

# JUNTAS HAND IN HAND

Thai Establishment Enabling  
Burmese Military

August, 2023



By Thailand for Burma



## **A Brief by Thailand for Burma**

# Introduction

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In this brief, Thailand for Burma has collected records of the Thai government's engagement with the Myanmar junta. We have also collected records of their regional diplomatic efforts regarding Myanmar since the coup attempt on 1 February 2021. These records shed light on Thailand's malfunctioning and incoherent approach to Myanmar's political crisis between December 2022 and June 2023.





# Thailand's Incoherent Approach

Since the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, Thailand, the neighbouring country most closely tied to Myanmar economically and socially, has developed ad hoc accommodationist policies vis-à-vis the junta. It is essential to continue publicly debating whether these policies respect the collective will of the Myanmar people, whether they have contributed to resolving the crisis in Myanmar, and whether they are in line with Thailand's own democratic principles or international democratic standards. Awareness and debate about these matters are also important for the Thai people as they monitor Thailand's transition to a new government and the new government's Myanmar policies after the May election of 2023.

Since the coup, despite resounding calls from pro-democracy groups, the National Unity Government, and the Myanmar public to not recognise the junta as a legitimate government and to not include them in official talks, such as ASEAN meetings, Thailand has continued engaging with the Myanmar junta. While ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus approach has been unsuccessful, ASEAN, as a group, has at least sanctioned the junta by excluding them from high-level meetings. Thailand, however, has unilaterally undermined ASEAN's agreement by consistently engaging with the Myanmar junta, purportedly in furtherance of Thailand's political, commercial, and military interests.



Myanmar civil society groups and democratic forces have had little faith in ASEAN's failed Five-Point Consensus since its inception. The Myanmar people have made it clear that the international community must help stop the Myanmar junta before engaging in any other diplomatic work to stabilise the country. ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus also demands that the Myanmar junta stop its use of violence. However, Thailand continues to shake hands with the perpetrators of atrocities against the Myanmar people, thereby ensuring that the junta leaders do not face justice for their crimes. Thailand's recent hosting of junta leaders, despite objections from other ASEAN nations, is only the latest example of its years-long accommodationist approach to the Myanmar military's illegal administration.

Focus on ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus blinds the international community to the Myanmar people's vision of a new future with liberty and democracy. Many studies have revealed the deep structural flaws of the so-called democratic reforms that began in the early 2010s and ended with the 2021 coup. Myanmar was not a democracy; the military's continued control was enshrined in the 2008 Constitution. Thus, diplomatic language about "restoring democracy" in Myanmar shows profound ignorance of Myanmar's political history and the reality on the ground. The Myanmar people will not go back to the 2008 Constitution and a state partially controlled by the military. Thousands have sacrificed their lives to ensure this does not happen, and millions continue to resist. Rather, the Myanmar people are going forward and envisioning the country's rebuild on new political models. Thus, any approach to Myanmar that clings to the 2008 Constitution or other moribund political models is truly incoherent and must be abandoned.

Thailand, as the country most connected to Myanmar, must reform its policies based on an increased awareness of its neighbour's political reality. We exhort Thailand's new government to replace the old government's failed approach with a fresh and functioning one that respects the Myanmar people and democratic principles.



# Thailand's Recent Informal Engagements With Myanmar Junta

Thailand convened an informal ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in Bangkok on 22 December 2022. They invited representatives of the Myanmar military, in violation of ASEAN's agreement not to engage with the junta until it implements the terms of the Five-Point Consensus. In March, 2023, Thailand again hosted junta officials at a so-called regional Track 1.5 meeting. Also in attendance were representatives from China, Japan, India, Laos, Vietnam and Bangladesh. Its sequel meeting was hosted by India in the following month and Thailand actively participated.

Most recently, on 19 June 2023, Thailand hosted another informal meeting of ASEAN member states and other regional powers such as China and India. In his invitation letter, foreign minister of Thailand's caretaker government, Mr. Don Pramudwinai, stated his intention to "fully re-engage" the Myanmar junta despite ASEAN's clear decision not to do so. Key ASEAN member states such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore declined to attend the meeting and publicly criticised Thailand for going against ASEAN's agreement and betraying the mandate of rotational chair Indonesia. By acting unilaterally, Thailand sowed discord in the regional bloc instead of strengthening its unanimity and authority.



**22, DECEMBER, 2022**



Thailand convenes informal ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting inviting Myanmar junta's foreign minister.

**MARCH, 2022**



Thailand hosts Track 1.5 roundtable on Myanmar with junta's foreign minister, representatives from some ASEAN members, as well as India, China, Japan, and Ban-

**19, JUNE, 2023**



Thailand hosts the third round of Track 1.5 meeting on Myanmar inviting junta.

# Timeline of Events

**13, JANUARY, 2022**



Thai PM Prayuth and Deputy PM/Foreign Minister separately receive Japanese Envoy on Myanmar, Yohei Sasaka-

**25, APRIL, 2023**



In New Delhi, Thailand attends the second round of Track 1.5 meetings it initiated on Myanmar.

# Official Visits and Diplomatic Events

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In April 2021, Thailand's foreign minister and deputy prime minister, Mr. Don Pramudwinai, visited Naypyidaw and met with the junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. It was the highest official visit since the coup. The meeting came only ten days after the Pazigy Massacre, in which the junta's air force bombed a local gathering in central Myanmar, reportedly killing 168 people—mostly unarmed civilians, including children. The meeting disregarded clarion calls from pro-democracy groups and the Myanmar people for the international community to work only with the democratic forces of Myanmar, including the National Unity Government, and to deny the junta's political legitimacy. Shaking hands with the perpetrators of such atrocities, while the people of Myanmar were in mourning, was perceived as callous, opportunist, and a betrayal of Thailand's avowed democratic values. In light of this insensitivity, Thailand's subsequent humanitarian gestures, such as donating to the victims of Cyclone Mocha, have felt like empty diplomatic performance, and the Myanmar people's faith in Thailand's friendship has suffered.



# Timeline of Thai Government's Diplomatic Engagement with the Junta

**25 APR  
2022**

Thai foreign minister Don appoints his advisor Pornpimol Kanchanalak as special envoy to Myanmar.



**4 JUL  
2022**

Thai foreign minister Don attends the 7th Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Foreign Ministers' Meeting hosted by Myanmar junta's MFA.



**21 APR  
2023**

Thai foreign minister and deputy prime minister Don meets with Myanmar junta chief in Nay Pyi Taw on 21 April.



**21 APR  
2023**

Advisor to Thai foreign minister and Thai special envoy on Myanmar meets Myanmar junta's minister for international cooperation.

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# Actions of Newly-appointed Thai Ambassador to Myanmar

In late 2022, Mr. Mongkol Visitstump was appointed as the new Thai Ambassador to Myanmar. Unlike some democratic powers, such as the US and the UK, which have reduced their level of diplomatic presence in Myanmar by replacing their ambassador with chargé d'affaires, Thailand has tried to maintain and cultivate their relationship with the Myanmar junta. The new ambassador presented his credentials to the Myanmar junta chief on 7 December 2022. During his first three months as the ambassador, he met with the deputy chief of the junta, at least ten junta-appointed ministers, and the central bank governor. These logs evince his and the Thai foreign ministry's more-than-normal relationship with the junta and a willingness to work with them in nearly every major sector, despite calls to boycott and sanction the junta's bloodline businesses.



# Timeline of the Movements of the New Ambassador



**7 DEC  
2022**

New Thai ambassador Mongkol Visitstump presents credentials to junta chief.

**7 DEC  
2022**

New Thai ambassador meets with junta's deputy chief.

**7 DEC  
2022**

New Thai ambassador meets with junta's foreign minister.

**8 DEC  
2022**

New Thai ambassador meets with junta's international cooperation minister.

**8 DEC  
2022**

New Thai ambassador meets with junta's home affairs minister.

**5 JAN  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's investment and foreign economic relations minister.

**5 JAN  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's tourism minister.

**6 JAN  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's central bank governor.

**18 JAN  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's religious affairs and cultural minister.

**19 JAN  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's commerce minister.

**14 FEB  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's health minister.

**15 FEB  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's new foreign minister.

**15 FEB  
2023**

Thai ambassador meets with junta's transport and communications minister.

**5 APR  
2023**

Thai ambassador hosts Songkran Festival in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Myanmar and Thailand.

The Thai military's delegation, led by Lt. Gen. Apichet Suesat, who is third in command, visited Naypyidaw and met with the junta chief on 29 June 2022. The visit followed the 34th Myanmar-Thailand Regional Boundary Committee hosted by the junta from 27th to 29th June in Taunggyi. During the meeting, the Thai military delegation and the Myanmar junta reportedly discussed more cooperation between two militaries. Next, in late January 2023, Thai military chief and his delegation attended the 8th High-level Committee Meeting of the two countries' militaries, which was hosted by the Myanmar junta.

Thai and Myanmar militaries have maintained close friendship and cooperation for the past several decades. After the coup, as Myanmar military commanders and key personnel were sanctioned by some western democracies, the Myanmar military sought closer ties with China, Russia, and other partners. Their partner armies are equipping the Myanmar military with materiel, training, and technologies, helping fuel its oppression of the Myanmar people. Thailand's Royal Armed Forces has also been aiding the Myanmar military, especially by tolerating violence on their shared border.

The Myanmar military has been using excessive force in its campaign against the popular resistance. This includes air attacks on rural villages and towns in conflict areas. Villages in Karen and Karenni/Kayah states, which border Thailand's western provinces of Tak and Mae Hong Son, are among the territories bombed. Thailand has not reacted defensively to the Myanmar military's frequent bombing of its border. In one notable incident, a Myanmar military jet crossed into Thailand's air space over the Phop Phra district of Tak province on 30 June 2022. It was a direct threat to local residents in Tak, which borders Myanmar's Karen state. Thailand's military gave no response, demonstrating their collaboration with Myanmar generals. However, after Pita Limjaroenrat, leader of the election-winning Move Forward Party, said his party was going to adopt a new Myanmar policy, the Myanmar military publicly put its troops on alert at the Thai border, showing its aggression even towards its ally Thailand.

## Military-to-Military

# relation



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# Timelines of Events Related to Military Relations between Myanmar and Thailand



**23  
MAY  
2023**

Myanmar puts troops on alert following statement from Pita about situation in Myanmar

Thai military chief and delegation attends 8th High-level Committee Meeting of the militaries of two countries hosted by Myanmar military.

**20  
JAN  
2023**



**29  
JUN  
2023**

Thai military delegation led by third commander Lt. Gen. Apichet Suesat meets with junta chief in Nay Pyi Taw.

Thai military delegation attends the 34th Myanmar-Thailand Regional Boundary Committee hosted by Myanmar junta in Taunggyi.

**27-29  
JUN  
2023**



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# Implications and Recommendations

Thailand's previous military-backed government was resoundingly ousted in the May 2023 election. Its opaque, antidemocratic, and ineffective Myanmar policies must go with it. The new Thai government must endeavour to undo the harm done by its predecessor's actions and it must develop Myanmar policies in line with Thailand's own democratic values and the democratic values that have been ripped away from the Myanmar people. Three immediate demands are to:

# 1

Cancel any future regional Track 1.5 meetings involving Myanmar junta representatives.



# 2

Stop endorsing the illegitimate Myanmar junta with diplomatic engagement and work with Myanmar's democratic forces including National Unity Government and the National Unity Consultative Council.



# 3

Develop policies focused on supporting and protecting the Myanmar people, including the tens of thousands of refugees inside of Thailand.



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