

# OPINION

## Expectations for the ASEAN-US Summit



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The ASEAN Association's nine official leaders will attend the ASEAN-US Summit in the United States of America on May 12-13, 2022. This will be the second physical meeting in the United States between the ASEAN and the US since 2016. The only difference between the ASEAN association and the US meeting right now is that in 2016, ten ASEAN members attended the meeting, whereas only nine ASEAN members will attend the upcoming meeting, or just eight since Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has publicly declined to attend. The Myanmar junta leader will not be invited to the meeting because the junta leader's ascension to power is considered illegal.

Cambodia is the chair of ASEAN in 2022, so what can Cambodian citizens expect from the ASEAN-US Summit?

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the United States on July 11, 1950, the two countries' relations have fluctuated greatly. Between the two countries, there are differences in state leadership and political systems. The cold war and the US war in Vietnam are also major factors in the strained relationship between the two countries.

Cambodia is too small, according to the United States of America, for serious consideration of economic investment and military cooperation. Before investing in Cambodia, the

United States considers its economic, military, human resource, geopolitical, and occasionally humanitarian power. It is a reality we cannot deny because these are the most important factors in each country.

Cambodia was always expecting a donation or support from its counterparts in this field or that field at every meeting with any country leader or high-ranking official of any powerful country leader, and Cambodia occasionally donated its money and materials to those countries that were in need, such as Lao, Myanmar, Timor-Leste, and occasionally Vietnam.

China, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and other partners have frequently donated or loaned money to Cambodia in order to help the country develop. It's easy to focus on what other countries have done for Cambodia, and it's more difficult to look for things that Cambodia could do for those wealthy nations.

There is one major question that scholars in the region have frequently raised: aside from asking for the gift that the US might give to Cambodia, what could Cambodia give back to the US?

Cambodia appears to expect too much from the United States while being unable to reciprocate. Cambodia's main market for selling its products is the United States, and the US government's GSP has favored Cambodia's development. Other countries, such as Japan, the EU, China, and South Korea, have all contributed significantly to Cambodia's development. It's

wonderful to hear that Cambodia maintains positive relations with those who are willing to help.

Returning to the ASEAN-US Summit, what is Cambodia's expectation? As far as the public can tell, Cambodia wants to talk to the US about a variety of issues and wants the US to listen to its concerns, but the US has never given Cambodia the opportunity to express its concerns honestly. Cambodia has something in mind for the US, but the US consistently dismisses these concerns.

The US government has repeatedly made statements about Cambodia on its Facebook page and website; for example, the US is committed to working with Cambodian citizens to strengthen good relations between the two countries. That sentence should be replaced with the following: "The United States is committed to working with the Cambodian government because Cambodian citizens voted to elect parliamentarians, who then voted to nominate the prime minister." Every group or country has a leader, and we need to communicate with each other or the person in charge of the group. We can't just talk to the general public to solve the problem; we need to talk to the people who are responsible for it.

We all understand that the US government wants to speak with Cambodian citizens at all levels, including the King of Cambodia, Prime Minister, parliamentarians, politicians, and non-governmental

organizations, but identifying differences in political systems would be the smartest way to truly strengthen cooperation between the two countries, because political systems control everything in each country in the world.

In a geopolitical competition, Cambodia requires the United States, and the United States requires Cambodia. Each side requires the other. Why, if all parties require each other, are they unable to communicate with one another? The two governments, or all parties, should have frequent discussions and verbal exchanges with one another; there should be a direct talk before the media announcement so that both sides can better understand one another; it would be a problem if the media served as a bridge between talks before you could talk to each other face to face. In interpreting the meaning of the media announcement, a misunderstanding of the meaning is possible.

During the visit of ASEAN leaders to the US for their summit, the US President should spend at least thirty minutes with each ASEAN chair to hold a bilateral meeting, as it would be treated as an honor and a mechanism to understand challenges for each ASEAN chair, as each ASEAN chair may face different challenges, and each ASEAN chair may have something to bilaterally inform the US government. ■

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