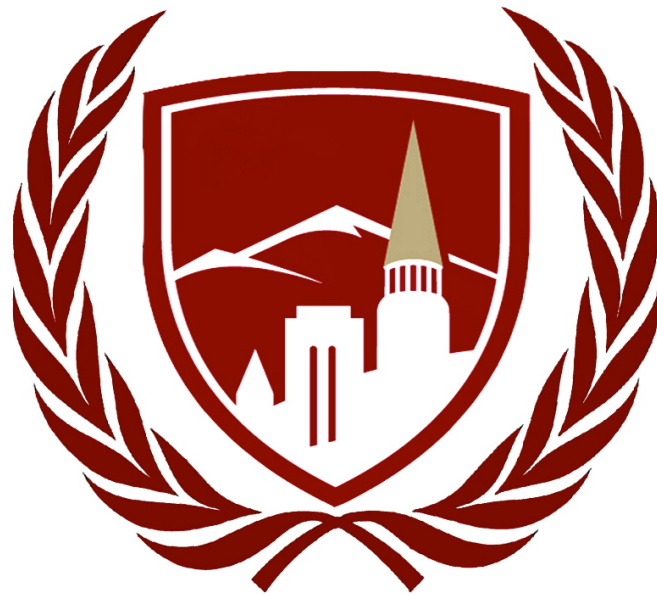


UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



BEGINNER SECURITY COUNCIL

The Situation in Myanmar



By Mieke Vanerven

Introduction

Myanmar, also commonly known as Burma, has long been closed off to the world economically as well as politically due to continued military dominance of the government; however, with President Thein Sein making small but noteworthy changes within the superstructure there is the possibility that Myanmar may slowly become more prominent in the world community.

History

In 1824 Britain conquered Myanmar and worked the province into the Indian Empire. This went on for 68 years until 1886. In 1937 it became a self-governing colony, and Myanmar won its independence in 1948. General Ne Win controlled the government beginning in 1962, serving first as a military ruler, then progressing to a self-appointed president and finally acting as a political linchpin. It was during a coup in 1962 that Ne Win seized power. It was not until 1988 that he stepped down from his position due to social unrest. Within months the military, also known as the junta, seized power after quashing student-led protests.

In 1990 the country held a multi-party election in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory. The junta ignored the results and refused to give up power. The leader of the NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) was under house arrest during this time. The daughter of the country's independence hero, General Aung San, she was placed under house arrest from 1989-1995, 2000-2002, and May 2003-November 2010.

In late September of 2007 the junta suppressed protests led by prodemocracy activists and Buddhist monks over rising fuel prices. Thirteen were killed and thousands were arrested for their part in the demonstrations.

In May of 2008 Cyclone Nargis hit, killing 138,000 and leaving tens of thousands injured and homeless. Nonetheless, the junta continued with the May constitutional referendum, which would be the first vote held in the country since 1990.

In 2010 there was a November parliamentary election held. It was considered flawed by many and the reigning Union Solidarity and Development Party won over three fourths of the seats. In January of 2011 Parliament appointed former Prime Minister Thein Sein as President.

Ne Win

Ne Win was born as Shu Maung on May 24, 1911 in Paungdale, Burma while the country was under British rule.

He dropped out of Rangoon University and instead joined a nationalist group named "Dobama Asiayone" which stands for "Our Burma." In the nationalist group he met nationalist leaders Aung San and U Nu. By the year 1940 he was one of the select few out of "Dobama Asiayone" sent to Japan to undergo military training, which was when he took the name Ne Win. During this time he became a commander in the Burma National Army which was funded by Japan and also became an aide to Aung San.

Japan invaded Burma in December of 1941 and within two months Ne Win had begun persuading some of the Burmese units, which had been attached to the British army to defect to the nationalist army.

In August of 1943 an "independent" government was set up by the Japanese, with Aung San as Minister of War and Ne Win as Commander-in-Chief of the army. However, over the following two years, Ne Win became suspicious that the Japanese were planning on colonizing the country. In December of the following year, the British invaded and the country became embroiled in a three-way war, with fighting between the British, Japanese, and Burmese nationalists who were led by Ne Win. In July 1942 Aung San was assassinated, leading to heightened political and ethnic tensions, as he had been considered an independence hero. Three years later in August of 1945 the Japanese were defeated, but it was not until 1948 that Burma finally achieved its independence.

U Nu, who had been one of the key members of "Dobama Asiayone" had the difficult position of Prime Minister in the infant country, and due to the tensions that had arisen out of Aung San's assassination, was facing a possible civil war. At the time, Ne Win was serving as U Nu's deputy and defense minister.

Political support for U Nu didn't fall apart until 1958 and in September Ne Win set up a "caretaker government" which was to last six months so that elections could be held. During this time he reinstated public services and deported refugees from Rangoon to outlying areas and was eventually asked to continue the government for an extra year. After this time elections were held and U Nu won a landslide victory, however, soon after in March of 1962 Ne Win led a military coup and arrested U Nu along with all of his cabinet members. He then enacted martial law, abolished the constitution, and dissolved the legislature and Supreme Court. In the next two months he published *The Burmese Way To Socialism*, foreign charity foundations were removed from the country and contact with foreign entities was restricted. Students soon started resistance demonstrations at Rangoon University in July of 1962 and the campus was subsequently invaded with troops.

In 1963 foreign banks and businesses were nationalized, which forced his main political opponent, Brigadier Aung Gyi, to resignation. Afterward he ordered the mass arrest of all opposition politicians.

It was not until 1966 when Burma was in economic disparity that Ne Win loosened controls on commerce and freed political opponents, including U Nu from prison. However, no there was no economical improvement and in the 1970's the electricity supply would be regularly cut off anywhere from four to five hours per day.

In 1974 Ne Win created a new constitution and transferred political power to a civilian, single party "People's Assembly" in which Ne Win served as president with his senior military aides.

Ne Win officially stepped down from power in 1981, however he still had significant control over the political landscape, as he remained the leader of the Burma Socialist Programme Party. He stepped down from that position seven years later, right before the political uprising of Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK).

Ne Win died on December 5, 2002.

ASSK

Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) is daughter of independence hero General Aung San who was assassinated in July of 1942 during a changeover period six months before Myanmar's independence was declared. ASSK, who is now 66, was only two at the time.

In 1960 she went to India with her mother, Daw Khin Kyi, who had been appointed Myanmar's ambassador to Dehli. Four years later she attended Oxford University where she met her husband, Michael Aris, while studying philosophy, politics, and economics.

ASSK lived and worked in Japan and Bhutan before finally settling in Britain to raise her two sons, Alexander and Kim. In 1988 she returned to Rangoon to look after her ailing mother. During this period there was political strife, and the military coup occurred on September 18, 1988. ASSK was placed under house arrest for six years in Rangoon. During her early years of imprisonment she was often in solitary confinement and was not allowed to see her children or husband. In 1991 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent struggle for democracy and human rights. She has stated that she was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi for their use of non-violent protests. Her husband died of cancer in 1999.

In September of 2000 she was again placed under house arrest for attempting to travel to the city of Mandalay in an act of defiance over travel restrictions. ASSK was released in May of 2002, however she was imprisoned just over a year later following a clash between a mob backed by the regime and ASSK's followers.

Economy

Myanmar is the world's largest exporter of teak and is also a prime source for jade, pearls, rubies, and sapphires. Fertile soil and offshore oil and gas deposits account for much of the country's wealth, however, little of it reaches the general population. Buddhist temples have been a booster for the tourism industry.

The economy is still in the developmental phase and many of the key industries are controlled by the military, which is said to be rife with corruption. The junta is also accused of the large scale trafficking of heroin. The United States, European Union, and Canada have all imposed economic sanctions on the country. China, India, and South Korea are the only major economies which have invested in Myanmar.

Cultural Aspect

The largest ethnic group in Myanmar is the Burman people who are distantly related to the Chinese and Tibetans. Some of the minority groups are the Karen, Shan, Rakhine, Mon, Rohingya, Chin, Kachin. There has been known conflict between the minority groups and the Burmese, which has led to sporadic protests and separatist rebellions.

Buddhists within the region have grown increasingly hostile toward the Muslim Rohingya group, a tension that is fueled by fear between the groups. According to ASSK, global Muslim power is thought to be very strong.

Thousands have been displaced by junta offensives against insurgents. There was a ceasefire deal signed in late 2011 and early 2012 with the rebels of the Karen and Shan.

Current Status

Although the bulk of Thein Sein's appointees are military, he has began policy reforms that have increased the possibility of the government moving to a more democratic structure. In April of 2012 the NDL contested seats in Parliament and won 43 of the 45 seats contested and ASSK is now a serving Member and is head of the Committee for Rule of Law and Tranquility. In May ASSK went on a visit outside of the country for the first time in twenty four years. This signifies the opening of a country that has historically been isolated.



As Myanmar has begun moving forward its economy has also seen improvement. Large companies such as Suzuki and Nissan have displayed interest in the country, while Ford has already opened up a dealership and Coca-Cola is running a local plant. This interest in investment has resulted in land disputes as well. A port in Thilawa, south of Rangoon, is scheduled to be transformed into an industrial area, in order to provide necessary power to Japanese manufacturers. This area is currently inhabited by families who have been living there and tending the land for numerous years. They have said that they feel they are being pressured by the government to give up their land.

The Chinese brokered talks with Kachin rebels in February of 2013. There was also strife between Buddhists and the Muslim Rohingya in 2013, fueled partly by the Buddhists' attempt to pass a law against interfaith marriage. The government has released hundreds of political prisoners and reached preliminary peace agreements with ten out of eleven major armed ethnic groups. Human rights laws were enacted and restrictions on "freedom of the press, association, and civil society" were reduced.

Due to the recent regime changes the majority of political parties have begun to build their platforms for the upcoming 2015 elections. Upcoming in 2014 is an election for chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Bloc Positions

People's Republic of China: The People's Republic of China does not recognize the Republic of China as a separate country and is actively hostile towards the Taiwanese. The Chinese government operates under a strict "One-China" policy. This policy states that the People's Republic of China is the only true China, and any governments wishing to have relationships with the Chinese government must cut all ties with the Republic of China. Furthermore, the government of China operates under the "One-China Principle," which states that Taiwan and China are fundamentally the same state, and neither can be separate from the other.

Republic of China: There are several divisions among the Taiwanese regarding China. The KMT agrees with the "One-China Principle" which states that China and Taiwan are the same state. However, the KMT believes that they have sovereignty and power over most of mainland China, not the government representing the People's Republic of China. However, the Democratic Progressive Party believes that geographical areas composing China and Taiwan are two separate entities, and therefore the Taiwanese people should have the right of self-determination.

United States: While the US and Taiwan have no official relations with each other, the two state governments have held unofficial relations with each other since 1979. Officially the US government has relations with the people of Taiwan rather than the government itself. However, it is in the United State's economic interests to maintain relations with Beijing, and as such formally acknowledges the Chinese government and has full diplomatic ties with the state. The state department maintains that China is to use no force to threaten Taiwan and that Taiwan is to take no steps that would inflame tensions between the two countries.

Russia: Russia has no official relations with Taiwan, instead choosing to maintain ties with the People's Republic of China. Russia has a positive trade balance with Taiwan, exporting mostly natural resources. Both countries have representative's offices in Moscow and Taipei. However, Russia is closely aligned with the People's Republic of China politically, and is much more interest in maintaining a positive relationship with their government than the people of Taiwan.

European Union: The EU supports the one-China policy, which recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole government of China. As such, all EU member states have no formal or diplomatic relations with the government of Taiwan. However, the EU recognizes Taiwan as an economic and commercial entity and supports trade with the region and its member states. Additionally the EU supports Taiwanese participation in all major international organizations where statehood is not a requirement for membership.

Preparation Questions

1. How do the conflicting cultural groups affect the internal security of Myanmar?
2. Does the alleged trafficking of heroin affect the possibility of major Western economies investing in the country?
3. How important is it that the United States and United Nations lifts sanctions on Myanmar, and if they do not what are the economic consequences for Myanmar?

4. Does the instability within the country leave an opening for terrorism to occur or for terrorists groups to grow their operations within the nation?
5. Will the tension between the Buddhists and Muslims deteriorate the chances of the country finding legitimate trading partners?
6. Who, despite official titles, holds power throughout the country and how does this shape Myanmar's future?

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