peoples and societies including China's various dynasties, the Srivijaya Empire, the Majapahit Empire, the Brunei Sultanate, and several other Chinese, Indian, and Austronesian societies. There is no evidence that any society exercised undisputed authority or sovereignty over these areas over a long period of time, both because it was impractical due to technological limitations, and because it was not imagined as a concern at the time.

However, with the arrival of Europeans who wanted to claim lands in Southeast Asia, the question of defined sovereignty over the South China Sea became relevant

again. European empires needed to decide who was able to claim sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea, in particular.

At first, it was Spain and France that claimed dominance, with Spain claiming the Spratly Islands near its colony in the Philippines and France claiming that the Paracel Islands belonged to its colonies in Vietnam. Later, Japan would also throw its hat in the ring, even having complete dominance over the South China Sea during its brief period of total control over Southeast Asia in World War 2. China protested all of these claims, but due to its extremely weak geopolitical position and constantly being beaten by European powers, it could do little to exercise this claim.

The debate over "who owned what" in the South China Sea would take on new meaning after World War 2 ended. Following the end of the conflict and the surrender of the Japanese Empire, many of the European protectorates located in that region began to break away and declare independence. Places like Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Cambodia asserted that they did not want the Europeans to return, even after being freed from Japanese rule. Many of them even fought wars to prevent the Europeans from returning.

Due to the end of colonial dominance in the region, suddenly there were 10 new independent nations in Southeast Asia that had their own foreign policy agendas. Additionally, the idea of a rules-based international order was beginning to take shape, with the formation of the United Nations and international bodies of arbitration. The question of "who owned what" in the ocean began to be formally outlined in international law in a way that it hadn't been before.

Additionally, China under Chiang Kai-Shek and later Mao Zedong attempted to formally push its maritime claim to the South China Sea using the nine-dash line, a map that laid out what China viewed as its territorial waters in the region. To this day, this

nine-dash line serves as an official guideline for China's claims to the South China Sea and is the largest claim of any nation.

Periodic skirmishes would occur, particularly between Vietnam and China, over the Paracel Islands- particularly in the context of the Sino-Vietnamese War and the Third Indochina War. But ultimately, nothing would firmly be decided. None of these nations had strong enough navies to formally cement their claims. China was in an especially difficult position, having a very large land army but a quite weak navy. For the most part, the nine-dash line was irrelevant.

However, as China's economy liberalized after the death of Mao Zedong into a functioning capitalist economy, China began modernizing its naval forces. China has, in recent years, slowly become more and more able to actually enforce its claims over the South China Sea, and make excursions into places where it was previously unable to enforce claims. The Chinese navy has since made excursions deep into the Filipino and Vietnamese claims, and has enforced certain rules such as requiring fishing permits for foreign fishermen- as well as imprisoning those who don't comply. China has also turned several of the disputed islands into military bases- and even created new islands by dumping sand into shallow reefs. China has stationed fighter jets and missiles on these islands, effectively making its claim self-enforcing.

China and the Philippines have also gotten involved in several skirmishes in recent history, with China detaining Filipino fishermen, and the Chinese and Filipino navies getting into tense confrontations. China often finds itself in standoffs with the Filipino navy, with Chinese vessels intentionally ramming Filipino ships and threatening to open fire. The Philippines has responded by doubling down on its alliance with the United States, including signing mutual defense agreements, purchasing new weapons, and allowing an extended U.S. military presence. The United

States and the Philippines have conducted joint air and naval exercises in the South China Sea, in order to assert Filipino sovereignty in the area.

Issues to Consider

It is abundantly clear to all ASEAN nations that something needs to be done in order to resolve the conflict, to prevent Southeast Asia from being destabilized by yet another deadly conflict.

Most ASEAN members agree that China's nine-dashed line claim is ridiculous and illegitimate, and represents a larger pattern of China's government threatening its neighbors over seemingly-small territorial disputes.

However, many ASEAN members also have dealings with China. Several members of ASEAN are reliant on trade with China, and every member of ASEAN (except for the Philippines) is a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. China has large infrastructure projects and investments in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, which could cause those countries to be less cooperative when it comes to challenging China- especially since those three countries do not have South China Sea disputes. It may be more difficult to get these countries to agree on unified action on the South China Sea, especially since they are not as involved.

There is also the aforementioned fact that ASEAN nations also have inter-ASEAN disputes over the ownership of the South China Sea. The claims of the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam all overlap- there are also some other unsettled disputes between countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, over other maritime boundaries that are not in the South China Sea. Some ASEAN members may feel that it is more important to resolve the dispute with China first, while others may feel that ASEAN

members should agree on what the borders in the South China Sea look like without China, such that they can form a more united front on that issue.

It is also undeniable that this is taking place within the broader context of the China-United States confrontation in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States wants to counter Chinese expansion in the region, and has moved to back up countries like the Philippines in their confrontation with China. The United States does not want to see a powerful and emboldened China that could threaten its strategic position in the region.The United States can provide valuable aid to ASEAN member states in the South China Sea, in order to fend off China- but should ASEAN members ask the U.S. for help? The United States has a complex relationship with Southeast Asia due to the Vietnam War, which Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have never fully forgotten or forgiven. Is ASEAN comfortable seeking closer relations and cooperation with the United States? Or should ASEAN attempt to resolve the South China Sea dispute on its own first?

Guiding Questions

- *Should ASEAN resolve its internal disputes over the South China Sea first, or focus on China as the main regional enemy?*
- *What should a resolution to the South China Sea dispute look like? What is your country willing to concede? What is your country not willing to concede?*
- *Should ASEAN be amenable to negotiations with China, or should ASEAN take a hardline position and assert that China has no place in the South China Sea?*
- *How can ASEAN member states combat economic coercion from China, while keeping their claims to the South China Sea?*
- *To what extent should ASEAN members cooperate with the United States in order to ensure the territorial integrity of its members?*

Positions:

Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., President of the Philippines

Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. is the current President of the Philippines, a position which he was elected to in 2022. This makes him the Head of State of the Philippines, and he also serves as the leader of the UniTeam coalition, a center-right alliance of political parties. Marcos generally supports increased but neutral ASEAN intervention on regional matters. He has been pushing an agreement on the South China Sea between all the ASEAN member states, and has also called for a ceasefire and continued negotiations in Myanmar. As the leader of one of Southeast Asia's few relatively democratic nations, and an opponent of China which supports Myanmar's military government, Marcos may be more opening to supporting the pro-democracy rebels and ethnic separatists. Marcos is hawkish on Chinese interference as the President of the Philippines, with the Philippines bearing most of China's aggressive provocations in the South China Sea.

Sara Duterte, Vice President of the Philippines

Sara Duterte is the current Vice President of the Philippines. She was able to gain this position as a result of complex political dealings between her powerful political family, the Duterte family, and the Marcos family, in a bid to secure an alliance between the two. However, this alliance has rapidly crumbled. Sara Duterte, following in the footsteps of her father and former President Rodrigo Duterte, is much more pro-China than Marcos, calling for dialogue and economic cooperation, instead of confrontation, with China. Duterte is also much more willing to defer to Myanmar's military over the

pro-democracy groups, given her father's authoritarian tendencies and calls for ASEAN to "stand with Myanmar".

Tess Lazaro, Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the Philippines

Tess Lazaro is the top diplomat within the Filipino government. She is relatively new to the position, only having received it on July 1st of 2025 following a cabinet reshuffle. Lazaro has been the Philippines' top negotiator on the South China Sea issue, and recently brokered a landmark deal which allowed the Philippines to resupply a remote island garrison which was being blockaded by Chinese naval forces. If this legacy is anything to go by, she will likely support increased negotiations with China, but still in such a way that supports the territorial integrity of the Philippines, Vietnam, and other ASEAN states which China's claims affect. While she may be less bellicose than Marcos about the South China Sea dispute, she is likely going to still support a settlement that favors countries whose territorial waters are being claimed by China. Lazaro will likely also follow Marcos' positions regarding Myanmar, supporting negotiations but in such a way which could favor the pro-democracy rebels.

Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Prime Minister of Thailand

Paetongtarn Shinawatra is currently the Prime Minister of Thailand, albeit on shaky ground. She was elected in 2024, making her one of the most recently elected leaders in Southeast Asia, after succeeding former Prime Minister Sretta Thavisin, also a member of her coalition. Shinawatra is the heir to a powerful political dynasty started by her father Thaksin Shinawatra. Generally speaking, Shinawatra has been eager to help with efforts to combat crime in Myanmar, but has a working relationship with Myanmar's military government, so is likely to favor the military junta. However,

Shinawatra may be slightly skeptical of the military junta in Myanmar, given that her father was overthrown by the Thai military a few decades earlier, and until the mid 2010s, Thailand was under a similar military dictatorship. Additionally, Shinawatra will likely be concerned about the large number of Burmese refugees entering Thailand. Thailand has long been a partner on the belt and road initiative, and so getting involved in an ASEAN-wide effort to combat China will be difficult- but Thailand isn't also entirely in China's pocket, as strong relations with the United States mean that Thailand tries to be more neutral between China and the United States.

Maris Sangiampongsa, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Thailand.

Maris Sangiampongsa has actually been Minister of Foreign Affairs for longer than Paetongtarn Shinawatra has been Prime Minister. Sangiampongsa was first given the role in 2024, by Shinawatra's predecessor Sretta Thavisin, but has been kept on by Shinawatra due to his diplomatic competence. Sangiampongsa is likely going to take similar positions to Shinawatra on the South China Sea- supporting peaceful negotiations that slightly favor China's claims, and ruling out Western involvement. On matters relating to Myanmar, Sangiampongsa has favored Myanmar's military junta in the past and is likely to continue doing so. Sangiampongsa sees the junta as a key actor to stabilize Myanmar and prevent crime from spilling into Thailand. He will likely therefore support negotiations for a settlement which favors the military over the pro-democracy rebels in the country.

General Phanna Khlaeoplotthuk, Commander-in-Chief of the Thai Army

Although he has no position in government, the influence of General Khlaeoplotthuk looms large over Thailand's politics. Thailand's military has largely had

a free hand to intervene in Thailand's politics ever since the 1930s, and it was only a decade ago that Prayuth Chan-o-Cha, Klaeoplotthuk's direct predecessor, carried out a military coup which overthrew Paetongtarn Shinawatra's aunt, Yingluck Shinawatra. The Thai Army, while officially neutral, is a powerful political force in Thailand, and the threat of a coup looms large over foreign affairs. Thus, generally speaking, the Thai government must take the military's opinion into account before acting. Khlaeoplotthuk is a staunch Thai nationalist and conservative. As a Thai nationalist, he is skeptical of Chinese influence in Thailand and Southeast Asia more broadly, and so is likely to eye China's moves in the South China Sea suspiciously. However, Khlaeoplotthuk is more likely to support Myanmar's military junta, because of the solidarity between the Burmese and Thai militaries due to a common conservative outlook on politics. He is also therefore less likely to favor negotiations with the pro-democracy rebels.

Hun Sen, President of the Senate of Cambodia

While Hun Sen's position may at first seem unimportant on paper, he remains the most powerful man in Cambodia. Although he abdicated the Prime Minister's seat in 2023 to his son, Hun Manet, he still remains the chief decision maker and top politician in Cambodia. Hun Sen is considered to be a staunch ally of the government of China. He is deeply involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, allowing China to build dozens of infrastructure projects like highways and bridges throughout Cambodia. He has also allegedly allowed China to help refurbish a Cambodian naval base, which some analysts believe may be used to support a Chinese navy presence. Hun Sen was also the first ASEAN leader to visit Myanmar's military leader after the coup, meaning that he is likely a strong supporter of their government.

Prak Sokhonn, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Cambodia

Prak Sokhonn is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs for Cambodia, having been placed there in 2024. Sokhonn is Hun Manet's second Foreign Minister, succeeding Sok Sophea before him. Sokhonn is likely to continue to carry out the will of both Hun Sen, and by extension Hun Manet. He will be supportive of China's South China Sea claims to a large extent due to Cambodia's positive relations with China. He will also likely support Myanmar's military regime, albeit favoring negotiations and being more critical of the regime than Hun Manet due to his past work in helping negotiate with both pro-democracy rebels and military authorities.

Norodom Sihamoni, King of Cambodia

Norodom Sihamoni is currently the King of Cambodia. Cambodia is, officially, a constitutional monarchy. The King is officially a neutral figure, similar to the King of England, with the Prime Minister wielding most of the power in the country. Despite this, the royal family of Cambodia remains deeply influential in Cambodian politics, and previous Kings have used their position to be more impactful on Cambodian politics than perhaps Cambodia's elected leaders would like. Norodom is more in favor of negotiations between Cambodia's warring parties, and is less of a pro-military junta hawk when compared to Hun Sen. However, Norodom is likely to have a similar position to Hun Sen on the South China Sea issue, being less aggressively anti-China than some of their counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia. This is because Norodom's family was allowed to hide in China during the Cambodian Civil War, which took place from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Thongloun Sisoulith, President of Laos

Thongloun Sisoulith is the President of Laos, as well as the leader of Laos' only legal political party, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. He is the leader of one of only five remaining Communist nations left on the world stage. Thongloun is also considered to be a strong Chinese ally, with over half of his country's external debt owed to China. He has allowed China to build many infrastructure projects in his nation, and as a nation that does not even have a coastline, he likely isn't very concerned regarding the South China Sea dispute. Thongloun pursues a neutral but more friendly relationship with Myanmar's military government, preferring negotiations but keeping Myanmar at an arms-length due to its human rights abuses.

Thongsavanh Phomvihane, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Laos

Thongsavanh Phomvihane is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs for Laos, and has been since 2024. Thongsavanh is educated in Russia and spent the early part of his career working on Chinese-Laotian relations, meaning he is likely to be a strong advocate for the Russian-Chinese international bloc in the ASEAN summit. He is likely to support China's claims in the South China Sea, or at least favor a settlement that favors China. He is also likely to be supportive of Myanmar's military, which is backed by both Russia and China.

Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia

Anwar Ibrahim is the current Prime Minister of Malaysia, after having won election in 2022. He ran on a platform of reform and good governance, being the first opposition politician ever to be Prime Minister. In Myanmar, Ibrahim has emphasized the need to end the violence in Myanmar, and called for greater ASEAN diplomatic intervention. Ibrahim has had dialogue with the pro-Democracy rebels, as well as with

the military. Ibrahim may sympathize with the pro-Democracy rebels as he himself came to power as a result of a struggle for democracy against the country's long-ruling Barisan Nasional political party. Malaysia is one of the nations with a South China Sea claim that overlaps with the claims of the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. However, Malaysia generally has been spared much of the aggressive military confrontation that we have seen in the Philippines due to the fact that Malaysia's claim contains relatively few islands. That said, Malaysia has urged dialogue over the issue, and has (like Marcos) encouraged the signing of a South China Sea protocol in order to set out the norms for ASEAN members using the South China Sea, and hopefully negotiate an agreement among ASEAN nations.

Fadillah Yusof, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia

The South China Sea dispute is very personal for Fadillah Yusof, because it affects his home province. Yusof is the first Deputy Prime Minister from Malaysia's often neglected eastern half, comprising the northernmost areas of the island of Borneo. Yusof is likely to be a vocal opponent of any Chinese effort to claim parts of the South China Sea, since doing so would likely affect trade between Malaysia's eastern and western halves. There also may be some tensions with Brunei over its claims over territorial waters which belong to eastern Malaysia. On the topic of the Myanmar Civil War, Yusof likely has an outsized amount of sympathy for Myanmar's ethnic rebel groups, since he himself is a member of the Gabungan Parti Sarawak, a political party that represents eastern Malaysia.

Mohamad Hasan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia

Mohamad Hasan is Anwar Ibrahim's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hasan is an experienced diplomat and also once served as Malaysia's Minister of Defense. He comes from the very same political party, the Barisan Nasional, that Anwar Ibrahim tried so hard to defeat. However, the two are now forced into a coalition in order to keep the far-right out of power. Hasan is somewhat more conservative than Anwar Ibrahim on the South China Sea issue, stating that "foreign powers" like the United States should stay out of ASEAN affairs, a veiled swipe at Philippines-US cooperation. Hasan thus favors regional negotiation and settlement, rather than enlisting outside forces to defend ASEAN waters. Hasan has also called on the various parties in Myanmar to reach a ceasefire agreement, like Anwar Ibrahim did before him.

To Lam, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam

To Lam, while not officially Vietnam's Head of State, is the most powerful politician in Vietnam. This is because he is the leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which is Vietnam's only legal political party. To Lam shares a healthy amount of skepticism for China, as China has occupied the Paracel Islands and claims a large amount of Vietnam's ocean territory as part of the nine-dash line. However, Vietnam is in large part cooperating with Myanmar's military against ethnic separatists. Vietnam and Myanmar are both authoritarian countries, and Vietnam does not want to see too much change in terms of democratization.

Pham Minh Chinh, Prime Minister of Vietnam

While Pham Minh Chinh might not hold the top job in Vietnam's government, the Prime Minister's office is certainly viewed as an important stop on the route to power. While he may not be General Secretary today, he could be tomorrow if his

current position is any indicator. Pham is a reformer, and differs from To Lam on several key security issues and policies. He is much more friendly to the West, and much more willing to work with Europe and the United States, especially in the context of the U.S.-China rivalry. Pham will probably be more hawkish on resolving Vietnam's oceanic dispute with China, and will support bringing in the U.S. to support ASEAN nations if China does not comply. Pham's position on Myanmar is much less flexible, however, because at the end of the day Vietnam's government (as an authoritarian country) is skeptical of pro-democracy movements in Southeast Asia.

Bui Thanh Son, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Vietnam

Bui Thanh Son is currently Vietnam's chief diplomat, appointed by and directly subordinate to Pham Minh Chinh. Bui Thanh Son is also Vietnam's deputy Prime Minister. In many ways, Bui belongs to the same faction and alliance within the Communist Party as Pham Minh Chinh, and is likely to act accordingly. This means that he will be highly skeptical of China's moves in the South China Sea, and willing to stand up to China's claims on territorial waters of ASEAN members. However, he is also equally willing to continue to support the status quo military government in Myanmar, while calling for negotiations between the two warring factions.

Prabowo Subianto, President of Indonesia

Prabowo Subianto is the current President of Indonesia, after winning his 2024 election following the resignation of Joko Widodo. Prabowo Subianto's presidency has been one in which he has sought to build up Indonesia's reputation on the international stage by presenting Indonesia as a regional peacekeeper across the world, from Eastern Europe to the Middle East. However, this has not stopped him from commenting on

more local issues. During the early months of his presidency, Prabowo signed a memo with China that fixed Indonesia's maritime border with China, effectively conceding small amounts of the South China Sea in exchange for an end to the dispute. Prabowo will likely favor negotiations with China in order to end the dispute. With regards to Myanmar, Indonesia is a Muslim nation that has historically objected to the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim community in the region. However, Prabowo is also a former military officer himself who served in Indonesia's own military dictatorship, and also has his own concerns about the crime epidemic in Myanmar, which has resulted in the kidnapping of several Indonesian citizens. For these reasons, Prabowo will likely support mediation between the two sides of the civil war, rather than supporting any one side.

Sugiono, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Indonesia

Sugiono (who only has a single name, as is tradition in his native language) is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs for Indonesia. He is widely considered to be the ideological son of Prabowo, and many within Prabowo's political party believe that Sugiono is being groomed by Prabowo to succeed him later on. For these reasons, his positions on the topics discussed above are going to be very similar to those of Prabowo- pro-negotiation, anti-provocation with China, as well as sympathy for Myanmar's military junta and a desire to crackdown on crime originating from Myanmar. Sugiono may be slightly less sympathetic than Prabowo because Sugiono was not actively a member of a military dictatorship as Prabowo was, but will likely also support negotiations.

Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, Minister of Defense for Indonesia

Perhaps the most feared official in Indonesia's government is Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, Indonesia's Minister of Defense. Sjamsoeddin was the bodyguard and trusted advisor of former Indonesian dictator Suharto, and is now a key member of Prabowo Subianto's inner circle. Sjamsoeddin is likely to be a hardliner when it comes to Indonesia's maritime disputes with China, opposing settlements that don't benefit Indonesia's government, but ultimately willing to negotiate with China over the South China Sea. He is also likely to support Myanmar's military dictatorship and support negotiations that favor Myanmar's military junta, perhaps to a greater extent than Prabowo, due to Sjamsoeddin's long track record of work for the Suharto regime.

Lawrence Wong, Prime Minister of Singapore

Lawrence Wong is the fourth-ever Prime Minister of the nation of Singapore, a position which he obtained after the resignation of his predecessor, Lee Hsien Loong. He is also the chair of the People's Action Party, Singapore's largest political party. The political strategy of Singapore seems to be to remain neutral on most issues- including the South China Sea and the Myanmar Civil War. Singapore under Wong has called for dialogue between the warring factions of Myanmar, as well as for ASEAN members to reach a consensus on the South China Sea issue, but has steered clear of endorsing any particular position, other than that ASEAN should be used to mediate. Singapore, as a historically neutral country, will likely favor negotiation in most matters.

Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Singapore

Vivian Balakrishnan is the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Singapore. Balakrishnan is a longtime diplomat and experienced politician, having been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs over a decade ago, in 2015. Balakrishnan is expected to

mirror Lawrence Wong in many ways, such as supporting a negotiated settlement to the South China Sea dispute that preferably does not involve conflict. That said, Balakrishnan is also a longstanding friend of the United States and the Philippines, and has helped to negotiate Singapore's pivot towards the west, and is likely to support more U.S. involvement in ending the dispute. On Myanmar, Balakrishnan is likely going to take a more neutral stance, supporting a ceasefire but not supporting either side of the conflict and continuing Singapore's neutral tradition.

Hassanal Bolkiah, Sultan of Brunei

Hassanal Bolkiah is the hereditary and absolute monarch of the Sultanate of Brunei, a small nation on the island of Borneo, completely surrounded by Malaysia. Most of his nation's wealth comes from Brunei's abundant oil reserves, which he uses to fund his lavish lifestyle. Bolkiah's main concern in the South China Sea is going to be his country's massive dispute with Malaysia. While China and Brunei don't have large overlapping claims, Bolkiah's primary competitor is Malaysia. Malaysia has made a claim on nearly all of Brunei's territorial waters except for a limited few around its coast, something which has made Brunei quite upset. Thus, Bolkiah will likely favor solving inter-ASEAN South China Sea disputes before going after China itself. Bolkiah, like Myanmar's government, is an authoritarian, and so he is also unlikely to take a position that favors the pro-Democracy rebels.

Erywan Yusof, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Brunei

Erywan Yusof is the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Brunei, having assumed that role seven years ago, in 2018. Yusof has a lot of relevant experience in the issues at hand- he is ASEAN's special envoy to Myanmar regarding the outbreak of the armed

conflict in the country. Yusof drafted the five-point consensus regarding Myanmar that ASEAN has so far agreed to abide by, and has attempted to act as a lead negotiator between the rebels and the military to get the two to agree on a ceasefire- an effort he has so far failed in. Yusof will also, like Bolkiah, make strong attempts to get Malaysia to recognize Brunei's continental shelf claim in the South China sea.

Xanana Gusmão, Prime Minister of Timor-Leste

Xanana Gusmao is currently the Prime Minister and highest ranking politician within Timor-Leste. While Timor-Leste is not a formal member of ASEAN, Timor-Leste is expected to gain membership sometime within the next two years, and is currently an ASEAN observer state. Hence, he will be the only member of Timor-Leste's delegation to this committee. Gusmao is known for having a generally friendly relationship with China's leadership, meaning that he will likely support non-confrontational policies regarding the South China Sea, and be skeptical of Western involvement in the region. However, Xanana Gusmao is the single strongest ASEAN supporter of the pro-democracy rebels in Myanmar's ongoing civil war. Xanana Gusmao, along with the President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos Horta, have strongly condemned the 2021 coup and called for members of Myanmar's military to join the pro-democracy rebels. He will likely call for ASEAN to recognize the pro-democracy forces as Myanmar's legitimate government.

James Marape, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea

James Marape is the current Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, being the tenth individual to hold that position since its creation. Like East Timor, Papua New Guinea is an ASEAN observer country, but is not expected to become a full member of

the bloc anytime soon. James Marape enjoys friendly relations with most Western nations, including Australia and the United States. He is also skeptical of China's role in the Asia-Pacific region, having rejected security talks with China in favor of a security treaty with Australia. This means that Marape will likely oppose China's claims on the South China Sea and oppose conceding any ground to the Chinese government. He will likely join leaders like Ferdinand Marcos in opposing Chinese interference, probably by enlisting the help of the West. In Myanmar, Marape has largely been neutral and could be convinced by a variety of opinions. As the leader of a democracy, he is likely to be somewhat sympathetic to the rebels- but may not want to rock the boat and jeopardize his country's chances of becoming a full ASEAN member.