



**Department of Political Sciences**

**Master's Degree in International Relations**

Chair of Comparative History of Political Systems

**The 2021 military coup in Myanmar:  
planning, developments and reactions**

Prof. Rosario Forlenza

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Paolo Ciocca

CO-SUPERVISOR

Giulio Domenico Gioacchino Pilato

CANDIDATE

Academic Year 2024/2025

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>A brief history of contemporary Myanmar: from independence hopes to ethnic paralysis.....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Impact of the British occupation .....	9
1.2 Administrative division of the Burma province .....	10
1.3 Economy and education in British Burma .....	12
1.4 Emergence of a national feeling in Burma: from 1906 to 1930s.....	13
1.5 The World War II, the Japanese occupation and the emergence of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League .....	15
1.6 The new independent Myanmar: first insurgencies, political instability, and the rise of the army (1948-1962).....	18
1.7 The military dictatorship and its impact on Myanmar (1962-1988) .....	21
1.8 The 1988 Uprising, the brief end of the military rule and the 1990 coup d'état .....	25
1.9 The post-BSPP Myanmar: pursue of the military rule in the new globalized world (1990s-2011) .....	29
1.10 The adoption of the 2008 Constitution, the end of military rule and the experiment of managed democracy (2011-2020).....	32
1.11 The end of the managed democracy and the restauration of the military rule (2020-2021).....	35
<b>Chapter 2 .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>The unfolding of the 2021 military coup: causes, planning, developments and reactions.....</b>	<b>38</b>
2.1 Causes and factors behind the coup: end of the political compromise between the army and the National League for Democracy .....	38
2.2 Internal factors that determined the coup .....	41
2.3 Preparation, development and unfolding of the coup .....	43
2.4 Domestic reaction to the coup: overt opposition.....	49
2.5 Gradual escalation by the Tatmadaw.....	52
2.6 Spread of violence and total escalation .....	56
<b>Chapter 3 .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>The international reaction to the military coup.....</b>	<b>59</b>
3.1 Economic isolation from the rest of the world and halt of foreign investments in the country .....	59

3.2 Protests of Myanmar citizens outside the country .....	61
3.3 Worsening relations with the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) .....	62
3.3.1 Karen National Union and Karen National Liberation Organization: a renewed hostility .....	64
3.3.2 CNF and KNPP: A Return to War .....	66
3.3.3 Arakan Army: Between peace and war .....	68
3.3.4 Relative Peace on the Northern Shan Front .....	69
3.4 Reaction of the international community to the 2021 military coup.....	71
3.4.1 Chinese policy in Myanmar .....	71
3.4.2 Indian policy in Myanmar .....	72
3.4.3 Thai policy in Myanmar .....	74
3.4.4 Western policy: the EU and the US .....	75
3.4.5 Other ASEAN members' policy .....	77
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>86</b>

## Introduction

The research question of this thesis regards how the Burmese Army (Tatmadaw hereafter) plotted, planned, and organized the coup, its aims and targets, and how the international community reacted to the military takeover of power throughout the first days of February 2021. Precisely, this dissertation would firstly describe the main authors of the coup, their motivations and targets, interpreting the events in light of the political, economic, and social context of Myanmar in the last months of 2020. Secondly, the essay will describe the unfolding of the coup on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, and the reaction to the military coup both inside and outside the country, mainly using articles from local and international press.

Two main arguments convinced me to delve into the intricacies of the political context of Myanmar in recent years. The first reason regards the willingness to widen my knowledge about a country not sufficiently covered by the media and IR analysts. Specifically, I was interested in themes such as the influence that prolonged military rule on the country shaped the social fabric of Myanmar, the relations with ethnic minorities, and how the Tatmadaw tried to guarantee the territorial integrity of the state against various insurgencies since the independence of country. The second reason that induced me to focus on Myanmar lies in its fortunate geographic position and its economic and political ties with China (People's Republic of China, or PRC). In particular, the main areas of interest regarding Myanmar's role within the Chinese foreign policy targets and the general state of relations between the PRC and Myanmar since 1948.

Overall, this thesis aims to describe the preparation, the organization and the unfolding of the military coup by the Tatmadaw against the civilian government led by then-State Councilor Aung San Suu Kyi (the *de facto* prime minister of Myanmar from 2016 until 2020) and by then-President Win Myint and how intensely the international community reacted to the full restauration of the military rule after ten of shared powers with the newly-established civilian power.

The research methodology chosen for the writing of this essay was the desk research method. Specifically, the bibliography and references of this dissertation comprise a variety of sources, including articles written by analysts for think-tanks, experts on digital libraries of academic journals, historians, and reliable press articles from both local and international mass media. This approach was used to gather as much

information as possible. All the sources cited in the thesis were published recently and focused on specific topics relating to the aforementioned research question. These sources allow for a deeper understanding of the subject while introducing different analyses and interpretations of the current situation in Myanmar.

This work is structured in four parts. The first chapter of the thesis describes the recent history of Myanmar, covering the time that spans from the achievement of independence in 1948 from Great Britain until the unfolding of current events. Particular focus is given to the insurgencies that plagued the country and impeded the creation and formation of a stable central government, and the relationship between Myanmar and the various ethnic minorities over time.

Four historical periods are outlined in this first chapter. The first period covers the first fourteen years of independent Myanmar (1948-1962), which were characterized by the emergence of the Union of Burma, plagued by communist and separatist insurgencies. This first period ended with the coup d'état organized by General Ne Win in 1962. The second period, spanning from 1962 to 2011, is divided into two parts. The first part describes the rule of the socialist military dictatorship (1962-1988). In that time, Myanmar was hermetically isolated from the outside world. The second part of the period of time (1988-2011) describes the long period of transition from military dictatorship to managed democracy with considerable military influence. Finally, the first chapter will discuss and cover the last ten years of Myanmar's history. Precisely, there will be covered the presidency of General Thein Sein, who ruled the country from 2011 until 2016, and the governments led by the National League for Democracy from 2016 to 2021.

The second chapter describes how the military coup organized by the Tatmadaw against the civilian government unfolded, from the capture of the main exponents of the civilian government to the establishment of the military junta. Specifically, this chapter will outline the description of the preparation and the unfolding of the coup between the final months of 2020 and January 2021.

Preparations for the coup began by the Tatmadaw in the aftermath of the 2020 general election, in which the National League for Democracy triumphed by obtaining 396 out of the 476 seats in the House of Representatives (the lower chamber) and 138 seats in the House of Nationalities (the upper chamber). In comparison, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which served as the political wing of the

military, had obtained dismal results, with a cumulation of 33 seats between the lower and the upper house<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the electoral triumph of the NLD was favored by the adoption of the FPTP (first-past-the-post) electoral system, through which 80 percent of the elected seats were won despite winning only 57 percent of the popular vote. If the military kept a significant presence within the parliament, it was made possible uniquely by the military-appointed MPs, accounting for a quarter of its members.

Although the military would have kept three pivotal ministries, such as Border Affairs, Defense, and Home Affairs, they understood how it was not possible in the long term to uphold a partially democratic regime characterized by minimal support for their “political wing” (the USDP) and majoritarian political support for the NLD. Given the new political situation and the fact that the new regime originated from the Constitution of 2011, which was on the verge of a decisive consolidation that would have guaranteed its existence, the privileges of the Tatmadaw would be threatened.

The relationship between the NLD and Tatmadaw has also deteriorated to the point where the military no longer sees the system that they designed as being viable for its interests. Since the NLD’s impressive 2015 electoral victory, the relationship between the military and the NLD worsened noticeably. In 2017, a close advisor to Suu Kyi was assassinated, likely by the military. In March 2020, Suu Kyi’s NLD pushed for changes to the constitution, which would strip the military of its political powers.

In the meantime, the fragile relationship between the National League for Democracy and the Tatmadaw before the general elections further worsened in the following weeks. The military baselessly claimed that significant electoral fraud and irregularities distorted the electoral results, and it has used these claims as a pretext for the coup.

In preparing the coup, the Tatmadaw was trying to restore its full control over the state apparatus and bargain from a strengthened position after losing much of its influence and leverage after three consecutive electoral defeats. Consequently, by detaining the State Counselor Aung-San-Suu-Kyi and the President of the Republic Win Myint and disbanding the National League for Democracy as a political party on the eve of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lindsay, Maizland. “Myanmar’s troubled history: Coups, Military Rule and Ethnic conflict”. *Council on Foreign Relations*. (2022).

opening session of parliament, the military signaled it no longer tolerates the new partially democratic regime, viewing it as no longer conducive to its interests<sup>2</sup>.

The other fundamental argument this chapter will make concerns the summation of motivations and vested interests that induced the Tatmadaw generals to break the political compromise reached in 2011 with the NLD and reclaim total state control by establishing a military junta: the State Administration Council.

The military's motives for the coup remain unclear. Ostensibly, the military has posited that alleged voter fraud threatens national sovereignty. A few days before the coup, the Union Election Commission appointed by the civilian government had categorically rejected the military's claims of voter fraud, citing the lack of evidence to support the military's claims of widespread irregularities in voter lists across Myanmar's 314 townships.<sup>3</sup>

The coup may have been driven by the military's goal to preserve its central role in Burmese politics. The Defense Services Act imposes a mandatory retirement age of 65 for the Armed Forces' Commander-in-Chief. Min Aung Hlaing, the incumbent, would have been forced to retire on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday in July 2021<sup>4</sup>. Further, the Constitution empowers solely the President, in consultation with the National Defense and Security Council, to appoint Min Aung Hlaing's successor. The retirement of Min Aung Hlaing would have provided an opportunity for the government to appoint a more reform-minded military officer as Commander-in-Chief<sup>5</sup>. Hlaing's lack of power would have exposed him to potential prosecution and accountability for alleged war crimes during the Rohingya conflict in various international courts<sup>6</sup>. Min Aung Hlaing had also hinted at a potential entry into politics as a civilian, after his retirement.

In conclusion, another factor that influenced the decision of the Tatmadaw to organize the coup was the certainty that the usual scenario would have taken place. When undertaking the preparations for the coup, the Tatmadaw had foreseen that the coup would

---

<sup>2</sup>Ye, Myo, Hein. "The Root Causes of Myanmar's coup go deeper". *Wilson Center*. (2022).

<sup>3</sup>Pyae Sone, Win. "Myanmar election commission rejects military's fraud claims". *AP News*. 28/1/2021. <https://apnews.com/article/aung-san-su-kyi-elections-myanmar-cc1b225b806c27dda748d3ab51d0e47f>

<sup>4</sup>Aung, Sithu, Myint. "Could Min Aung Hlaing's retirement break the political deadlock?", *Frontier Myanmar*. 12/1/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/could-min-aung-hlaings-retirement-break-the-political-deadlock/>

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Adam, Simpson. "Myanmar military under pressure as legal jeopardy builds". *East Asia Forum*. 21/12/2023.

follow in a situation similar to 1962 and 1988. The generals thought that the process of restauration, apart from the expected protests of the NLD supporters and sympathizers, would be relatively smooth.

In addition, the Tatmadaw would have expected that the end of managed democracy would not have imperiled the enforcing ceasefires with the ethnic armed militias (ethnic armed organizations or EAOs) and that the international community, chiefly the West, would have limited to recognize the *fait accompli* and confined its reaction at best to generic statements condemning the military coup and demanding the immediate release of political prisoners<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, as the third chapter will demonstrate, the calculations of the army generals proved wrong, achieving at best only the relative indifference of the international community. The military saw the successful coup backfire against them, unleashing a huge anti-coup popular movement against the SAC<sup>8</sup>. Initially, opposition to junta did not resort to violence through widely participated and peaceful mass protests. In the following months, as a consequence of the brutal repression operated by the army, anti-junta militias, called the People's Defense Forces, or PDF<sup>9</sup>, were formed.

In addition, the PDF managed to build alliances with some of the EAOs, ensuring that the anti-junta protesters would not be repressed and crushed as in 1990 and making the civil war inevitable<sup>10</sup>. The unrest and the huge anti-junta protests taking place in cities obliged the SAC to transfer troops to the previously peaceful urban areas, while in mid-April the National League for Democracy established a parallel in-exile government (National Unity Government) composed of former lawmakers and MPs ousted in the military coup.

The third chapter is dedicated to the immediate reaction to the coup inside the country, with the peaceful protests of thousands of people against the newly established

---

<sup>7</sup> Frontier Myanmar. "Tatmadaw seizes power under state of emergency, to rule for a year". 1/1/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/tatmadaw-seizes-power-under-state-of-emergency-to-rule-for-a-year/>

<sup>8</sup> Reuters. "Anti-coup protests ring out in Myanmar's main city". 2/2/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/anti-coup-protests-ring-out-in-myanmars-main-city-idUSKBN2A1395/>

<sup>9</sup> Al Jazeera, "Myanmar shadow government calls for uprising against military". 7/9/2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/7/myanmar-shadow-government-launches-peoples-defensive-war>

<sup>10</sup> Ye, Myo, Hein. "Understanding the People's Defense Forces in Myanmar". *United States Institute of Peace*. (2022).



military junta, and the international community, the majority of which condemned the coup and demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners.

As an immediate reaction to the military coup, in the following weeks civil resistance, favored mainly the popularity of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, has emerged all across the country in numerous forms, from acts of civil disobedience to widely participated labor strikes of healthcare workers and civil servants which extended to private firms such as factory and copper mine workers. Other forms of civil resistance to the junta by the population included a national military boycott campaign of all the products of the enterprises linked to the Tatmadaw, huge public protests in the most important urban centers, and formal recognition of the election results by elected representatives<sup>11</sup>.

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, the military junta ordered telecom operators and internet providers to block access to Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram for three days<sup>12</sup> to prevent further diffusion of protests. Two days later, the junta extended the ban on social media to Twitter before initiating an internet shutdown. In conclusion, the restrictions to Internet access (from 1:00 am to 9:00 am) imposed by the junta became effective on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

The military coup has also sparked important reactions from the international community. A majority of Asian countries, including Russia and China, did not clearly condemn the coup and generically expressed concern over its consequences and the pursuit of dialogue between the junta and the protesters<sup>13</sup>. The West, supported in the move by Japan and South Korea, denounced the coup and called for the immediate release of all political prisoners. In particular, the United States, under the helm of Biden by less than two weeks, approved on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February an Executive Order that enable the Biden administration to sanction against Myanmar, specifically by freezing \$1 billion of

---

<sup>11</sup>Joshua, Cheetham. "Myanmar coup: The shadowy business empire funding the Tatmadaw". *BBC News*. 9/3/2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56133766>

<sup>12</sup> Singh, Manish. "Myanmar's new military government orders to temporarily block internet access". *Tech Crunch*. 5/2/2021. <https://techcrunch.com/2021/02/05/myanmar-military-government-is-now-blocking-twitter/>

<sup>13</sup> Reuters. "China 'notes' Myanmar coup, hopes for stability", 1/2/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/china-notes-myanmar-coup-hopes-for-stability-idUSKBN2A129V/>

U.S. assets belonged to Myanmar and targeting the business interests of the military junta<sup>14</sup>.

Conversely, the neighboring countries explicitly refused to take position and considered the coup as an internal matter of Myanmar, while ASEAN has seen its effectiveness significantly reduced, revealing the divisions among its member states by not being able to formulate and define a common and substantive position that could influence the course of events<sup>15</sup>.

With regard to intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations, ASEAN called for dialogue between the parties, while the European Union further defined its position by condemning the coup and demanding the release of detainees. A first attempt to explicitly condemn the military coup in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) through the adoption of a British-drafted resolution predictably failed due to the veto posed by China and Russia as permanent members, while India and Vietnam expressed, as non-permanent members, reservations about the draft resolution<sup>16</sup>.

A consensus was reached among the UN Security Council members by March 10<sup>th</sup>, through negotiations on a watered down “presidential statement”, which limited to condemn violence, call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, restraint by the military, the release of all the detained civilian and government officials and a negotiated settlement between the parties. The UNSC presidential statement further urged all parties to collaborate with the mediation efforts of the ASEAN and the U.N. envoy to Myanmar, and to ensure humanitarian access<sup>17</sup>. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the governments of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam proposed to drop an article calling for an arms embargo on the country from a U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) draft resolution<sup>18</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> The White House. “Executive Order on Blocking Property with Respect to the Situation in Burma”, 11/2/2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/11/executive-order-on-blocking-property-with-respect-to-the-situation-in-burma/>

<sup>15</sup> Marco, Mezzera. “A closer look at 5 regional responses to the Myanmar coup”. *Clingendael Institute*. 4/5/2021.

<sup>16</sup> BBC News. “Myanmar coup: China blocks UN condemnation as protest grows”. 3/2/2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55913947>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations. “Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Myanmar”. 4/2/2021. <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14430.doc.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Tom, Allard, and Michelle, Nichols. SE Asia states want to drop proposed U.N. call for Myanmar arms embargo. *Reuters*. 28/5/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-deports-first-group-myanmar-refugees-who-fled-2021-coup-2024-03-08/>

Finally, the fourth and final chapter is emphasizing the conclusions, in which the main points of the answer to the research question are summarized.

# Chapter 1

## A brief history of contemporary Myanmar: from independence hopes to ethnic paralysis

### 1.1 Impact of the British occupation

To understand the real motives which led to the 2021 military coup in Myanmar it is necessary to consider and analyze its recent history, specifically taking into consideration the period elapsing from the declaration of independence from British rule in 1948 to the ongoing civil war fought between the State Administration Council and the kaleidoscopic anti-junta opposition.

For Myanmar, the contemporary history can be traced back to the year 1885, when it was fought the third Anglo-Burmese war. The conflict resulted in the occupation of Myanmar by the British Empire and paved the way to the occupation of the ancient Burmese kingdom<sup>19</sup>.

The British occupation of Myanmar, which was gradually annexed and included within the British Raj between the 1820s and 1885 by fighting three Anglo-Burmese wars, was hugely consequential for the future history of the country<sup>20</sup>. Historians consider the British colonial rule not only as a foreign occupation, but also as the end of the previous administrative structure that sustained the monarchy<sup>21</sup>.

The most significant change brought by the British Empire was the end of the symbiotic relation between Buddhism and the Burmese state. If the period of British colonial occupation was one of relative civil order, it also favored the disintegration of the old social structures. Learning from the experience of the Sepoy Mutiny in India, which led to ferocious repression in the last years of the 1850s, the British occupiers did not favor Buddhism over other religious confessions as the monarchy had once done.

Previously, Buddhism was intertwined with the state, with royal patronage of Burmese Buddhism that included both financial and moral support, while the affirmation

---

<sup>19</sup> Maung, Htin, Aung, and David, Isaac, Steinberg. "The British rule in Myanmar, 1885-1948". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Myanmar/The-British-in-Burma-1885-1948>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

of Buddhism as the dominant religion favored the legitimacy and authority of the religious institution. The king had the right to appoint the patriarch, who kept control and discipline among the sangha (the community of the Buddhist clergy).

In addition to this, the British refusal to pursue the traditional relationship between the Buddhist monks and the state resulted in the decline of the sangha and its ability to keep friendly relations with the clergy. This, in turn, reduced the prestigious reputation of the clergy and contributed to the rise of secular education and a new class of teachers, depriving the sangha of one of its primary roles. In addition to this, the colonial government of India founded secular schools teaching in both English and Burmese, encouraging foreign Christian missions to found schools by offering them financial assistance. Many mission schools were founded; parents were compelled to send their children to these schools, as there were no realistic alternatives.

## 1.2 Administrative division of the Burma province

The old Burmese kingdom was replaced by a new, distant Burma province under British colonial administration, whose aim was to obtain as many revenues as possible through the imposition of taxes and the exploitation of the natural resources being available, including oil and wood.

Precisely, the old Burmese kingdom became part of the British Raj and was divided into three provinces. The first province included the Irrawaddy and the Arakan valley, it was placed under the direct control of British civil servants, which were accountable to a colonial governor resident at Rangoon. Conversely, the second province included the valleys placed at higher altitudes and its surrounding mountains and experiencing only an indirect rule by the British Empire, which guaranteed the control of the territory through allied princes and local chiefs<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, the third province comprised the most remote mountain territories, which were claimed as part of the Empire. However, they were neglected and considered as “non-administered” regions, thus experiencing a purely nominal British rule (Figure 1)<sup>23</sup>.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

The division of the province of Myanmar into three different parts through convenient borders was hugely consequential for the future history of the country. That decision made it clear that Great Britain was occupying and governing an ethnically heterogeneous territory, which would be difficult to manage in the following years. However, with the British decision to administer each part differently from each other, further identity divisions between the various ethnic groups emerged, hindering attempts to build a Burmese nation<sup>24</sup>.

From the British perspective, the territories of greatest interest in Myanmar were undoubtedly those of the Irrawaddy valley. Although Britain was considering exploiting Myanmar's advantageous geographical position to gain a land access route to Chinese markets, the project was not followed up due to the decline of the Qing Empire. As a result of this, London's focus shifted to the export of the country's natural resources, setting the stage for the transformation of Yangon into a major port and the construction of bridges and railways in the rest of the country. During the colonial period, Yangon became the economic, political, and cultural center of Myanmar before replacing Mandalay as the capital after independence<sup>25</sup>.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1: 1931  
Administration Map of Burma  
under British rule.  
<https://www.geocurrents.info/?s=burma>

### 1.3 Economy and education in British Burma

In the meantime, the economy of Myanmar changed completely. The economic path followed by the monarchy was that of the redistribution of resources. Prices of most commodities were set by the state, and in general the economy did not follow the mechanism of supply and demand. Consequently, agrarian self-sufficiency was crucial for the very existence of Myanmar, while trade was only of secondary importance. The British occupation of Myanmar determined the abrupt end of the old economic system and integrated the country into the global economy<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma". 1-9 chapters. "Chapter 3- Self-government without independence", Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.46-71.

Indeed, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 created a much higher international demand for Burma's rice than had previously existed. In a matter of decades, the Irrawaddy delta became covered in rice fields. The area of productive rice fields in Lower Burma rose from approximately 60,000 acres (24,000 hectares) to nearly 10,000,000 acres (4,000,000 hectares) between the mid-19th century and the outbreak of World War II, while the price of rice increased continuously until the Great Depression. The affirmation of the rice sector in the Burmese economy favored a significant shift in population from the northern heartland to the delta, shifting as well the basis of wealth and power<sup>27</sup>.

Simultaneously, the progressive diffusion of the British education system nurtured the emergence of a first nucleus of the westernized middle class of Myanmar, whose best elements would have served within the ranks of the colonial administration and would have led the first nationalist associations demanding political autonomy through negotiations<sup>28</sup>.

#### 1.4 Emergence of a national feeling in Burma: from 1906 to 1930s

In 1906, the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was founded, becoming the first organized political association in Myanmar, whose aim was to preserve the Burmese civilization from the ongoing demographic and cultural changes. In 1909, the United Kingdom introduced some constitutional reforms of minor importance in the territories of the Raj, aimed at placating and pacifying the rising Indian National Congress. These early associations did not oppose the British occupation and were mainly focused on the ethnic and cultural question represented by the increasing presence of Indian immigrants in Myanmar<sup>29</sup>.

Nevertheless, despite the presence of a passive resistance to the British occupation by the population, the very concept of nationalism and of the Western organizational techniques was alien to Myanmar<sup>30</sup>. The nurturing and the affirmation of the nationalist

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Josef, Silverstein. "Burmese Student Politics in a Changing Society". *Daedalus*. Vol.97, No.1, (1968): pp.274-292.

<sup>30</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma", 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 3- Self-government without independence*", Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.46-71.



movement in Myanmar would have taken several decades to generate popular acceptance or adhesion by a handful of political thinkers and activists<sup>31</sup>.

The first figure that emerged in the early stages of Burmese nationalism was that of the Arakanese monk U Ottama. After teaching Pali and Buddhism in India and being influenced by his experience within the Indian National Congress, which enabled him to become familiar with political campaigning, he visited various countries, including South Korea, Great Britain, Japan, the United States, China, and Vietnam, before returning to Burma in 1918.

Particularly inspired by the Japanese modernization process, he began to write speeches and articles that recommended the Burmese people to follow the Japanese example. After being imprisoned by the British authorities in 1921, Ottama was released in August 1924 and immediately resumed its anti-government activities by organizing a procession at Mandalay and by speaking at Yangon. The pursuit of the emerging peaceful dissent movement cost Ottama a penalty of three years with hard labor<sup>32</sup>.

However, in commuting the penalty, the British authorities underestimated the deep attachment to the Buddhist religion felt by the populace, which joined a demonstration organized at Yangon led by outraged monks, which was repressed by the police and led to public disorder in the city<sup>33</sup>. In the meantime, the British authorities decided to ban all public meetings in Yangon for a month. Despite the smooth repression of the monk protests, this first act of resistance revealed how the widespread anti-British feeling could be potentially channeled into a wider movement openly opposing British rule<sup>34</sup>.

Precisely, a violent uprising by Burmese peasants against British rule happened in the 1930s. Armed only with swords and sticks, they resisted British and Indian troops for two years before being repressed. The young “Thakins” (masters in Burmese), though not involved in the rebellion, won the trust of the villagers and emerged as leaders in place of the British-educated Burmese elite<sup>35</sup>. In 1936, university students again went on strike,

---

<sup>31</sup> Htin, Maung, Aung, and David, Isaac, Steinberg. “*The British rule in Myanmar, 1885-1948*”. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Myanmar/The-British-in-Burma-1885-1948>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

with students such as U Nu and Aung San becoming the future leaders of the movement, joined the Thakins, and became the figurehead of the Burmese nationalists.

In 1937 the British government separated Burma from India and granted to Burma its own constitution, independent of that of India. During the period of time that began with the concession of the constitution and ended with the obtention of independence from the British Empire in 1947, Myanmar experienced various degree of partial autonomy and different political arrangements under the British and the Japanese occupation<sup>36</sup>.

### 1.5 The World War II, the Japanese occupation and the emergence of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League

Both the British and the Japanese Empire, due to the fear of losing either the control of Myanmar's natural resources or compromising the broader regional stability, to which the survival of their empires was conditioned, would have conceded only limited self-rule to Myanmar.

Nevertheless, during the Japanese occupation, Myanmar experienced a radical political and economic change. Respectively, the nascent political system of Myanmar saw the elimination of moderate and conservative Burmese politicians favorable to keeping ties with the British Empire, and that would have represented a serious challenge to Aung San and other left-wing nationalist figures. Simultaneously, the colonial economy, which was based on the exploitation of natural resources and rice production, collapsed during World War II and hampered Burma's post-war economic recovery in the decades ahead.

Although Burma had separated from India and now had limited self-government, these gains remained unsatisfactory for many Burmese nationalists. The British Governor still controlled major areas of the government, and a colonial elite dominated by Europeans, Eurasians, and Asian minorities controlled the economic wealth of the country and dominated the capital, in which the Burmese population remained a minority. Burma was not yet fully extricated from a colonial empire in which European culture remained

---

<sup>36</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma". 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 4 -The democratic experiment, 1948-1958*", Cambridge University Press. (2009): p.72-92.

the measure of civilization and modernization. Another model of modernization admired by Burmese nationalists, one that was Asian and hostile to European colonialism, was the Japanese Empire<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, it is not surprising that British accounts of the Second World War frequently suggest surprise at the rapid pace of the Japanese conquest of Burma and a disbelief that the Burmese would cooperate with the Japanese invader.

In the meantime, Aung San, having been convinced by the previous evolution of the events that the obtention of Burmese independence would be impossible without severing any kind of association with the British Empire, tried to gain support both from Chinese communists and from the Japanese Empire to help him liberate Myanmar<sup>38</sup>.

Following a mission of the Japanese intelligence officers led by Suzuki Keiji, which aimed at finding cooperative local partners that would have favored the invasion of Burma, Aung San arrived in the Japanese-occupied China in August 1940. Having accepted the Japanese patronage, Aung San spent the rest of 1940 in Japan learning the Japanese language and political ideology, before beginning a recruiting mission in Myanmar at the beginning of 1941 that aimed at contacting and recruiting thirty additional agents that would have constituted the “Thirty Comrades”<sup>39</sup>.

The “Thirty Comrades”, who were trained at Hainan by the Japanese in 1941, would have become the initial nucleus of the future Burma Independence Army (BIA) that would have supported the Japanese invasion of Myanmar in December 1941. Immediately after the beginning of the invasion, BIA and the Japanese occupied Yangon after a devastating Japanese air raid that led to a mass exodus of the population. In the meantime, the British decided to abandon Burma to guarantee a better defense of India, which led to the rapid occupation of the remaining Burmese provinces by the Japanese forces.<sup>40</sup>

With the occupation of Burma, the Japanese occupied a country of huge strategic importance, given the fact that Japan could easily cut the Burma Road used by the Allies to support the Chinese nationalist forces led by Chiang Kai-shek, thus favoring the complete conquest of China. In addition, the conquest of Burma would have allowed the Japanese to prepare an invasion of British India through the capture of the Assam province

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

and use it as a base for the pro-Japanese insurgent army of Subhas Chandra Bose. These evident advantages induced the Japanese to build the Burma Railway.

Given that premises, the Japanese were not interested, contrary to the hopes of Aung San, at conceding to Myanmar substantial independence and, after a period of military occupation that lasted until 1943, the Japanese established a puppet state under the guide of Ba Maw and with Aung San becoming Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of War<sup>41</sup>. Thus, Aung San served the Japanese until August 1944, when he founded with the Communist Party and the socialist People's Revolutionary Army the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO), which became the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL, or League) in 1945. The AFPFL kept informal contact with the Allies in preparation for the invasion of Burma in 1945, which saw Japanese soldiers fighting until October of the same year<sup>42</sup>.

The Japanese occupation and the war had transformed Myanmar. Two major campaigns had been fought across the entirety of the country, first by the Japanese to push the British out and then by the Allies, joined later by the AFPFL and its Burma National Army (BNA), to drive the Japanese out. In early March, the British set fire to oil refineries in the vicinity of Rangoon, they scuttled percent of the five hundred steamer fleet of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, destroyed bridges, and engaged in a range of other efforts to avoid leaving any further resources to the enemy<sup>43</sup>.

While Japanese military forces would have destroyed the remaining installations and towns after occupying the country, they did not engage in any wartime reconstruction, beyond the needs of the Japanese Army. Alongside the Japanese Army, Japanese companies were brought in to help in the procurement of supplies. As a consequence, the number of cattle in Burma dropped by two-thirds, severely hurting agricultural output<sup>44</sup>. Japanese currency used to buy commodities quickly became inflated. Clothing became scarce and expensive. Things worsened as Japanese forces, cut off from supplies from abroad due to Allied submarines and aircraft, took all available resources<sup>45</sup>.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## 1.6 The new independent Myanmar: first insurgencies, political instability, and the rise of the army (1948-1962)

After the cessation of hostilities, the British colonial occupation was reinstated under the guidance of its last governor general, Reginald Dorman-Smith, who was immediately confronted with the future destiny of Aung San and how to find the means to keep British control and guarantee the unity of the future Burmese state. Thus, Aung San and his BNA became the dominant political actor until he died in 1947, having severed all ties with the communists in the two following years<sup>46</sup>.

The BNA was renamed Patriotic Burmese Forces (PBF), and its commanders were offered senior positions for the emerging Burmese Army. Aung San started complex negotiations with the British to establish a provisional government (the Executive Council) of fifteen members, whereof eleven were to be APFPL-appointed, that would have worked to ensure that new general elections would be held, and of a Legislative Council of fifty members<sup>47</sup>.

After a first breakdown of the negotiations, Dorman-Smith proposed a new offer to the League in March 1946, according to which Aung San would be included in a strengthened Executive Council, but the unwillingness of London to recognize a prominent role for the Burmese commander threatened the cessation of any dialogue. The hesitations of London induced Aung San to initiate a peaceful constitutional struggle, demanding the creation of a new government and calling for Burmese non-cooperation concerning the payment of rent and taxes, and the sale of rice to official government purchasing agents. The increasingly dire situation led to the recall and the resignation of Dorman-Smith as Governor General in early August<sup>48</sup>.

There was a concrete risk that the situation would have spiraled out of control. To prevent a rebellion, the new General Governor Hurbert Rance had to end the strikes, resume the negotiations with AFPFL, and maintain internal stability to pursue the reconstruction of the country. In addition, the nationalists remobilized their paramilitary forces, while further strikes were organized by the AFPFL<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>46</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma". 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 5 - Dress rehearsals, 1958-1962*". Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.93-106.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

In reaction to the deteriorating situation, Rance reaffirmed the conditions that the British government could have accepted: no further increase of the powers of the Executive Council, the concession of the dominion status rather than immediate independence, and the participation of parties other than the AFPFL. Aung San decided to continue the strikes to obtain the most favorable terms possible. Finally, Rance decided to cooperate and, in September 1946, met with Burmese leaders to discuss the composition of the new Executive Council, composed of nine members and guided by Aung San. Moreover, the AFPFL obtained that the government, that the power of veto at the disposal of the governor, would have been used as sparingly as possible and that the Executive Council would have been recognized as a proper Council of Ministers<sup>50</sup>.

The new changes were formalized with the Anglo-Burmese Agreement in January 1947 and paved the way for the emergence of a unified Burma under the guidance of Aung San, but that scenario never took place. In July 1947, Aung San was assassinated by some gunmen with military uniforms. The assassination of Aung San did not undermine the nascent Burmese democracy but made it impossible to prevent the numerous insurgencies that would have plagued Myanmar ever since<sup>51</sup>.

The first independent Myanmar was characterized by great political instability. Immediately after independence in 1948, Burma confronted many insurgencies from ethnic minorities and rebel groups<sup>52</sup>. The most threatening perils were those coming from the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) led by Thakin Soe, and the Karen National Union launched widespread military insurrections against the central government. Thus far, rebellions against the central government were local and inherited from the pre-independence period, such as in Arakan<sup>53</sup>.

Precisely, the emergence of the two rebellions revealed the difficulty of the new Burmese state at building a solid democracy and avoid the ethnic separatism. The Communist Party of Burma was founded by the most radical elements of the old United Burma Communist Party (BCP), who refused the new, pragmatic political direction chosen by Aung San in 1945.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Led by Thakin Soe, the CPB was radically nationalist and vehemently opposed to any negotiations with the British, which determined the split from the BCP. Between 1945 and 1948, an uneasy truce between the two factions took place, during which the AFPFL tried in vain to include the BCP in the government and disarm it to strengthen the Burmese state. In May 1948, the BCP insurgency has begun.

About the Karen National Union (KNU), their rebellion, which officially began in January 1949, was more threatening, given that it would undermine the fragile ethnic balance of Myanmar, and the Karen would become one of the most durable rebel forces facing the central government. Furthermore, the KNU was a cohesive armed ethnic force guided not only by ethnic affinities but also by the memory of the harsh treatment received by the Burmese nationalists and by the determination to keep the relative autonomy they enjoyed during the British occupation<sup>55</sup>.

The new Union of Burma has already shown its internal weakness, and, given the rapid advance in Lower Myanmar by the Karens and the BCP in the first months of 1949 towards the capital Yangon, it seemed on the brink of collapse. Nevertheless, the BCP, which could unite Myanmar under a Marxist-Leninist state, did not possess the military capabilities to gain control of the strategic infrastructure necessary for the transport of troops. Furthermore, these insurgencies were pivotal in setting the conditions for the political rise of the Burmese Army, which would arrogate to itself the duty of saving Myanmar from internal threats<sup>56</sup>.

After the convulsions of the 1948-1950 Ne Win, the commander of the Armed Forces and future dictator of the country, oversaw a substantial increase in the capacity of its army. From a poorly equipped infantry force of 43,000 troops, the Burmese Army was transformed into an efficient war machine that regained control of much of the territory occupied by the insurgents. Although the insurgents were forced to retreat from Yangon, the military weakness of the central State meant that every government after the independence would have dealt with ongoing or future insurgencies<sup>57</sup>.

Furthermore, the new Burmese democracy was politically fragile, despite the hegemony of the League. The AFPFL was riven by internal strife between the faction supporting the leader of the party, U Nu, and its internal rivals and experienced a split

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

into two rival parties in 1958. In the meantime, the only competitive election took place in 1958, when various opposition parties coalesced around the National United Front, which obtained around 30% of the vote. With regard to the economy, after the war, the agricultural economy was gradually recovering and the AFPFL tried to establish a socialist economy. Only with the caretaker military government the Union experienced a brief period of economic growth<sup>58</sup>.

Finally, the Union kept a low profile in foreign policy, stressing its neutrality (it was one of the first countries to recognize Israel and the People's Republic of China) and refusing calls by the US to join the SEATO, and any foreign aid in general. The League did not recover from the split of 1958 and, as U Nu increasingly relied on a cult of personality and the promotion of Buddhist nationalism, in the context of his perceived attempts to sacrifice national unity, the Army wondered if it could now, as it had just a few years before, do a better job at managing the country<sup>59</sup>.

In conclusion, the Union of Burma was a weak State that became increasingly reliant on the army to survive. Given the political and social context fully favorable for an authoritarian government, the Burmese Army organized a military coup in March 1962, which deposed the civilian government and established the military dictatorship that would have lasted until 1988. Furthermore, the chronic instability of the fragile democratic system represented by the Union of Burma discredited for a generation the idea of democracy, political pluralism, and federalism among the population, which favored the authoritarian centralism of the Burmese Army (Tatmadaw)<sup>60</sup>.

## 1.7 The military dictatorship and its impact on Myanmar (1962-1988)

Initially, the military would have governed directly without any political figurehead. After this initial period of direct military rule, in the 1970s, despite keeping the power, they introduced a new constitution that nominally transformed the country into a monopartite dictatorship and transferred the power to the People's Assembly, the unicameral

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



legislature composed uniquely of members of the ruling party of the country, the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP)<sup>61</sup>.

After taking power, the military junta began to look for ways to mobilize the civilian population in administration, or rather to give the government a civilian face, without sacrificing real power, for otherwise it would probably invite a return to the political factionalism and state fragmentation witnessed during the final years of the Union. Moreover, the stated goals of the coup, while intended to legitimate the takeover, bound Ne Win to a particular direction of reform that substantially reduced alternative options<sup>62</sup>.

Since taking power, the Revolutionary Council began to pursue the transition from military to civilian rule, passing the early years of rebuilding the institutions of the State that would have become strong enough to sustain and enforce a monopartite dictatorship. In the meantime, the junta spent the following nine years transforming the BSPP to make the transition from a small coalition group of generals to an effective, totally subservient mass party, which had the sole objective of mobilizing the population to pursue the interests of the junta<sup>63</sup>. The process of creating a proper mass party was defined during the first BSPP Congress in November 1971, when the Chief of Staff of the Army, Brigadier San Yu, announced that the party would become a mass party and the beginning of the drafting of the People's Party Organizational Plan<sup>64</sup>. Two years later, the second BSPP Congress was held in October 1973. During the congress there were elected the new members of the central and the executive committee and, in particular, the final draft of the new Constitution, which would have replaced the Constitutional Chart of 1947, was approved.

According to the new constitution that would have been submitted to a referendum the following year, Burma would have become a one-party socialist "democratic republic" called the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. As aforementioned before, the population would have elected the members of the People's Assembly, whose members were only members of the BSPP and were elected for a term of four years. The People's Assembly had the power to select among its members the components of the

---

<sup>61</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma.". 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 6- The Revolutionary Council*", Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.107-132.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

State Council, a state organ of 29 members who exercised the legislative power, and it also had administrative power<sup>65</sup>.

Nevertheless, the most important legacy that the military rule of the country left on Myanmar was the total economic and political isolation experienced by the country, which would have hampered the prospects of country. Particularly during the early period of military rule, the junta conceived a very ambitious economic plan called “Burmese Way to Socialism” that would have led Burma to become a socialist and autarchic economy.

This plan, which consisted of the nationalization of all industries, except for agriculture, had a disastrous impact on the Burmese economy, making the country one of the world’s most impoverished countries and classifying it as a least developed country by the United Nations in 1987. The Enterprise Nationalization Law, passed in 1963, nationalized all the most important industries, such as rice, import-export trade, copper, and mining, and forbade the creation of new plants with private capital<sup>66</sup>. A further consequence of the law was the cessation of oil production and the exodus of the Anglo-Burmese, Indian Burmese, Burmese Chinese, and Indians, who played a relevant role in the growth of the economy during the colonial period. In conclusion, the country saw its foreign exchange reserves dwindle from 214 million dollars in 1962 to \$50 million in 1971, with inflation levels reaching 30%<sup>67</sup>.

Myanmar experiences an ephemeral respite in the 1970s, when the World Bank set up a consortium including the US, Japan, Great Britain, France, Australia, Canada, and West Germany, and would have coordinated its policy regarding aid to Burma. West Germany and Canada, quickly followed by China since 1979, became the largest foreign aid donors. The arrival of capital investments and foreign technical assistance would have become pivotal to reach the targets of the junta’s economic policy, respectively continue to exploit the natural resources through the creation of joint investments without sacrificing the socialist economic system<sup>68</sup>.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence, Stifel. “Economics of the Burmese Way to Socialism”. *University of California Press*. (1971): pp.803-817.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Michael, Charney. “A history of modern Burma”. 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, “*Chapter 7 – The BSPP Years*”, Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.133-147.

Only in the 1980s the economy began to reveal its weaknesses. Between 1981 and 1986, the national debt doubled to reach almost \$3 billion and the value of exports dropped by half, while teak and hardwood replaced rice as major export items, while black market thrived and largely sufficed for the needs of the population. In the meantime, the net debt burden was equivalent to the 650 percent of foreign exchange earnings, with a debt-service ratio of almost 60 percent of foreign-exchange reserves. Myanmar was not considered as reliable interlocutor to manage its economy anymore.

The attempts to partially liberalize the economy in the late 1980s, such as the lifting of ban on citizens buying or selling domestically produced goods or the severe cuts to the rice procurement program that assisted the majority of the Burmese urban population, were not viewed by the international community as sufficient measures. Foreign investments were still blocked and the forbade was reinforced through the adoption of a law which would have punished the sale of land and building to or from foreigners with up to five years of prison.

Consequently, the economy reached the bottom in 1987. The UN granted to Myanmar the status of Least Developed Country, which made the country eligible for special technical and development assistance and zero interest loans. The foreign debt reaching \$4 billion and the growth rate for 1987 reached only 2,3%.

In the following months, the deepening economic crisis sealed the fate of the military junta. The industry lacked raw materials, oil and spare parts, thus triggering a decline of available consumer products. Simultaneously, Myanmar experienced the decline of the oil production, which made impossible to satisfy the demands of the transportation and production sectors. Hence, to ease inflation, the government liberalized the transport of private goods, except those coming from cooperatives and government departments, but prices went out of control and the kyat was replaced by rice as the standard mean of payment. The continuous deterioration of the economy made internal unrest a concrete possibility<sup>69</sup>.

With regard to foreign policy, the military junta discarded the positive neutralism of the parliamentary period and held to strict neutralism. Indeed, the first decade after the military coup by General Ne Win, Myanmar attempted to isolate itself from the outside world. The government thought that this policy would lead to the successful

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

implementation of its social programs. With the beginning of the Burmese Way to Socialism, “the country increasingly resorted to an autarchic, nationalistic, and inward-looking posture, designated to insulate its unpopular and arbitrary regime from the outside world”<sup>70</sup>.

Myanmar became particularly suspicious of foreign interferences, primarily Communist China (PRC). The distrust towards Beijing is motivated by two fundamental reasons. Firstly, Myanmar openly criticized Chinese support to the Burma Communist Party (BCP) until the 1980s, while now Beijing is intervening in support of some trusted ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) before and after the current civil war. The second element consists of the hegemony that China wants to exert on Myanmar by deepening as much as possible the political and economic ties with Naypyidaw, thus guaranteeing its survival.

Since, Myanmar kept a policy of neutrality and its foreign policy has always followed the goal of not being involved in the balance of power politics, in particular during the Cold War. In conclusion, the military junta chose to highlight this isolationist tendencies, and it was convinced that severing almost any diplomatic relation with the rest of the world was the most suitable path for Myanmar. Only with the 1990s, precisely with the gradual transition towards a managed democracy, Myanmar would have begun to reestablish regular diplomatic relations with other nations.

## 1.8 The 1988 Uprising, the brief end of the military rule and the 1990 coup d'état

Nevertheless, with the 1980s in Myanmar took place the most important upheaval that the country since the independence, precisely the People Power Revolution of 1988 or 1988 revolution. This brief but intense revolutionary process unleashed the repressed popular anger towards the BSPP and aimed at ending one party rule, overthrowing the military junta and transition towards a democratic system. Despite the failure of the revolution and the maintaining of the military power through State Law and Order Restoration Council, the events of 1988 greatly influenced the future history of Myanmar.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Started as a student riot in March, the 1988 revolution would have led to the dismissal of Ne Win and the end of the BSPP rule<sup>71</sup>. The 15 March saw the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) become the theatre of violent clashes between the police and the students, which reacted to the brutal repression by the police by demanding the end of the one-party rule. In the following weeks, protests expanded throughout the country and become more vocal, though being broken un by police; the government chose to close universities and impose curfews on the main urban centers of Burma. In June, the internal situation become unbearable for the military junta, with Ne Win being forced to resign and the general Sein Lwin to lead a new government.

The intensity of the protests reached its climax in August, in reaction to the appointment of Sein Lwin. At Yangon, the students' protest managed to attract 10,000 people coming from all the layers of the society, while a general strike began on 8 August and demonstrations continued in the next four days. The government was surprised by the scale of the protests and of the anti-government sentiments and decided to crush the revolution through the massive use of force, thus further reinforcing the determination of the revolutionaries to overthrow the government. The situation was now totally out of control and the state was on the verge of collapse.

It was in this convulsed that a genuine, inter-ethnic and inter-classist democratic movement saw its birth and made possible, in the aftermath of the revolution, the emergence of the National League for Democracy and of its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Lwin's sudden and unexplained resignation on 12 August left many protestors confused and jubilant. Security forces exercised greater caution with demonstrators, particularly in neighborhoods that were entirely controlled by demonstrators and committees. On 19 August, under pressure to form a civilian government, Ne Win's biographer, Maung, was appointed as head of government. Maung was a legal scholar and the only non-military individual to serve in the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP).

The appointment of Maung briefly resulted in a subsidence of the protests, which resumed on 22 August 1988. In Mandalay, 100,000 people protested, while 50,000 demonstrated in Sittwe. Large marches were organized from Bamar-dominated center to distant ethnic states, particularly where military campaigns had previously taken place<sup>72</sup>.

---

<sup>71</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma". 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 8 – Toward Democracy*", Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.148-169.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Two days later, nationwide protests erupted throughout the country to the point that they would become out of control. During the second half of 1988, there was a concrete possibility that the regime would have collapsed with a fiercer reaction from the international community. On one occasion, a local committee mistakenly beheaded a couple thought to have been carrying a bomb. Incidents like these were not as common in Mandalay, where protests were more peaceful as they were organized by monks and lawyers.

On 26 August, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was the daughter of the independence hero Aung San, abruptly entered in the political arena by addressing half a million people at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon with a fiery speech, whom consecrated her as the symbol for the struggle for democracy in Burma. In particular, this consecration was true in the Western world. Suu Kyi urged the crowd to avoid a violent turning of the revolution and tried to force the junta to through non-violent means. In the most optimistic predictions, for many observers the 1988 revolution in Myanmar was seen as a similar process to the People Power Revolution in the Philippines, who took place in 1986 and put an end to the Marcos dictatorship<sup>73</sup>.

Nevertheless, the hope that the People Power revolution would led to emergence of a new democratic polity akin to the Philippines would not have never concretized. During the September congress of 1988, 90% of party delegates voted for a multi-party system of government. The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) announced they would be organizing an election, but the opposition parties called for their immediate resignation from government, allowing an interim government to organize elections. After the BSPP rejected both demands, protesters again took to the streets on 12 September 1988. Nu promised elections within a month, proclaiming a provisional government.

Meanwhile, cracks emerged within the police and army on whether to continue the repression of the uprisings, but the revolutionary movement reached an impasse and it was not able to seize the favorable moment. Indeed, the junta stood firm and any of the three hopes of the revolutionaries materialized: daily demonstrations did not force the regime to become receptive to their demands, cracks within the army did not lead to

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

massive defections by soldiers and were limited in numbers, while neither the United Nations nor United States would have intervened directly<sup>74</sup>.

By mid-September, the protests become increasingly violent and lawless, with soldiers deliberately provoking protesters into skirmishes that would have changed the image of the protests. Moreover, the protesters demanded immediate political change and distrusted steps for incremental reform. The momentum has now shifted in favor of the military and, on 18 September 1988, the Tatmadaw regained full control of the country through a coup d'état. General Saw Maung repealed the terms of the 1974 constitution and established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) as a new governing body in place of the defunct BSPP. After the imposition of martial law by Maung, the protests were violently repressed, and the protest movement effectively collapsed in October<sup>75</sup>.

The government announced on the state-run radio that the military had decided to assume power in order to save the country from disintegration. Tatmadaw troops arrived in the cities throughout Burma and opened fire indiscriminately on protestors. Around 3,000 estimated deaths and an unknown number of injured were counted by the end of September, with 1,000 deaths in Rangoon alone. By 21 September, the Tatmadaw has regained full control of the country<sup>76</sup>.

Many in Burma believed that the regime would have collapsed if there was a stronger reaction from the international community and neighboring countries. Western governments and Japan cut aid to the country. Among Burma's neighbors, India issued the strongest reaction by condemning the suppression, closing borders and setting up refugee camps along its border with Burma. By 1989, 6,000 NLD supporters had been detained, while those who continued to fight fled to the ethnic border areas and formed groups with those who sought greater self-determination. It was estimated that 10,000 NLD supporters had fled to territories controlled by ethnic armed organizations such as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), where many of them received military training<sup>77</sup>.

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

In addition, in the aftermath of the 1988 uprising, thousands of individuals were killed or imprisoned, in particular high school and university students, with prisoners being subjected to inhumane torture and deprived of basic provisions, such as food, water, medicine, and sanitation. From 1988 to 2012, the Tatmadaw and the police arbitrarily detained tens of thousands of supporters of the Burmese pro-democracy movement, as well as intellectuals, artists, students, and human rights activists<sup>78</sup>.

Nevertheless, the 1988 uprising forged many of the student leaders, and formed a generation of lifelong human rights activists and leaders of the Burmese pro-democracy movement, and would have contributed to the 2007 Saffron Revolution by organizing one of the first protests alongside Buddhist monks<sup>79</sup>.

In the meantime, the last remote possibility of a political change disappeared in 1990. In May 1990, the new Maung government held the first free multiparty elections since the 1962 military coup. The electoral outcome saw the triumph of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party founded by Aung San Suu Kyi in September 1988, won four fifths of the seats, earning 392 out of a total 492<sup>80</sup>.

The military junta refused to recognize the electoral results and did not transferred power to a civilian government until 2011, first as State and Law Order Restoration Council and, from 1997, as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). General Than Shwe became the new leader of the junta in 1992, becoming the *de facto* ruler of Myanmar and governing the country until 2011.

## 1.9 The post-BSPP Myanmar: pursue of the military rule in the new globalized world (1990s-2011)

In the 1990s, despite the reassertion of the Tatmadaw rule, Myanmar continued its opening to the outside world, symbolized by the acquisition of the membership to the World Trade Organization, and the admission into the Association of Southeast Asian

---

<sup>78</sup> David, Isaac, Steinberg and Michael, Arthur, Thwin-Aung. "Myanmar since 1988". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (2024).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> James, Guyot. "Myanmar in 1990: The Unconsummated election". *Asian Survey*. (1991): pp. 205-211.



Nations (ASEAN). Myanmar affirmed that the country would have maintained friendly relations with neighboring countries<sup>81</sup>.

Nevertheless, given the refusal to recognize the victory of NLD victory in 1990, the United States and the West became hostile, condemning the activities of the junta and imposing economic sanctions. The new Western approach positively affected the relations between China and Myanmar, with the PRC that would have become the main economic partner of Myanmar through its investments in the country and the great ally of the junta in international forums, politically and diplomatically.

Concerning the domestic policy, the 1990s saw a period of relative political stability and a renewed attempt by the junta to sign as many ceasefires as possible with the ethnic armed organizations. Specifically, in January 1993, Than Shwe gathered a National Convention to write a new constitution. Than Shwe insisted that the assembly would have preserved a pivotal role for the military in the formation of any future government, and reasserted his position by alternatively suspending and gathering again the convention. The work of the National Convention saw disorders between the junta and the National League for Democracy, which, exasperated with the interference, decided to abandon the work in late 1995, while the Convention was finally dismissed in March 1996 without the writing of a constitution<sup>82</sup>.

As in the previous years, the main threat to the unity of Myanmar was the presence of the insurgencies. During the 1990s, the military regime dealt with several insurgencies by tribal minorities along its borders. General Khin Nyunt was able to negotiate cease-fire agreements that ended the fighting with the Kokang, hill tribes such as the Wa, and the Kachin, but the Karen would not negotiate. The Tatmadaw defeated the Karen in 1995, but a peace settlement was not reached<sup>83</sup>.

After the failure of the National Convention to write a new constitution, the agreement between the Tatmadaw and the NLD became increasingly fragile, resulting in the crackdown on the party between 1996 and 1997. Meanwhile, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was replaced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, but it was merely a cosmetic change finalized to give a veneer of

---

<sup>81</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma". 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 8 – Toward Democracy*", Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.148-169.

<sup>82</sup> Michael, Charney. "A history of modern Burma". 1-9 chapters. Michael, Charney, "*Chapter 9 – Perpetual delay, 190 to the present*", Cambridge University Press. (2009): pp.170-200.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

respectability. The authoritarian rule of the junta and ongoing violations of human rights led to the sharp deterioration of the relations with the West. The United States decided to intensify sanctions in 1997, followed by the European Union three years later.

Meanwhile, the NLD chose to continue follow the nonviolent strategy of Aung San Suu Kyi, taken into custody from 2000 until 2002, and reconciliation talks with the junta were held. These negotiations were inconclusive, and Suu Kyi was once again taken into custody in May 2003. Predictably, the government also carried out another major repression of the NLD, with the arrest of many of its leaders and the closure of its offices.

Being totally free to manage the transition towards a managed democracy, the junta, now guided by Kyin Nyunt, announced a seven-step "roadmap to democracy" in August 2003. On 17 February 2005, the government attempted again in writing a new Constitution and convened another National Convention for the first time in twelve years. Pro-democracy organizations and parties, including the National League for Democracy, were barred from participating. The Convention was adjourned once again in January 2006<sup>84</sup>.

In November 2005, the military junta started transferring the capital from Yangon to a newly designated capital city, Naypyidaw. This decision responded to a long-term unofficial policy of moving critical military and government infrastructure away from Yangon to avoid being exposed to a potential state collapse as happened in 1988<sup>85</sup>.

In conclusion, the junta did not face explicit opposition to its rule until the emergence of the Saffron Revolution in 2007, a series of anti-government protests that began the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2007. The immediate cause of the protests was the decision to remove fuel subsidies, which caused the price of diesel and petrol to suddenly rise as much as 100%, and they did not have political aims. The protest demonstrations were at first dealt with quickly and harshly by the junta, with dozens of protesters arrested and detained. Starting 18 September, the protests had been led by thousands of Buddhist monks, and those protests had been allowed to proceed until a renewed government crackdown on 26 September<sup>86</sup>.

During the crackdown, there were rumors of disagreement within the Burmese military, but none were confirmed. At the time, independent sources reported, through

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

pictures and accounts, 30 to 40 monks and 50 to 70 civilians killed, as well as 200 beaten. However, other sources reveal more dramatic figures.

#### 1.10 The adoption of the 2008 Constitution, the end of military rule and the experiment of managed democracy (2011-2020).

In the wake of this unrest, the National Convention finally approved a draft of a new constitution in early 2008 that was to be put to a public referendum in May. However, the referendum process was disrupted by a natural disaster. On the first days of May the Nargis cyclone struck the Irrawaddy delta region of south-central Myanmar, obliterating villages and killing some 138,000 people (the total including tens of thousands listed as missing and presumed dead). The government's failure to provide relief quickly at the outset of the disaster and its unwillingness to accept foreign aid or to grant entrance to foreign relief workers further increased the death toll caused by disease and elicited harsh criticism from the international community<sup>87</sup>.

The new constitution was ratified in late May 2008, although outside observers were highly skeptical of the referendum process itself (particularly the reported results from regions devastated by the cyclone). The document was to take effect after the election of a new bicameral legislature, named the Assembly of the Union, which eventually was scheduled for November 2010. Provisions in the constitution ensured that the military would have a leading role in future governments in Myanmar, notably that one-fourth of the members of each legislative chamber would be appointed by the military leadership<sup>88</sup>.

A brief transition period ensued in early 2011. The new legislature convened on January; at which time the 2008 constitution nominally went into effect. On February Thein Sein, a former general who served as prime minister since 2007 and designated successor of Shwe, was elected president of Myanmar by members of the legislature and would have guided the government from 2011 until 2016. Than Shwe formally relinquished his control of the state and government on March 30 by dissolving the SPDC, while Thein Sein assumed constitutional executive authority in the country. Than Shwe

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

subsequently stepped down, but it was unclear whether he would have continued to wield some influence<sup>89</sup>.

In the meantime, the new civilian government formed by Than Shwe began to implement an agenda of political and social reforms. The reforms that would have been enacted included loosening press restrictions, the concession of a general amnesty and the consequent release of thousands of political prisoners, the passing of laws that would have guaranteed the organization of peaceful demonstrations and the formation of unions. Furthermore, another priority of the new government was the signing of a cease-fire accord with Shan insurgents (a similar accord was reached with Karen rebels in January 2012).

Most notably, government-imposed restrictions on Aung San Suu Kyi were further relaxed during the year, including her ability to meet freely with associates and to travel around the country. In December the NLD was allowed to register as an official party and field candidates for parliamentary by-elections held on April 1, 2012. Aung San Suu Kyi vied for and won the open seat in her home constituency in Yangon. In all, NLD candidates won 43 of the 45 seats that were up for election.<sup>90</sup>

Following the April 2012 elections, the United States and European Union announced plans to lift some of the economic sanctions and other restrictions that had been in place since the early 1990s with the exclusions of those related to the arms traffic. The new state of diplomatic relations between Myanmar and the rest of the world was symbolized by the visit of the U.S. President Barack Obama to Yangon.

In addition, in early 2012 the Shein Tein cabinet initiated a process of economic reform to increase and diversify foreign investments and reduce the dependency on China. One of the early measures regarded the kyat, which served as the national currency. The kyat was now allowed to float in value on world markets as one of the initial steps toward economic reform. The strategy of investments diversification worked, and Myanmar experienced a brief period of sustained economic growth.

Parliamentary elections were held in early November 2015 and proved to be the country's first to be freely contested. Reports indicated that, generally, the polling was

---

<sup>89</sup> Priscilla Clapp. "Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition". *United States Institute of Peace*, (2015): pp.2-5,

<sup>90</sup> Olarn, Kocha. "Myanmar confirms sweeping election victory for Suu Kyi's party". CNN World. 4/4/2012.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/04/world/asia/myanmar-elections/index.html>

conducted fairly, and, after several days of ballot counting, it was clear that the NLD had won a considerable majority of the seats in both legislative chambers. The NLD was thus poised to form a new government in early 2016, although the military leaders were to retain control over such areas as the army and the police force. In addition, Aung San Suu Kyi would not be permitted to become president, because of the constitutional provision that bans candidates who have (or had) spouses or children who are foreign nationals. Because of that stipulation, the NLD presented Aung San Suu Kyi's close friend, Htin Kyaw, as the party's candidate.

Members of the legislature met on March 15, 2016, to vote on the country's new president. Htin Kyaw was elected. He was inaugurated on March 30, 2016. Aung San Suu Kyi emerged with multiple posts in the government before paring her appointments to those of foreign minister, minister in the president's office, and a newly established State Counselor position. The last position had been created by the NLD-dominated legislature and signed into law by Htin Kyaw within a week of his inauguration, nevertheless it was denounced by the military-appointed MPs, who considered it unconstitutional.

In her new position of power, Aung San Suu Kyi's primary focus was on bringing to an end the various insurgencies that were being waged across the country by some 20 different ethnic armed organizations<sup>91</sup>. Building on the progress that the previous administration had reached with some of the groups that had signed a nationwide cease-fire in October 2015, the 21st Century Panglong peace conference opened in August 2016 and was followed with regular meetings thereafter. Economic reforms started by the previous government continued to be pursued, albeit initially at a slower pace, as the new administration was more focused on quelling the insurgencies than on reforming the economy, and businesses were hesitant to act until there was more certainty regarding the shape and direction of the new administration's economic policies.

The most important challenge faced by the new administration was the resurgence of periodic violence against the Muslim minority of Rohingya by the Tatmadaw and by police, who led brutal crackdowns on the civilian Rohingya<sup>92</sup>.

---

<sup>91</sup> Lee, Jones. "Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: the periphery is central". *Taylor & Francis Online*. (2014): pp.780-797.

<sup>92</sup> Aung, Htin, Maung and Arthur, Michael, Thwin-Aung. History of Myanmar, "The British in Burma 1885-1948", Since independence, the unsettled early years". Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Myanmar/The-British-in-Burma-1885-1948>

The brutal repression campaign against Rohingya became an international case and the weak reaction of the government was heavily criticized from the international community. Allegations of widespread human rights violations committed by Myanmar armed forces against the Rohingya began to circulate. According to early estimates, more than 800,000 Rohingya had fled the country since the first crackdown had begun in 2016<sup>93</sup>.

The persecution of the Rohingya tarnished the image that the international community had towards Aung San Suu Kyi, whose activism for human rights and democracy was antithetic to her measured response to the Tatmadaw actions and her inability to denounce them. In addition, in 2019 the systematic human rights violations committed induced Gambia to accuse Myanmar of allegedly having committed acts that violated the UN Convention on Genocide, bringing the case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ)<sup>94</sup>. At an ICJ hearing in December 2019, she testified in defense of Myanmar's actions and said that if any war crimes had been committed by members of the military, they would be prosecuted in Myanmar's military justice system.

In the meantime, in 2018 Myanmar president Htin Kyaw resigned and the Assembly of the Union (the lower house) voted to find a successor. The resignation of Htin Kyaw led to the election of Win Myint, a close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi like his predecessor, as president on March 28<sup>95</sup>.

### 1.11 The end of the managed democracy and the restauration of the military rule (2020-2021)

The NLD introduced constitutional amendments in March 2020 with the goal of democratic reforms to the military-backed 2008 constitution. These included some that would gradually reduce the minimum number of legislative seats reserved for the military

---

<sup>93</sup> Agence France Presse. "Bangladesh to build one of world's largest refugee camps for 800,000 Rohingya". *The Guardian*. 6/10/2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/06/bangladesh-build-worlds-largest-refugee-camps-800000-rohingya>

<sup>94</sup> Owen, Bowcott. "Gambia files Rohingya genocide case against Myanmar at UN court". *The Guardian*. 11/11/2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/11/gambia-rohingya-genocide-myanmar-un-court>

<sup>95</sup> Deutsche Welle. "Myanmar elects Win Myint as new president". 28/3/2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-elects-win-myint-as-new-president/a-43162327>

over a 15-year period, as well as decreasing the military's broad emergency powers. But, since the 2008 constitution provided the military with at least 25 percent of legislative seats, ensuring that they could block any legislation unfavorable to the military's interests, the amendments were not passed<sup>96</sup>.

The parliamentary elections were held on November 2020. During the electoral day, vote operations were not possible in some areas of the country, with the electoral commission explaining that the reason was the presence of security concerns due to ongoing fights between the Tatmadaw and the armed ethnic groups. Despite the fact that the areas affected by the unrests represented less than 10 percent of the total electorate, ethnic minority voters were disenfranchised.

Analogously to the previous general election, the electoral outcome was already sealed. Despite the four years passed at governing the country would have revealed the difficulty of the NLD in the administration of the state, the party obtained an overwhelming majority, winning more than four-fifths of available, non-filled seats in both legislative chambers. Conversely, the military-aligned USDP party suffered another humiliating defeat and saw its number of seats further decrease from 41 to 33. Furthermore, the results definitively confirmed that the USDP would not have been capable to build a pro-military political party that would have challenged the NLD in winning elections, thus becoming the instrument of the Tatmadaw to formally lead the government<sup>97</sup>.

The outcome of the results alarmed the military, which would fear that a strengthened civilian government led by the League would have become a serious threat to their privileged positions of power and decided to organize a military coup before the swearing of the new legislature. Hence the Tatmadaw, backed by the USDP, rejected the electoral results, baselessly claiming presumed frauds and irregularities in vote operations that would have affected the results, the organization of new elections and the delay the opening of Parliament scheduled for February 2021.

The accusations of the Tatmadaw were promptly dismissed by the electoral commission, which affirmed that there was no evidence of widespread fraud and

---

<sup>96</sup> Annabelle, Heugas. "Myanmar's Constitution Amendment Process in the year 2020". *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*. (2020).

<sup>97</sup> BBC News. "Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi's party wins majority in election". 13 November 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54899170>

irregularities. The stance of the electoral commission was supported by domestic and international observers. Simultaneously, the government rejected the third demand of the army.

On February 1, 2021, when the parliament was scheduled to meet for the first time since the election, the Tatmadaw reaffirmed its full control of the country in a coup d'état. President Win Myint, Aung San Suu Kyi, and NLD MPs and supporters were detained, while former Vice President Myint Swe became acting president. The newly-invested president invoked the articles 417 and 418 of the constitution, through which he declared the state of emergency and that would have handed the effective control of the three executive, judicial and executive branches of government to the Commander in Chief of the Tatmadaw General Min Aung Hlaing.

Min Aung Hlaing attempted to justify the military coup by affirming that it was justified by presumed widespread electoral irregularities and because the Tatmadaw did not received an answer to its request to delay the installation of the new legislature. To prevent that the widespread pro-democracy protests would effectively undermine the authority of the newly-established State Administration Council (SAC), he promised to hold new elections at the end of the state of emergency and to hand power over to the winner.

The next day the State Administrative Council was formed, with Senior General Min as chairman, to handle government function during the state of emergency. The coup was widely condemned on the international stage, and there was opposition to the military coup within Myanmar as citizens held large protests and engaged in acts of civil disobedience. In conclusion, in the following chapter there will be analyzed the planning and the unfolding of the February 2021 military coup and the reactions within the country and the international community to the military takeover.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The unfolding of the 2021 military coup: causes, planning, developments and reactions**

#### **2.1 Causes and factors behind the coup: end of the political compromise between the army and the National League for Democracy**

As aforementioned before, after the results of the 2020 general elections, the Tatmadaw had decided to conclude the experiment of managed democracy. Nevertheless, with regard to the determining factors that induced the Tatmadaw to propend towards the overthrowing deposition, a variety of speculations emerged.

A first hypothesis affirms that the restauration of the direct rule of the military was the logical consequence of the political hegemony of the NLD, in contrast with the expectations of the military. Given that the NLD-led governments between 2016 and 2020 were not able to deliver the changes that they promised to the population, the Tatmadaw would have expected either a better result or even an electoral victory for its proxy party, the USDP.

Nevertheless, the NLD managed to secure another overwhelming majority by taking 396 of the 426 available seats. The electoral results convinced the Tatmadaw that the formation of a political bloc alternative to the NLD for the conquest of power, which was supposed to be formed by the USDP, other minor ethnic parties and the 25 per-cent active-duty military sitting as MPs, and the consequent formation of a government fully backed by the Tatmadaw was impossible. As Steinberg summarizes, “The collapse of the USDP denies the Senior General a personal political/constitutional route to presidential power, for even if he were nominated to become one of the two vice presidents (one of the two will be from the Tatmadaw), that role has far less influence than his present one. It seems unlikely he would want that position, and the coup at least clarified the extent of his political ambitions”. Alternatively, another factor that would have influenced the decisions of generals was the lack of trust between the NLD and the Tatmadaw, in particular between Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Aung Hlaing. The lack of trust is an important disvalue in a society in which personalized power has been an essential attribute

of governance. The motivations of top leaders matter greatly in a political system that is as highly personalized as the Burmese.

Min Aung Hlaing, despite lacking the network of allies that Than Shwe had within the army, managed to secure a general support among the wider officer corps to organize the coup. In fact, some observers have suggested that he may have been pushed to act by hardline officers.

Nevertheless, to truly understand the end of the democratic experiment in Myanmar it is necessary to disprove common misconceptions about the decade of liberalization preceding the coup.

A first misperception regards the relations of the Tatmadaw with the new democratic system. During the period of managed democracy which lasted from 2011 until 2020, there was a consensus among analysts and scholarly literature that the end of military rule was beneficial to the Tatmadaw. The army was able to preserve its influence on the country during the political transition, to the point that it was argued that the Tatmadaw effectively stayed in power despite the democratic shift.

Aung San Suu Kyi was criticized for its failure to challenge the prerogatives of the Tatmadaw and put a limit to its autonomy. Specifically, this critic was particularly evident during the repression of the Rohingya in 2018. This narrative was misleading, and did not consider underlying tensions between the army and the government. While the Tatmadaw had contrasting relations with the government, alternating signals of prudent rapprochement with a more confrontational attitude, it was difficult for the Tatmadaw to accept the very framing of the transition as a system of power sharing.

In addition, another misunderstanding of was the willingness and the aim of the political and economic reforms operated by the junta. Many of the post-2011 reforms were not planned and never had the full support of many senior officers. Rather, President Thein Sein and his closest confidants unexpectedly ushered a more ambitious for reforms than expected after they retired from the military in 2010 to lead the first post-junta administration in fifty years from 2011–2015.

Thein Sein and his closest allies were able to preserve their influence because they retained authority among the new military leaders and they were able in bringing in economic and political benefits both for the country and the military by securing the lifting of the sanctions imposed by the West, attracting foreign investments, and the

improvement of the military's international standing after two decades of international opprobrium. Nevertheless, at the eve of the 2015 general election, serious disagreement within military circles persisted with regard to the wisdom of handing over government power to their long-standing political nemesis, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

After the NLD government took power in 2016, the relations between the Tatmadaw and the new government quickly deteriorated and entered a downward spiral. The renewed rivalry among the two main political actors of Myanmar was exemplified by the personal distrust between Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Aung Hlaing who began to fight a power struggle for the presidency, and extended at the institutional level where issues of power, policy, and pride were conducive to create tensions.

Contrary to popular perceptions, the NLD government had real power and used it. Although the new civilian leaders mostly refrained from openly challenging the Tatmadaw on core issues, such as its constitutional reserve powers and the defense budget, they sought from the outset to marginalize it in matters of day-to-day governance. The establishment of the extra-constitutional position of State Counsellor for Aung San Suu Kyi as de facto head of government, above the presidency, challenged if not strictly the letter, then certainly the spirit of the 2008 Constitution, which formed the basis for the military's acceptance of the broader reform process.

While the generals had forecasted this scenario and acknowledged the new situation, they grew increasingly frustrated with the continuous delay of the convention of the National Defense and Security Council by Aung San Suu Kyi. The National Defense and Security Council was intended as a mechanism that would have helped coordinating national security policy between the civilian and military sides of the government, and later appointed a civilian national security adviser. These steps clearly crossed the lines the military had drawn to protect its long-standing monopoly on security decision-making.

The later transfer of the General Affairs Department from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Ministry of the Union Government Office, which was under civilian control, must also have raised the hackles of the military leadership, although the impact of this was felt more at the local level and did not at the time cause any open military dissent. Furthermore, Aung San Suu Kyi decided to question the permanence of Min Aung Hlaing as Commander in Chief of the Tatmadaw in a political context where a civilian

government would have to respond to him. Conversely, Aung San Suu Kyi should have attempted to establish a stable relationship with Min Aung Hlaing, of gradually obtaining power, nibbling away at the army's control at its flanks of power.

Politically speaking, the overestimating of both her figure, of the strength and the capacity of the NLD to truly become a party of government, and of the solidity of the constitutional agreement of 2011 was an error of huge importance. Anyways, during her years at the zenith of the State, she did not manage to become an effective politician. In conclusion, the excessive confidence of the NLD is illustrated by its attempts to change the provisions for the election to the presidency.

Given the fact that Suu Kyi married the British historian Michael Aris, from whom she had two children, she was denied the election to the presidency. To guarantee that Aung San Suu Kyi would have played a more active role in the government, the Amyotha Hluttaw (the upper house in Myanmar parliament) approved the establishment of the title of state counsellor, which was similar to that of the prime minister and, as the presidency, would have a term of five years. In conclusion, the unwillingness of both sides to collaborate for the governance of the country made the new sharing power agreement reached in 2011 very tenuous and precarious.

## 2.2 Internal factors that determined the coup

The division of power between the Army and the Tatmadaw became a paralyzing factor in the resolution of the main political issues facing the state. The NLD and the Tatmadaw has equally contributed to the deterioration of the coexistence between the two main actors within the Myanmar state.

The main factor that could be taken into consideration would be the willingness by the Tatmadaw to preserve directly its political and financial privileges. Namely, the Defense Services Act would have imposed a mandatory retirement age of 65 years old for the Armed Forces' Commander-in-Chief. Min Aung Hlaing would have been replaced by a new Commander in Chief by the 1<sup>st</sup> July<sup>98</sup>.

---

<sup>98</sup> Frontier Myanmar, "Could Min Aung Hlaing's retirement break the political deadlock?". 12/1/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/could-min-aung-hlaings-retirement-break-the-political-deadlock/>

Precisely, according to the Constitution, the President, in consultation with the National Defense and Security Council, had the authority to appoint the new Commander in Chief of the Tatmadaw, which could have provided an opportunity for the civilian government to appoint a military officer more inclined to dialogue and less focused in defending the entrenched interests of the army as Commander-in-Chief<sup>99</sup>.

The nomination of a new Commander-in-Chief by the new NLD-led government would have allowed the executive to reach two important results. Firstly, as aforementioned before, it would have strengthened the position of the executive in its relations with the army, then it would have determined the removal of Min Aung Hlaing from the political scene, given that he would become vulnerable to being prosecuted before international courts for war crimes during the Rohingya Conflict of 2018<sup>100</sup>. As Pedersen states, Min Aung Hlaing lacked a strong network of contacts and allies among the military that his predecessor, Than Shwe, had at his disposal, thus allowing him to place trusted officers in key positions within the Tatmadaw and preserving his base of power<sup>101</sup>.

Concerning the military-owned businesses overseen by Min Aung Hlaing, the activist group Justice for Myanmar has highlighted how the necessity of preserving the significant financial and business interests was a potential motivating factor for the coup. Indeed, Min Aung Hlaing oversees two military the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanma Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), two conglomerates owned by the Tatmadaw operating in various economic sectors. The MEC operates in the mining, manufacturing, and telecommunication sectors, while the business interests of MEHL include banking, construction, agriculture, tobacco, mining and food<sup>102</sup>.

Min Aung Hlaing is also the chairman of the Patron Group, which is controlled by MEHL, and one of the biggest shareholders of the country. The business of both MEC and MEHL was favored by the corruption of the military junta and the theft of public assets by the Tatmadaw. For instance, two evident examples of the oversight of public

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Morten, Pedersen. Myanmar in 2021: A State Torn Apart”. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, pp.235-253. 2022.

<sup>102</sup> Justice for Myanmar. “Who profits from a coup? The power and greed of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing”. 30/1/2021. <https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/who-profits-from-a-coup-the-power-and-greed-of-senior-general-min-aung-hlaing>

assets, which were outsourced to cronies and international businesses through corrupt deals, were the MEHL takeover of the Bo Aung Kyaw Port from the civilian-led Myanmar Port Authority and the leasing of some of jade and ruby licenses in lucrative sites to the KBZ conglomerate<sup>103</sup>.

In the former case, in 2016 the MEHL leased the port to the conglomerate KT Group under a 50-year deal that would have earned \$3 million per year, while in the latter case, according to a report of Myanmar Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, KBZ paid minimal royalties to the State despite extracting over 24,000 kilograms of jade were extracted in the 2015-16 fiscal year. In conclusion, these two corrupt deals exemplify how Aung Min Hlaing obtains important profits and reinforce its relations with cronies beholden to him that allow the pursuing of a system of a concentration of wealth within a tight group of generals and their associates<sup>104</sup>.

## 2.3 Preparation, development and unfolding of the coup

Immediately after the elections, the tensions between the Tatmadaw and civilian government escalated, triggered by the false allegations of the army regarding presumed widespread electoral fraud and irregularities. Before the commencement date for the new legislature on 1 February, the military sought to explore several legal avenues to delay it. Precisely, the Tatmadaw calling, first, for a special sitting of parliament and, later, a meeting of the National Defense and Security Council, and even a Supreme Court intervention<sup>105</sup>.

These demands, however, were rejected by the civilian authorities, resulting in intense negotiations between representatives of the NLD and during the last few days of January the army attempted to try to resolve the incoming constitutional crisis. If the official reason for that request was that the Tatmadaw simply wanted an acknowledgement of their dissatisfaction over the election result and of the necessity of investigate eventual irregularities that could have affected the election results.

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> San, Yamin, Aung. "Updated Timeline: Tracing Military's Interference in Myanmar Election". The Irrawaddy. 20/01/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/timeline-tracing-militarys-interference-in-myanmar-ele.html>

Nevertheless, the real reason was the pushing by the army for an eventual new power-sharing arrangement, which would have required substantial concessions from the NLD<sup>106</sup>. Either way, the negotiations failed, and in the early morning of 1 February, the Tatmadaw occupied Naypyidaw, arrested the State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, the President Win Myint and declared a state of emergency to reassert the full control on the country<sup>107</sup>.

The initial takeover followed the plans of the Tatmadaw, being quick and bloodless. However, unlike the 1962 and 1988 coups which saw the population apathetic and resigned, this display of force by the Tatmadaw triggered a widely participated and peaceful mass movement in favor of the democracy that the military junta would not have been able to quell in the following weeks<sup>108</sup>. The endurance of this mass movement against the junta would have favored the emergence of enduring tensions that would have led to the civil war in the following months, which took thousands of deaths on both sides and, whatever the final outcome, fundamentally changed Myanmar.

Nearly two years after the coup, it is clear that the changes wrought by the current crisis will have long-lasting and transformative effects. While the initial agenda of the new junta was fairly conservative, the general population's hatred of the Tatmadaw has sparked a revolutionary war to remove this once-proud institution from politics. The return of armed struggle to central parts of the country has fundamentally changed the tenor of political contestation, as well as the balance of power among key political groupings.

The long-standing, towering influence of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD over the democracy movement has been significantly diluted, while the influence of ethnic armed organizations has dramatically increased, and their demands for local autonomy have escalated to the point that it is no longer certain that the state of Myanmar will hold together. The generals insisted from the outset that the coup was in fact not a coup but merely a temporary military takeover necessitated by the refusal of the NLD government

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Reuters. "Statement from Myanmar military on state of emergency". 1/1/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/statement-from-myanmar-military-on-state-of-emergency-idUSKBN2A11A8/>

<sup>108</sup> Richard, Paddock. "More Bloodshed in Myanmar as Crackdown on Coup Protests Continues". New York Times 11/4/2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/world/asia/myanmar-coup-protests.html>

to deal with the allegations of electoral fraud in good faith and attempt to take power by “fraudulent means”.

According to the initial statements issued on the morning of the coup, the military intended to hold power for one year only under the emergency provisions of the 2008 Constitution, after which it would hold fresh elections and return power to the elected government. The main focus of the emergency administration in the interim, supposedly, would be to investigate the allegations of electoral fraud, combat the COVID epidemic, and revive the economy.

Otherwise, it would be a caretaker government only. Myanmar’s economic and foreign policies would remain the same, and work on the peace process would continue. The deadline for the return to civilian government has since been pushed back to August 2023. However, this schedule still formally adheres to the provisions of the Constitution, which allow for up to two years of emergency rule and another six months to organize elections. Unlike previous coup leaders in 1962 and 1988, the 2021 generation do not seem to be set on fundamentally changing the political system.

To lead the country until the organization of new elections scheduled the following year, the military established a new ruling council, the State Administration Council (SAC), headed by Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and replaced most politically appointed leaders and bodies, including the entire cabinet, the Union Election Commission (UEC), and the Governor of the Central Bank.

To further assert its effective control over the country, the SAC established councils led by military officers at each administrative level, and nominated the majority of the over 17,000 elected village administrators with loyal servants of the junta. The new administrations were mainly veterans from the army and members of the USDP. All the levers of the state, both at the national and local level, were now firmly under the control of the SAC.

The appointment of some representatives of non-NLD and ethnic political parties on the Council and of several consensual civil servants to key ministerial portfolios was made only to give some substance to the claim of “business as usual” towards the international community. As aforementioned before, the pretext that induced the Tatmadaw to organize and unfold the coup was the claim that widespread irregularities irreversibly altered the results of the 2020 general election. Nevertheless, in first instance



the Tatmadaw sought to avoid to openly overthrow the incoming civilian government. Then the army demanded the delay the inauguration of the new legislature and an emergency reunion of the National Defense and Security Council and even a Supreme Court intervention<sup>109</sup>.

The efforts were inconclusive and the army decided to execute the coup. In the last days of January, several Western nations such as the United State, France, the United Kingdom and Australia warned that the Tatmadaw was staging a coup, while warning against any regime change through a joint statement from their diplomatic missions in Myanmar<sup>110</sup>.

Consequently, as planned by the Tatmadaw, the military coup began to unfold through an early morning raid which led to the arrest of the most important figures of the now-overthrown NLD government<sup>111</sup>. Precisely, the Tatmadaw managed to took in custody the then-State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, the President of the Republic Win Myint, the secretary of the NLD Han Tha Myint and many other personalities of the party. This initial raid was rapidly followed by another raid of the army, which placed over 400 MPs under house arrest and offered them 24 hours to leave Naypyitaw and the country. Immediately after the coup, massive protests were organized by the NLD supporters (Figure 2)<sup>112</sup>.

By 4 February, over 130 people between officials, lawmakers and civil society activists were arrested, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. After having deposed the civilian government, from 3.00 a.m. the Tatmadaw managed to isolate Myanmar from the outer world through widespread Internet disruptions and the interruption of the communications channels from Naypyitaw. In the following hours, while the Tatmadaw began to patrol Naypyidaw, Yangon through its soldiers, it addressed the nation with a reassuring message with the aim to avoid that the military coup could stimulate and spread overt opposition to the incoming military junta and an excessively

---

<sup>109</sup> Reuters. "Crisis in Myanmar after army alleges election fraud". 1/1/2021. <https://www.deccanherald.com/world/expained-crisis-in-myanmar-after-army-alleges-election-fraud-945874.html>

<sup>110</sup> ABC News. "Australia joins list of countries warning Myanmar military against staging coup amid fraud claims". 29/1/2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-29/australian-government-worried-about-myanmar-military-coup/13104328>

<sup>111</sup> Frontier Myanmar. "Aung San Suu Kyi, Win Myint to face charges as NLD calls for 'unconditional' release". 3/2/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/aung-san-suu-kyi-win-myint-to-face-charges-as-nld-calls-for-unconditional-release/>

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

harsh reaction from the international community. The Tatmadaw affirmed that it would have governed the country for one year through a transition government to guarantee the organization of free and fair elections<sup>113</sup>.

Immediately after the address, the formal transfer of power from the civilian government to the incoming military junta took place, while the following days saw the Tatmadaw lead the process of creation and formation of the pillars of the new military-ruled Myanmar and its handling of the first widespread popular protests that were organized in reaction to the deposition of the civilian government. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, a meeting of the National Defense and Security was convened for the following day and saw the participation of the acting president Myint Swe and of military officials, while the following day the military junta created a new executive governing body called the State Administration Council (SAC), whose membership initially consisted of 11 members coming from the army, then increased to 16 to add some civilian personalities in an apparent effort to make the government more inclusive. With regard to the new government, the SAC replaced 24 former ministers, among them only eleven were filled with military-appointed members<sup>114</sup>.

In the same day, Myanmar police formally charged Aung San Suu Kyi and the former president Win Myint for breaching the Export and Import Law and the Natural Disaster Management Law without any evidence. The SAC acted swiftly to enact the formal liquidation of the NLD as a registered party. The deregistration of the NLD sparked the first wave of international outcry that demanded the unconditional release of all political prisoners. Consequently, in the early days of February 2021 the military coup organized by the Tatmadaw, which was meant to rapidly assume the power without meaningful opposition, completely backfired and had the effect to further shrink its base of support even before the beginning of the civil war.

In the meantime, soldiers were deployed in Naypyidaw and Yangon to quell any eventual opposition. The military coup ended with the securing control of the main cities of the country. Subsequently, the Tatmadaw announced on the military-controlled Myawaddy TV that it would have governed Myanmar for one year before organizing new

---

<sup>113</sup> Agence France Presse. "Myanmar military stages coup, Suu Kyi detained". 1/1/2021.  
<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/myanmars-military-stages-coup-detains-aung-san-suu-kyi-2360937>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

elections and handing power to a new civilian government<sup>115</sup>. The new Acting President Myint Swe formalized the effective transfer of power to the military junta, which formed a new governing body called the State Administration Council (SAC), by stating that the responsibility for the legislation, administration and judiciary had been transferred to Min Aung Hlaing.

The National Defense and Security Council, which was chaired by acting president Myint Swe and attended by top military officers, was convened, following a statement issued by the military. The statement declared that new elections would be held, and that the Tatmadaw would have held power for a year to guarantee the security. The Tatmadaw also announced the dissolving of the civilian cabinet composed by 24 ministers and deputies. In its place, a new military-appointed government of 11 replacements was named<sup>116</sup>.

Min Aung Hlaing established the State Administration Council the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, with 11 members, as the executive governing body. On the following day, Myanmar police filed criminal charges against Aung San Suu Kyi, who was accused of violating the Export and Import Law for allegedly importing unlicensed communications devices used by her security detail, after conducting a raid on her home in the capital<sup>117</sup>.

---

<sup>115</sup> BBC News. "Myanmar coup: Aung San Suu Kyi detained as military seizes control" 1/1/2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55882489>

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Frontier Myanmar, "Aung San Suu Kyi, Win Myint to face charges as NLD calls for 'unconditional' release". 3/2/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/aung-san-suu-kyi-win-myint-to-face-charges-as-nld-calls-for-unconditional-release/>



Figure 2: Peaceful protests of the population against the coup.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56150616>

## 2.4 Domestic reaction to the coup: overt opposition

The initial takeover, according to the plans of the Tatmadaw had to be quick and bloodless. The SAC hoped that the mass demonstrations against the military junta would have quickly run out of steam, as people would have been forced to return to work after the exhaustion of their reserves of food and cash. Hence, initially the order given by the SAC to security forces was to allow the first anti-junta demonstrations. Nevertheless, as aforementioned before, the junta greatly underestimated the willingness of the population to prevent a return to the past, and how quickly the message of anti-junta protesters (Figure 2) spread across the population, which has shown support for demonstrators and striking workers <sup>118</sup>.

However, unlike the 1962 and 1988 coups which saw the population apathetic and resigned, this display of force by the Tatmadaw triggered a widely participated and peaceful mass movement in favor of the democracy that the military junta would not have been able to quell in the following weeks<sup>119</sup>. The endurance of this mass movement against the junta would have favored the emergence of enduring tensions that would have

<sup>118</sup> The Irrawaddy. "Thousands Take to Streets of Myanmar to Protest Military Takeover". 6/2/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/thousands-take-to-streets-of-myanmar-to-protest-military-takeover.html>

<sup>119</sup> New York Times. "More Bloodshed in Myanmar as Crackdown on Coup Protests Continues". 11/04/2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/world/asia/myanmar-coup-protests.html>

led to the civil war in the following months which, after thousands of deaths on both sides and, whatever the final outcome, will have fundamentally changed Myanmar.

The first protests were launched by healthcare workers and civil servants through a national disobedience movement and adopted a “no recognition, no participation” stance towards the newly-established regime, with almost three-quarters among the one million civil servants serving the state joining the protests<sup>120</sup>. With regard to healthcare workers, staff from dozens of hospitals and medical institutes pledged to cease working and launched the “Civil Disobedience Movement”<sup>121</sup>.

The military coup d'état triggered massive public peaceful demonstrations across Myanmar as well as strikes by civil servants and by employees both from the public and the private sector (Figure 2). These peaceful protests quickly spread all over the country and paralyzed much of the country, severely affecting the basic functions of the government, from local administration to public hospitals, the functioning of the banking system, the use of ports, road and rail transport, among other facilities.

On 2 February 2021, healthcare workers and civil servants across the country, including in the national capital, Naypyidaw, launched a national civil disobedience movement in opposition to the coup d'état<sup>122</sup>. A Facebook campaign group dubbed the "Civil Disobedience Movement" has attracted more than 230,000 followers, since its initial launch on the same day. Min Ko Naing, an uprising leader, has urged the public to adopt a "no recognition, no participation" stance to the military regime. One expert on the government's civil service system estimated that the country had about one million civil servants and that about three-quarters of them had walked off their jobs.

The labor strikes have quickly spread to other sectors. Seven teacher organizations, including the 100,000-strong Myanmar Teachers' Federation, have pledged to join the labor strike. Staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formerly led by Aung San Suu Kyi, have also joined the strike. Healthcare workers from dozens of state-run

---

<sup>120</sup> Richard, Paddock. “We can bring down the regime: Myanmar’s protesting workers are unbowed”. New York Times. 15 February 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/15/world/asia/myanmar-workers-coup.html>

<sup>121</sup> Frontier Myanmar. “After coup, medical workers spearhead civil disobedience campaign”. 2 February 2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/after-coup-medical-workers-spearhead-civil-disobedience-campaign/>

<sup>122</sup> The Irrawaddy. “Myanmar Military Govt Bans Gatherings of Five or More in Yangon, Other Areas”. 9/2/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-military-govt-bans-gatherings-five-yangon-areas.html>

hospitals and institutions initiated a labor strike starting 3 February 2021, which extended to more than 110 hospitals and healthcare agencies all over the country, despite the intimidation threats received from superiors. In a matter of days, by 9 February, COVID vaccination had been suspended, the testing system of the country had collapsed and most hospitals in Myanmar had shut down.

In the following day, in Naypyidaw, civil servants employed at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation staged a protest. By 5 February 2021, the civil service strike included administrative, medical, and educational sector staff and students at "91 government hospitals, 18 universities and colleges and 12 government departments in 79 townships". Nan Nwe, a member of the psychology department at Yangon University stated, "As we teach students to question and understand justice, we can't accept this injustice. Our stand is not political. We only stand up for the justice."

In just three days, the opposition to the military junta, which would predictably be confined and limited to the NLD base support and urban middle and upper-middle class, became a truly national movement steadfast in the opposition to the restoration of full exercise of power by the Tatmadaw. Indeed, the strike organized by civil servants now included administrative, medical and educational sector staffs, students at 91 hospitals, 18 universities and colleges and 12 government departments in 79 townships<sup>123</sup>.

After 5 February, it was the turn of other sectors of the national economy. Seven teachers' organizations, students from universities and colleges and engineers working for military-linked companies such as Mytel pledged to join the labor strike that began three days ago<sup>124</sup>. On 8 February, news confirmed that journalists of state-owned newspapers Kyemon and Global New Light of Myanmar would have ceased publications to express their opposition to the coup, joining all the workers from Myanmar Railways and a good chunk of the employees of the banking sector.

Between 8 and 9 February, the continuous expansion of the base of support of anti-junta protests induced the State Administration Council to issue orders imposing the martial law until further notice. As a consequence, a curfew from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am was

---

<sup>123</sup> Htwe, Zaw Zaw, "Thousands Join Peaceful Protests Against Myanmar Military". The Irrawaddy. 5/2/2021.

<sup>124</sup> Justice for Myanmar. "Boycott and coup attempt cost Mytel USD\$24.9 million in three months". 5/11/2021. <https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/boycott-and-coup-attempt-cost-mytel-usd-24-9-million-in-three-months>



established in Yangon, later extended to several other major cities and severely restricted gatherings of five or more people in public spaces<sup>125</sup>.

## 2.5 Gradual escalation by the Tatmadaw

After the first two weeks of February, during which the SAC focused in consolidating its power and repress the civil disobedience movement, the military junta began to react. During the 15 February, the Tatmadaw took two important decisions which revealed its will to crush the protest movement and exert a total control over the country. Firstly, the Tatmadaw announced that it would have deployed armored vehicles across the cities, in an attempt to quell the demonstrations in the country through military repression. Secondly, Aung San Suu Kyi was given new criminal charges in violating the National Disaster Law to separate her from the anti-junta protesters. Thousands of protestors in different cities across Myanmar requested the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi<sup>126</sup>.

Furthermore, after taking power, the Tatmadaw began to prepare a controversial draft Cyber Security Law to internet service providers aiming at further enhancing governmental control over citizens by establishing a “digital surveillance” programme mimicking the Chinese “internet firewall”<sup>127</sup>. The law was widely criticized by IT communities as it violates human rights by putting citizens under digital surveillance and severely restricting freedom of speech. News of China's involvement in building the firewall were widely circulated among Myanmar social media users, which prompts protestors to demonstrate outside the Chinese Embassy. China denied the news as rumors.

The new Cybersecurity Law, which would have applied in the first half of 2022, has given extensive powers, including regulatory powers with regard to the freedom of expression and the power to impose sanctions, to bodies not independent of the Tatmadaw such as the Cyber Security Central Committee or its subordinate, the Cybersecurity

---

<sup>125</sup> The Irrawaddy. “Myanmar Military Govt Bans Gatherings of Five or More in Yangon, Other Areas”. 9/2/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-military-govt-bans-gatherings-five-yangon-areas.html>

<sup>126</sup> Tom, Embury-Dennis. “Myanmar coup: Armoured vehicles deployed to cities amid protests as junta extends Aung San Suu Kyi detention”. The Independent. 15/2/2021. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/myanmar-coup-aung-san-suu-kyi-detention-charges-b1802284.html>

<sup>127</sup> Bertil, Lintner. “China showing Myanmar junta how to firewall the internet”. Asia Times. 24/12/2021. <https://asiatimes.com/2021/12/china-showing-myanmar-how-to-firewall-the-internet/>

Central Committee. Secondly, the Cybersecurity Law has imposed broad and vague restrictions on the content that may be published online and significant restrictions on digital service providers<sup>128</sup>. Finally, many other criminal offences were created without appropriate requirements with the only purpose to extend beyond any measure the scope of the law and tighten the military control on digital telecommunications.

Even within parts of the Burmese society where the Tatmadaw kept considerable support, their reaction to the coup and the assessment of its usefulness was mild at best, if not overtly critical. Specifically, various Buddhist monasteries and educational institutions made critical statements of the coup denouncing it as contrary to Buddhist principles. Aside from the Buddhist sangha, local clergy and the Catholic Church have similarly voiced their opposition to the military takeover<sup>129</sup>. In the meantime, the Shwekyin Nikāya, which represents the second largest Buddhist order of Myanmar, criticized the response of the junta to the military coup and urged Min Aung Hlaing to cease all attacks on unarmed civilians and refrain to engage its soldiers in theft and property destruction. Other members of the Buddhist community have spoken in dissent of the coup and the ensuing violence.

In the following days, the State Administration Council resorted to violence to crack down on peaceful protests, mainly through the use by the Myanmar police of rubber bullets, water cannons, and tear gas to disperse protesters at mass rallies. Furthermore, on 12 February, the National League for Democracy was formally disbanded, after a raid of the Myanmar police on the headquarters of the party in Yangon which resulted in the arrest of ministers, election officials, activists and senior members of the party, thus depriving the opponents to the military junta of any political instrument.

Myanmar's military regime distributed a draft for the controversial Cyber Security Law to internet service providers, asking them to provide comments by 15 February 2021. On 17 February 2021, the military issued arrest warrants on six more celebrities for urging civil servants to join the civil disobedience movement. The protests against the military junta saw the adhesion of the Burmese living outside Myanmar, in particular within

---

<sup>128</sup> Access Now. "Analysis: the Myanmar junta's Cybersecurity Law would be a disaster for human rights." 27/1/2022. <https://www.accessnow.org/analysis-myanmar-cybersecurity-law/>

<sup>129</sup> Insight Myanmar. The Masoyein Response. 10/2/2021. <https://insightmyanmar.org/burmadhammablog/2021/2/10/the-masoyein-response>



Asia<sup>130</sup>. On the same day of the military coup, a spontaneous protest was organized by a group of Burmese expatriates and by hundreds of Thai pro-democracy activists in front of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok. To signal their adhesion to the anti-junta protests, some protesters reportedly gave the three-finger salute, which was used for the whole duration of popular protests calling for democracy in Thailand. The protest induced the police to repress the act, with two protestors injured and hospitalized, and two others arrested. On the same day, citizens in Tokyo gathered in front of the United Nations University to signal their opposition to the military takeover of Myanmar.

In the meantime, anti-junta protesters managed to spread their message through a savvy and effective use of social media instruments and personalities. Specifically, on 13 February 2021, an online post showing how the Ministry of Information (MOI) run by the Tatmadaw exerted pressures on the press to not using the words "junta" and "regime" in the media in one of the first evident attempt to restrict the freedom of press became viral across Burmese netizens.

Rapidly, the post became a symbol of the success of the anti-junta message, with Burmese celebrities and politicians such as the model, singer, and actor Paing Takhon or the television actor Daung publicly supporting the protesters and posing with the three-finger salute that became the reconnaissance symbol among anti-junta activists on social media<sup>131</sup>. Conversely, other celebrities and social media influencers, such as the musician Sai Kham Leng or the actress Nay Chi Oo, who did not support the opposition or did not immediately support the ongoing popular protests, lost sizeable online followings.

As aforementioned before, Burmese netizens present in social media adhered to the message of the opposition by further popularizing already trending hashtags like #SayNototheCoups, #RespectOurVotes, #HearTheVoiceofMyanmar, #SaveMyanmar, and #CivilDisobedience<sup>132</sup>. Within a day after the coup d'état, the #SaveMyanmar hashtag had been used by over 325,000 Facebook users. Social media users had also changed their profile pictures to black to show their sorrow or red in support of the NLD, often with a

---

<sup>130</sup> Sandi, Sidhu, and Helen, Regan. Burmese actress goes into hiding as celebrities opposing Myanmar coup added to arrest list. CNN World. 18/2/2021. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/18/asia/myanmar-protest-celebrities-arrest-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>131</sup> Coconuts Yangon. "Here is who is standing up against Myanmar's coup". 3/2/2021. <https://coconuts.co/yangon/news/heres-who-is-standing-up-against-myanmars-coup/>

<sup>132</sup> Penny, Potkin. "After Facebook ban, thousands in Myanmar take to Twitter to plead #RespectOurVotes". Reuters. 5/2/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-deports-first-group-myanmar-refugees-who-fled-2021-coup-2024-03-08/>

portrait of Suu Kyi. Burmese netizens have also ridiculed Min Aung Hlaing's short stature online, and some pro-democracy netizens have joined the Milk Tea Alliance, an online democratic solidarity movement in Asia.

Being aware of the threat that the diffusion of pro-opposition messages in social media would have become a mortal threat to the regime, the military junta issued an arrest warrant for seven well-known activists and influencers for "using their fame to spread writing and speaking on the social media that would disturb the nation's peace process"<sup>133</sup>. The military junta had already ordered internet providers and telecom operators to block Facebook for three years, given the role of the social network in favoring and facilitating the organization of the civil disobedience movement, its labor strikes.

From 25 February, the economy of Myanmar was further paralyzed by the adherence of truck drivers of Yangon to the anti-junta movement. According to data given by the Joint Secretary of the Myanmar Container Trucking Association, 90% of the truck drivers adhered to the protests. On 25<sup>th</sup> February, thousands of truck drivers protested against the coup and slowed the delivery of imports by refusing to transport goods from the docks at Yangon's four main ports and trapping cargo containers. Only the essential food and medicine for the population and fabrics for factories would have been delivered<sup>134</sup>.

With a growing adherence from the population to the anti-junta protests, the means used by SAC to quell them became increasingly brutal and violent. In particular, security forces began to intensify not only their use of means such as water cannons, tear gas, rubber bullets, and sound grenades, but also began to resort to using military weapons such as assault rifles, light machine guns, sniper rifles, and live grenades to keep order in the country. An example of this increasingly harsh approach was a raid by soldiers and police forces on a Mandalay shipyard the 20 February. In reaction to the convergence of

---

<sup>133</sup> Eleven Media Group Ltd., "The Tatmadaw announced that arrest warrants have been issued for Ko Min Ko Naing, Ko Jimmy, singer Lin Lin, Insein Aung Soe, Ko Myo Yan Naung Thein, Pan Se Lo, and Maung Maung Aye under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code", translated from Burmese. 13/2/2021. <https://news-eleven.com/article/204606>

<sup>134</sup> Ann, Koh and Khine, Lin, Kyaw. "Containers Pile Up at Myanmar Ports as Coup Protests Snarl Trade". Daily Maverick by Bloomberg. 25/2/2021. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-25-containers-pile-up-at-myanmar-ports-as-coup-protests-snarl-trade/>

demonstrators on the site to assist the striking workers, the security forces decided to open fire, killing two people and injuring at least a dozen<sup>135</sup>.

By mid-February there were reported the first civilian protests since the beginning of the protests were reported. On 8 March 2021, approximately two hundred protestors were besieged in Sanchaung, Yangon, as stun grenades and live ammunition were used by security forces, prompting calls from the United Nations and the British Embassy in Myanmar asking security forces to withdraw.

## 2.6 Spread of violence and total escalation

As the weeks passed, the hopes of finding a peaceful solution quickly faded in favor of a civil war between military deflagration between the SAC and the heterogeneous anti-junta coalition comprising the armed groups of ethnic minorities and the pro-NLD supporters. A further step was reached on the 27<sup>th</sup> March, the Armed Forces Day holiday. Dozens of people were killed by the army in the streets of Yangon. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, the Tatmadaw managed to kill 89 people, while the Myanmar Now website confirmed that 114 people were killed by security forces<sup>136</sup>. The March events marked the shift of the Myanmar crisis from a peaceful one to a violent one. Protesters have begun to resort to violence by openly targeting security personnel with slingshots, fireworks, and Molotov cocktails; nevertheless, the majority of the protesters were not engaging in violence.

Although anti-junta protests were organized in April and May, the systematic and constant repression of the demonstrations led the National Unity Government (NUG), which was an in-exile government and represented the civilian government overthrown by the coup, to favor the creation of the first People's Defense Force (PDFs). The PDFs are armed groups composed of common citizens and army defectors, which initially were not able to properly wage war against the State Administration Council (SAC). If the SAC did not manage to quickly win the civil war, this was mainly due to the mobilization of the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), which saw in the political chaos at the central

---

<sup>135</sup> Al Jazeera. "Myanmar police kill 2 in bloodiest day of anti-coup protests". 20/2/2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/20/two-myanmar-protesters-killed-by-police-fire-reports>

<sup>136</sup> Al Jazeera. "'Day of shame': Dozens of anti-coup protesters killed in Myanmar". 27/3/2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/27/myanmar-coup-leaders-put-on-show-of-force>

level the opportunity to get rid of the Tatmadaw. In the meantime, in September 2021, the NUG officially declared a "defensive war" against the State Administration Council<sup>137</sup>.

Furthermore, even before the beginning of the Myanmar civil war, some foreign powers began to turn their attention to the country. The first neighboring nation that began to act was China, which held considerable investments in the country since the 2010s.

The first Chinese reaction on the ground following the 2021 coup arrived on 14 March. In an industrial area of Yangon, protesters sabotaged over 30 factories, many of which were Chinese-owned or funded, after the repression of protests by security forces. Despite the uncertainty concerning the perpetrator of the attacks, these protesters were clearly aimed at the Chinese presence in the country, given the widespread perception that Beijing was supporting militarily and politically the SAC to guarantee its investments and its interests.

The Chinese state-owned media CTGN affirmed that “China won’t allow its interests to be exposed to further aggression. If the authorities cannot deliver and the chaos continues to spread, China might be forced into taking more drastic action to protect its interests”<sup>138</sup>. It is unclear what steps China would consider taking, given that it appears angry with the military for bringing about such instability but would also be unlikely to support an opposition that has adopted an anti-China stance.

The security forces were now acting with increasing brutality. Many of the protesters killed have been shot in the head, apparently by army marksmen or snipers. Individuals who attempt to render first aid, or pull victims out of the line of fire, have also been shot. Security forces have beaten and killed paramedics and other first responders wearing clearly identifiable red cross symbols. They have also shot at ambulances. In one incident caught on a security camera, police stopped an ambulance in Yangon on 3 March, smashed its windows, forced the paramedics out at gunpoint, and assaulted them repeatedly with rifle butts and kicks to the head; one later died of his injuries. Video footage has also shown security forces kicking, beating or dragging protesters along the street, and sometimes summarily executing people whom they had detained.

---

<sup>137</sup> Special Advisory Council for Myanmar. “Statement on Declaration of People’s Defensive War.” 8/9/2021. <https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SAC-M-PR-NUG-Declaration-ENGLISH.pdf>

<sup>138</sup> Elaine, Kurtenbach. Myanmar factory attacks put focus on Chinese influence. Associated Press. 19/3/2021. <https://apnews.com/article/beijing-china-martial-law-myanmar-df4e07d2903350b4fc119189deaac492>

In addition to cracking down on demonstrations and striking workers, the security forces have unleashed a campaign of random terror at night in residential areas of Yangon and other cities and towns. Typically, truckloads of soldiers and police will converge on a neighborhood after midnight, shouting threats, throwing sound grenades and indiscriminately firing rubber bullets and live rounds into residential buildings.

## Chapter 3

### The international reaction to the military coup

#### 3.1 Economic isolation from the rest of the world and halt of foreign investments in the country

Furthermore, the junta had to begin to face the effects of a diminution of its resources due to the success of a then-emerging “Stop Buying Junta Business” boycott campaign, who targeted businesses, products and services linked to the Tatmadaw such as the national telecom company Mytel, several coffee, beer and tea brands or bus lines. In addition, the military coup hindered the relatively favorable economic environment that emerged during the period of managed democracy through 2011<sup>139</sup>.

The Yangon Stock Exchange, which opened in December 2015 through a joint venture between the state-owned Myanma Economic Bank and the Japanese firms Daiwa Institute of Research and Japanese Exchange Group, halted its operations immediately after the coup. In the following days, Myanmar experienced an almost total halt of its commercial relations with the rest of the world and the abrupt end of the most relevant foreign investments that the country managed to attract. With the exception of the petroleum industry and the major companies that invested in Myanmar, specifically Total SE who reacted to the coup by affirming that it would have revisited its investment in the Yadana offshore gas field<sup>140</sup> and Chevron who lobbied against the Department of State against the imposition of sanctions, the ongoing investments projects were halted.

Examples of this brutal interruption of the economy includes the cease of the operations in the country of Suzuki Motors and other automakers, the halt of a \$1 billion industrial zone development project by the Thai industrial estate developer Amata<sup>141</sup>. Furthermore, other halted projects involved openly military-linked companies, in

---

<sup>139</sup> International Crisis Group, Briefing n.168/ Asia. “Taking Aim at the Tatmadaw: The New Armed Resistance to Myanmar’s Coup”. (2021).

<sup>140</sup> Reuters. “Total assessing impact of Myanmar coup on its projects”. 4 February 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/middle-east/total-assessing-impact-of-myanmar-coup-on-its-projects-idUSKBN2A4120/>

<sup>141</sup> Eti, Sugiura and Apornrath, Phoonphongphiphat. “Thailand’s Amata halts \$1bn Myanmar property project after coup”. Nikkei Asia. 2/2/2021. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Thailand-s-Amata-halts-1bn-Myanmar-property-project-after-coup>

particular Myanma Economic Holdings Company (MEHL)<sup>142</sup>, for example collaborations with the South Korean steelmaker POSCO which ended on April 2021 or the end of a \$127 million dollars investment by Adani Ports & SEZ finalized to build a new container terminal for the Yangon International Terminal, who selected the Indian port operator in May<sup>143</sup>.

After the mobilization of the Burmese society in the first days of February, the severe repression of the mass anti-junta protests by the Tatmadaw quickly favored the escalation of the violence. On 20 February 2021, two protesters were killed and at least two dozen more were injured in Mandalay by the police and military in a violent crackdown. These people were residents of Maha Aung Myay Township guarding government shipyard workers involved in the civil disobedience movement from the police, who forced them back to work. In addition to firing live rounds, the police and military personnel also threw rocks, arrested, and used water cannons on civilians, in addition to severely beating many. Despite the resonance that this incident had on the international community, the military junta warned protesters that they were willing to continue using such lethal force.

Despite these threats, huge crowds gathered on 22 February, with some protesters saying that the recent killings had made them more determined to continue protesting. The intensity of the interventions by authorities increased at the beginning of March, with reports of at least 18 fatalities on 28 February according to reports of Human Rights Groups, and an additional 38 on 3 March, with UN special envoy Christine Schraner Burgener describing the day "as the bloodiest since the coup happened". Warnings of possible further sanctions were reportedly met with indifference.

On 30 March 2021, numerous airstrikes against protesters in Kayin State were reported. On 9 April, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners and Myanmar Now reported that security forces had killed more than 80 protesters in Bago by firing rifle grenades at them.

---

<sup>142</sup> Ben, Doherty, and Ben, Butler. "Kirin beer company cuts brewery ties with Myanmar military over coup". The Guardian. 5/2/2021. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Thailand-s-Amata-halts-1bn-Myanmar-property-project-after-coup>

<sup>143</sup> Nikkei staff writers. "Myanmar FDI drops to 8-year low, reflecting post-takeover unrest". Nikkei Asia. 19/10/2021. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Myanmar-FDI-drops-to-8-year-low-reflecting-post-takeover-unrest>

### 3.2 Protests of Myanmar citizens outside the country

Other protests were organized by Myanmar expatriates in other Asian countries. Similarly to the protests which took place in Tokyo, Myanmar citizens decided to rally in front of the Myanmar embassy at Seoul to protest, organizing other rallies four times a week from 6 February until 1 March.

The Singapore Police Force (SPF) warned foreigners who planned to participate in anti-SAC protests in Singapore. On 14 February 2021, three foreigners were arrested by SPF forces for protesting in front of the Myanmar embassy without permission to participate in public assemblies. The Public Security Police Force of Macau has warned Myanmar residents that they are not allowed to conduct anti-coup protests because Article 27 of the Macao Basic Law only allows Macanese residents to protest.

At the beginning of February, more than 150 Burmese Americans protested in front of the Embassy of Myanmar in Washington, D.C. to express their opposition. A month later, on 6 March 2021, protesters in Tennessee gathered at the Tennessee State Capitol in Nashville and then, they held a march in order to encourage leaders in the U.S. and Tennessee to impose sanctions on the Burmese military. Protests were held in other cities with sizeable Burmese populations, such as on 27 February in the Dallas suburb of Lewisville.

In Australia, some Burmese Australians protested near the Parliament House in Perth to seek justice and urge the Australian government to support the anti-junta protesters in Myanmar. One week later, protesters in Sydney gathered in solidarity with protesters in Myanmar.

Around the end of February, Myanmar has experienced a symbolic loss of international recognition at the UN. On 26 February 2021, the Myanmar ambassador to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun was sacked from his post for having explicitly condemned the military coup by the Tatmadaw. In the meantime, the ambassador serving to the United Nations and eleven other diplomats stationing in the US, Switzerland, Canada, France, Germany, Israel and Japan decided to seek temporary protected status as a consequence of their refusal to return to Myanmar.

Thus, in the month of February the newly-established military junta has managed to repress the widespread protests through a ruthless repression, which was ultimately



conducive to the progressive radicalization of the ant-junta movement. That process took place between March and May 2021 and it was favored by the decisions of some EAOs (ethnic armed organizations) to not recognize the State Administration Council and ending their ceasefire deals with the central government.

### 3.3 Worsening relations with the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs)

As aforementioned before, one of the lasting consequences of the military coup was the dramatic deterioration of the fragile relationships between the ethnic armed groups and the new central government, preventing to reach a definitive solution of the ethnic insurgencies. Specifically, before the 2021 military coup, there were present 24 EAOs, in addition to numerous smaller armed militias who were mostly aligned with the Tatmadaw. Nevertheless, after decades of fighting wars against the central government since 1948, in the 2010s most of the EAOs ceased their hostilities. The EAOs either become part of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) framework established in 2015, thus participating in political talks with the government, or managed to negotiate bilateral ceasefires with the Tatmadaw. Throughout the presidency of Thein Sein, hostilities with the EAOs were limited to a few border regions, notably northern Shan, Kachin and Rakhine States. Only three armed groups were still fighting Myanmar: the Arakan Army, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army. Nevertheless, despite the relative quiet that emerged after the establishment of the NCA framework, in the following years the seeds for the resumption of hostilities were planted. The prospect of a general peace settlement that would have represented the full restauration of the central government was always considered a long shot and there was not enough political momentum to advance toward it. The NCA was signed by only ten EAOs, and negotiations with signatories in advancing towards a Union Peace Accord aimed at laying the conditions for the affirmation of a federal political system were at a dead end. Thus, the peace process gradually lost strength and, after several years of inaction in the second half of 2010s, it collapsed even before the overthrowing of Suu Kyi.

Furthermore, since the military coup the relations between the central government and some ethnic armed organizations began to deteriorate (EAOs). The first ethnic minority to oppose the 2021 military coup was the Shan ethnic group. Through the Committee for Shan Unity, who comprised Shan armed groups and political parties, the Shan ethnic minority openly opposed the coup, endorsed the peaceful protests of the population and demanded the restauration of the civilian government. For the military junta, the opposition of the Committee of the Shan Unity would have become the prelude to the gradual separation between the central government and the majority of the EAOs,



which would have become active again between March and May 2021 and fight the State Administration Council. Despite the EAOs did not explicitly form a military alliance with the NUG, the government-in-exile of the NLD, with the People's Defense Forces (PDF) as its military wing, in that moment it began to emerge a collaboration with the PDF with the aim to definitively defeat the Tatmadaw and the vision of centralized, authoritarian State that the army guarantees and represents.

Ethnic armed groups have been forced to make difficult

Figure 3: Map of the Myanmar civil war as of June 2024. <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2024/07/26/myanmars-rapidly-changing-civil-war-in-maps-and-charts>

strategic decisions, sometimes under strong pressure from their grassroots supporters to escalate the fight with the military.

Some have played a key role in training and supplying newly formed militias, or even fought the Tatmadaw alongside them. Ethnic armed groups also tend to have close ties to new militias formed in ethnic minority areas, particularly in and on the periphery of Chin, Kayah, Karen and Kachin States. The key questions that all ethnic armed groups are facing in this new environment are whether and to what extent to work with either the opposition, particularly the NUG, or the regime in Naypyitaw, and to what end.

### 3.3.1 Karen National Union and Karen National Liberation Organization: a renewed hostility

Since March, both the Karen National Union (KNU) and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and their respective armed wings – the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) – have adopted a much more aggressive posture toward the Tatmadaw after several years of relative calm.

Among the largest ethnic armed groups in the country, both have offered sanctuary to lawmakers, protesters, striking workers and others fleeing military abuses, while their fighters have seized Tatmadaw bases and staged deadly ambushes. They have also trained fighters for both urban underground groups and PDFs, and used the latter to expand their operations into new areas of the country<sup>144</sup>.

Nevertheless, they have also sought to avoid a return to all-out conflict, limiting fighting to particular theatres. Several factors explain their response. In the wake of the coup, public opinion in their areas of influence, as in most of the country, has been overwhelmingly against the military regime<sup>145</sup>.

Both groups have a strong culture of listening to the views of civil society, religious leaders and grassroots supporters, as they perceive their role to be protecting the population from military oppression. When peaceful protests were violently suppressed in Kayah and Kachin States, and momentum began to build for armed struggle, the Karen

---

<sup>144</sup> International Crisis Group. Report n.319 Asia. “Myanmar’s Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts”. (2022).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

National Union (KNU) and the Karen Independence Organization (KIO) were compelled to act; otherwise, their credibility would have been damaged<sup>146</sup>.

Conversely, both the KNU and the KIO exploited the deluge of popular anger to keep their pre-eminence in the Karen State, primarily by ensuring that newly formed militias were under their full control. At the same time, the coup revealed preexisting divisions among the two groups, particularly within the KNU<sup>147</sup>. Some senior officials supported a conciliatory approach towards the SAC and highlighted that any eventual dispute with the regime would have been treated through the National Ceasefire Agreement framework established in 2015 and warned of the dangers posed by a renewed conflict with the central government would have suffered the civilians.

On the other hand, others officials, such as former KNU vice chair Naw Zipporah Sein and the leadership of powerful 5th Brigade, stated that the National Ceasefire Agreement was no longer in force. Subsequently, these officials supported the establishment of a cooperation of the different EAOs with the National Unity Government and the People's Defense Forces against the Tatmadaw. This dispute pursued until December 2021, when, after the KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army) fought heavy clashes with the Tatmadaw in the Kayin State, saw the prevalence of the anti-SAC KNU faction<sup>148</sup>.

The coup has killed off any remaining hope of peace talks moving ahead. Although the regime and the signatories still sometimes refer to the NCA in public statements, its main selling point was the possibility, however slim, of an accord that could quell the many insurgencies of the country. The Tatmadaw never seemed likely to make the political concessions needed to get ethnic armed groups on board.

The KIO, however, has not engaged in significant fighting with the Tatmadaw since 2018. Meanwhile, fighting between the Tatmadaw and Karen National Union's 5th Brigade had been increasing since December 2020, but few clashes had been reported with the group's other brigades<sup>149</sup>.

Its priority was always to disarm and demobilize these groups. Just weeks after the coup, ethnic armed group signatories suspended political negotiations with the

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

regime, and some soon launched attacks on Tatmadaw forces. There is little chance of negotiations resuming; most signatories are on a war footing, and even those inclined to talk with the junta are under pressure from their constituencies to avoid engaging with the deeply unpopular regime<sup>150</sup>.

The coup and subsequent violent crackdown on peaceful protests has transformed the conflict landscape in other ways. It has led to the creation of new armed groups, mostly in lowland majority-Burman areas of the country that have seen little conflict for decades, and rekindled previously dormant conflicts. The new forces range from spontaneously organized rural militias that ambush soldiers to urban underground networks that target junta officials and offices. Although they tend to operate independently from one another, nearly all these forces are anti-regime<sup>151</sup>.

Since May 2021, when the National Unity Government (NUG) established its People's Defense Force (PDF), many have rebranded themselves as PDF units to underscore their allegiance to the NUG government, though in practice the NUG has almost no control over them and provides little in the way of resources<sup>152</sup>.

### 3.3.2 CNF and KNPP: A Return to War

For at least two ethnic armed groups, the coup has brought about an even more dramatic shift, marking a return to open conflict. The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)/Karenni Army, based in Kayah State, and the smaller Chin National Front (CNF)/Chin National Army, based in northern Chin State, have in recent years been marginal players in Myanmar's civil strife. Both signed bilateral ceasefires with Naypyitaw in 2012 and neither has many troops under arms<sup>153</sup>.

Prior to the coup, there had been very few clashes in either state for at least a decade. But minority groups in both states still had longstanding and unresolved grievances against the majority Burmans, particularly the military. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, Kayah and Chin experienced groundswells of anti-regime protest.

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

As was the case elsewhere, demonstrations quickly morphed into improvised armed uprisings in response to the Tatmadaw's brutal crackdowns<sup>154</sup>. But in the absence of a powerful local armed group, the newly formed militias were soon taking the fight directly to the military. Had the CNF and KNPP failed to work with the new militias, they would have lost legitimacy and possibly been eclipsed. Unlike the Kachin and Karen armed groups, they have had to treat the new resistance forces as more partners than subordinates. In addition to these calculations, another important factor in their decision to return to war was that both groups have a strong tradition of listening and responding to communal sentiment.

In Kayah State, the revived Karenni Army has fought regime forces alongside the various township-based militias on many occasions. Following heavy clashes in June 2021, many of these militias were reorganized into the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force, but the Karenni Army remains separate, as do some PDFs loyal to the NUG. While the Karenni Army takes the lead on military matters, the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force is free to manage its own administrative affairs, such as fundraising and recruitment.<sup>18</sup> In practice, the line between the two entities is blurry, as illustrated by the military's attempt to negotiate a ceasefire in June<sup>155</sup>.

In Chin State, the smaller Chin National Front (CNF) has played a more marginal role. It has helped to train fighters of various militias associated with the newly created Chinland Defense Force at its base in Thantlang, and has provided them with some weapons, though not as many as militia leaders had hoped. Aside from the CNF's lack of resources, cooperation between the historical and new Chin armed forces has been limited by the region's rugged terrain and its ethnic diversity; the CNF has only taken part in fighting in the north of the state, together with members of the local Chinland Defense Force who are from the same Chin sub-group. Elsewhere, the new defense force has acted on its own.<sup>156</sup>

Despite the lack of practical support, the Chinland Defense Force is among the more effective resistance forces formed in the coup's wake. Although its fighters tend to lack modern weaponry, they have taken advantage of their intimate knowledge of the mountains to stage deadly ambushes of Tatmadaw convoys, particularly in the southern

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

township of Mindat. When the Tatmadaw has gone on the offensive, however, the Chin rebels have been unable to hold their ground due to lack of firepower: after being attacked with helicopter gunships in May 2021, fighters were forced to abandon Mindat and retreat to the surrounding hills, from where they have continued to harass regime forces.

### 3.3.3 Arakan Army: Between peace and war

In November 2020, the Tatmadaw and Arakan Army – an ethnic Rakhine armed group active in Rakhine State – unexpectedly reached a de facto ceasefire after almost two years of sustained fighting that had cost thousands of lives. Following a flurry of meetings between the group and the military at the end of 2020, there have been no serious peace talks since the coup and the truce remains an informal arrangement.

Nevertheless, the Tatmadaw, facing conflict on many other fronts, has been largely content to leave the Arakan Army alone. The military has even been willing to make concessions to the group, such as lifting the internet shutdown, freeing relatives of its leader Twan Mrat Naing and others accused of links to the organization, and offering it COVID-19 vaccine doses to distribute in the state<sup>157</sup>.

The Arakan Army has said little about the coup and resisted the NUG's entreaties to join its armed struggle against the junta. Twan Mrat Naing has even said he does not want street protests like those in Yangon and other cities to emerge in Rakhine State, arguing that such a movement would disrupt progress toward the Arakan Army's "political goals". As resistance elsewhere in the country has increased, this positioning has generated some disquiet in Rakhine State, but the group has largely been able to manage the criticism. The Arakan Army has made the most of this period of relative calm, recovering from the brutal fighting of the past two years and preparing its forces for future clashes. Perhaps more significantly, it has used the downtime to consolidate its hold on a large swathe of Rakhine State and Paletwa in southern Chin State<sup>158</sup>.

After dismantling the lower rungs of the government bureaucratic apparatus, in the two years leading up to the coup, the group is now rolling out its own administrative structures. It has also launched a dispute resolution mechanism is providing some public

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

services. When COVID-19 broke out in Rakhine State in June 2021, it issued stay-at-home orders and later claimed that most people had complied. As the Arakan Army's forays into governance became more visible, the Tatmadaw issued warnings to the population not to engage with these new administrative and judicial structures.

It is unclear how long the truce on this front will last. On 9 November 2021, fighting erupted between the Arakan Army and Tatmadaw in northern Maungdaw Township, close to the border with Bangladesh<sup>159</sup>. The regime has played down these incidents, even claiming that one clash was with another group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. Japan's peace envoy to Myanmar, Yohei Sasakawa, who helped broker the November 2020 break in hostilities, flew to the country to help ease the tensions, and no further clashes have been reported. But the Tatmadaw can only let the Arakan Army's state-building continue unchecked for so long, because the last thing it wants is another armed group along Myanmar's borders achieving *de facto* autonomy – something that would be hard to reverse.

### 3.3.4 Relative Peace on the Northern Shan Front

Northern Shan State has witnessed some of Myanmar's heaviest fighting over the past decade, but in contrast to most of the country the region has been stable since the coup. The country's largest ethnic armed group, the powerful United Wa State Army, as well as its close neighbor, the National Democratic Alliance Army have remained largely aloof, as they enjoy full autonomy, are geographically distant from the political crisis and disengaged from Myanmar politics. Although they have not formally taken sides, their non-participation assists the Tatmadaw by enabling it to concentrate troops in other areas.

The response of other armed groups based in Shan State, particularly the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), has been more ambiguous. The RCSS, together with other NCA signatories, condemned the coup within a day of the military seizing power, and demanded the "immediate and unconditional release of all leaders who are detained and arrested".<sup>160</sup> But neither the RCSS nor the SSPP has shown much interest in dialogue or

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.



cooperation with the NUG, with the former ensuring that no PDFs form within its territory.

The TNLA, on the other hand, was engaged to some extent with the NUG and staged occasional attacks on the Tatmadaw, including one around Lashio in April 2021 that was likely a direct response to the military crackdown on protesters from the Ta'ang ethnic minority. Its involvement with the broader resistance, though, has been quite limited. Instead, the three groups have ramped up a bitter fight among themselves for control of central and northern Shan State that erupted in late 2015, after the RCSS began to push northward<sup>161</sup>.

In June and July, the SSPP and TNLA mobilized large numbers of fighters and artillery against the RCSS in Kyethi Township, managing to force the group to withdraw from positions it first occupied in 2017. Regular clashes have also been reported farther to the north. Both sides have issued statements blaming the other for the violence, and it is quite clear their focus is presently on each other, rather than on the junta or the NUG.

Conversely, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), an ethnic Kokang armed group active in Shan State, has sought to make the most of the situation by taking on the military. Well aware that the Tatmadaw is stretched thin, the group has launched an offensive on army positions around the town of Mong Ko, on the China border, with clashes reported almost daily in recent months<sup>162</sup>.

This fighting has been among the heaviest seen anywhere in Myanmar since the coup, with both sides deploying heavy artillery and the military committing large numbers of soldiers. But the MNDAA has not engaged with the NUG or expressed much opposition to the coup, and instead seems to be taking advantage of the present environment to win back territory to which it stakes a historical claim.

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

### 3.4 Reaction of the international community to the 2021 military coup

#### 3.4.1 Chinese policy in Myanmar

The unfolding of the 2021 military coup has sparked a considerable reaction within the international community. Specifically, the actors most involved in the crisis are essentially three. The first key player was China, which represented both the main economic, military and political ally of Myanmar SAC and an ally of some of the most influent EAOs<sup>163</sup>. The main objective of Beijing in Myanmar consist in obtaining the access to the Indian Ocean, which would be guaranteed by the existence of an allied and stable government, which would be conducive to the protection of Chinese investments and favor an ever-growing Chinese influence over the country.

In particular, Beijing prioritizes the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), allow the oil and gas transfer through pipelines across Myanmar, thus easing its heavy concern on the Malacca Straits. The eventual completion of the CMEC corridor would have relevant consequences. Firstly, the completion of the CMEC allows China to gain access to the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. Specifically, China wants to gain control over the port of Kyauk Phyu, located on Myanmar's west coast, to resolve the "Malacca Dilemma" and modify the equilibrium of forces in favor of the Chinese Navy. The eventual opening of the Kyauk Phyu port would diminish the dependence of the Chinese economy on the Malacca Strait, where four-fifths of China's imports of oil and gas<sup>164</sup>. Secondly, the completion of the CMEC would allow China to attain the transfer of manufacturing sites from the coasts in the East to its southwestern provinces and an enviable position in international trade, given that Beijing would have at its disposal both shorter roads to South, East and West Asia in addition to Europe and the possibility to find purveyors of raw materials in Myanmar and beyond<sup>165</sup>. In addition, other priorities of Chinese policy in Myanmar regard the securitization of the Sino-Burmese border, realized through the support to relevant EAOs

---

<sup>163</sup> Antonio, Graceffo. "Myanmar War: China's Support for Ethnic Armed Groups". *Special Eurasia*, Geopolitical Report ISSN 2785-2598 Volume 44 Issue 2. (2024).

<sup>164</sup> John, Nielsen. "Myanmar-China's West Coast Dream: Understanding Beijing's interests in Myanmar". *DIIS Policy Brief, Danish Institute for International Studies*. (2022): pp.1-4.

<sup>165</sup> , Timothy, Millar. "The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, 2 Years After the Coup". *The Diplomat*, 1/2/2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/02/the-china-myanmar-economic-corridor-2-years-after-the-coup/>

such as the United Wa State Army, and the necessity to prevent any Western interference in the country. China considers Myanmar as a part of its neighborhood, and, after the shock that followed Myanmar's openings to the West since 2011, Beijing became involved in Myanmar's peace process through the appointment of a Special envoy who tried to foster talks between the EAOs and the Myanmar government<sup>166</sup>. With the appointment of the NLD-led government in 2016 and the massacre of the Rohingya in 2017, China reasserted itself as the privileged partner and ally of Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi favored the Chinese investments within the BRI framework. It is not surprising that China was rather displeased with the outcome of the military coup of 2021. Until November 2024, China has pursued its policy of "dual approach" consisting of keeping ties with both the SAC and with Chinese-aligned EAOs to secure its infrastructural projects<sup>167</sup>.

Finally, China wants to keep its status of indispensable actor, whatever the outcome of the civil war would be. With regard to the military coup, China has not even considered the events of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 a proper coup, considering them as a "domestic reshuffle" and highlighting the necessity to pursue dialogue and reconciliation between the SAC and the protesters<sup>168</sup>.

### 3.4.2 Indian policy in Myanmar

The second key player involved in the Myanmar crisis is India, which share with Myanmar a land border of over 1,600 km and keeps deep historical and cultural ties.

India considers essential the political stability of Myanmar and follows a realist policy with the aim to avoid sources of instability at its borders. This policy is finalized to obtain political stability in Myanmar and of the prevention of being encircled by China. Precisely to avoid being surrounded by hostile states, India has nurtured ties with the SAC without publicly endorsing Min Aung Hlaing. This policy of covert engagement with the junta was confirmed by a report of the NGOs India for Myanmar and Justice for

---

<sup>166</sup> John, Nielsen. "Myanmar-China's West Coast Dream: Understanding Beijing's interests in Myanmar". *DIIS Policy Brief, Danish Institute for International Studies*. (2022): pp.1-4.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Chinese Embassy to Myanmar. "Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar H.E.Mr. Chen Hai gives interview to Myanmar Media on the current situation in Myanmar". *Global Times*. 15/2/2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215672.shtml>

Myanmar. The report stated that India provided weapons to the junta at least four times since February 2021<sup>169</sup>. New Delhi fears that the Tatmadaw could rely completely on Beijing to survive in face of the growing military might of the anti-junta alliance between the EAOs and the NUG.

Other important objectives of the Myanmar policy of New Delhi include the strict control of migration fluxes and insurgents and the improvement of connectivity with South-East through the realization of projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway project and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project as part of the “Act East” policy<sup>170</sup>, finalized at increasing the engagement of New Delhi in South-East Asia. With regard to the former, India initially applied a visa-free policy and hosted Myanmar refugees from the bordering Chin state, in north-east Myanmar.

As of 2023, almost 80,000 Myanmar refugees arrived to the north-eastern Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram. Nevertheless, combats in the Chin State contributed to the emergence of deep ethnic tensions in the state of Manipur between the Meitei and the Nagas and Kukis tribes. The Meitei community is Hindu and live in the valleys of the state capital Imphal, while Nagas and Kukis tribes are predominantly Christian and live in the surrounding hills<sup>171</sup>. Since May 2023, relations between tribes become tense to the point that New Delhi was forced to deploy troops to avoid anarchy in Manipur, with 260 deaths and over 60,000 people displaced<sup>172</sup>. As a consequence, India began deportations of Myanmar refugees who entered illegally between 2021 and 2023<sup>173</sup>.

Anyways, after over three of years of protracted conflict, it seems that the cautious Indian policy of quiet engagement did not work. China managed to increase its economic influence in the previous two years through the launch of new infrastructural projects in

---

<sup>169</sup> RFA Burmese. India is keeping close ties with Myanmar, even transferring weapons, NGOs say. 22/2/2023. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/india-burma-02222023180530.html>

<sup>170</sup> Saket, Ambarkhane, and Sanjay, Valentine, Gathia. US Institute of Peace. Over a Year Later, Myanmar’s Military Coup Threatens India’s National Security. (10 May 2022).

<sup>171</sup> Amrit, Dhillon. Indian troops ordered to ‘shoot on sight’ amid violence in Manipur. The Guardian. 5/5/2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/05/indian-troops-ordered-to-shoot-on-sight-amid-violence-in-manipur>

<sup>172</sup> Patel, Shivam, Fighters from Myanmar civil war aggravate bitter ethnic conflict in India. Asia One, originally published by Reuters. 20/12/2024. <https://www.asiaone.com/asia/fighters-myanmar-civil-war-aggravate-bitter-ethnic-conflict-india>

<sup>173</sup> Tora, Agarwala. India begins deporting first group of Myanmar refugees who fled 2021 coup. Reuters. 9/3/2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-deports-first-group-myanmar-refugees-who-fled-2021-coup-2024-03-08/>

2023<sup>174</sup>, while on the military side Beijing was reportedly building new intelligence facilities in the Great Coco islands in the northeastern Bay of Bengal.<sup>175</sup>

### 3.4.3 Thai policy in Myanmar

The third relevant player is Thailand, which holds a distinct policy from both India and China. Similarly to New Delhi, the main concerns of Thai policy in Myanmar regards political stability, national security and control of irregular migration. Nevertheless, Bangkok is both at the forefront of the efforts of the ASEAN to find an issue to the Myanmar civil war while pursuing its national interests<sup>176</sup>; hence, it is not surprising that Bangkok has kept a very cautious Myanmar policy since the 2021 military coup. Thailand has stated that it “continues to follow the developments in Myanmar with much concern” and it adheres to the position of Brunei, which calls for the “de-escalation of the situation and release of the detainees<sup>177</sup>”.

Similarly to China, Thailand has built relevant ties both with the SAC and both with some of the EAOs. Specifically, Thailand is an important provider of financial resources, one of the few foreign investors still present in the country after the coup and a relevant ally for Myanmar in the international fora<sup>178</sup>. For example, Thailand continued to invest in Myanmar’s oil and gas, thus providing critical financial resources for the survival of the regime. At the same time, Thailand managed to become a safe harbor to political opponents of the SAC and to people fleeing mandatory conscription and allowed many Myanmar citizens to transfer their assets, investing them in real estate to preserve their value. In addition, Thailand exerts an important influence over some EAOs, such as the Karen National Union and the New Mon State Party, which depend on Bangkok with

---

<sup>174</sup> RFA Burmese. “As China expands investment in Myanmar, experts warn of public backlash”. 4/7/2023. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/investments-04072023151527.html>

<sup>175</sup> John, Pollock and Damien, Symon. “Is Myanmar building a spy base on Great Coco Island?” Chatham House. 13/6/2023. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2023-04/myanmar-building-spy-base-great-coco-island>

<sup>176</sup> Paul, Chambers and Kridsana, Chotisut. “Neighbour to Civil War: Thailand’s Relations with Myanmar in 2024” Fulcrum. 8/7/2024. <https://fulcrum.sg/neighbour-to-civil-war-thailands-relations-with-myanmar-in-2024/>

<sup>177</sup> Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Statement on the situation in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar”. 11/3/2021. <https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/thailandstatementonmyanmar11mar2021-2?cate=5d5becb4e15e39c306000683c>

<sup>178</sup> Htet, Win, Hlaing. “A hidden key player? Thailand’s role in the Myanmar crisis”. CEIAS. (2024).

regard to arms, food, medicine and other supplies<sup>179</sup>. Furthermore, Bangkok managed to benefit from its status of neutrality by hosting three informal talks with representatives of the SAC, other non-democratic ASEAN states, and other international players such as Japan, India and China<sup>180</sup>.

In conclusion, the geographical proximity of Thailand to Myanmar has allowed Bangkok to become a relevant actor in the crisis. An eventual settlement of the Chinese intelligence on the Coco Islands would have great implications for the Indian strategic interests. Firstly, the Eastern Fleet of the Indian Navy located in the Andaman and Nicobar Island could be kept under watch and monitored by Tatmadaw and Beijing. Secondly, Chinese commercial shipping could bypass the Strait of Malacca, nullifying India's advantage in favor of Beijing.

#### 3.4.4 Western policy: the EU and the US

Other two player reacted to the 2021 coup d'état, nevertheless they do not represent actors as relevant as China, India or, in a lesser extent, Thailand. These actors are the West, comprising both the US and the EU, and the ASEAN. With regard to the former, both the EU<sup>181</sup> and the US<sup>182</sup> strongly condemned the military coup in 2021 and demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners<sup>183</sup>. In particular the US, after the overthrowing of the civilian government, authorized new sanctions against the SAC<sup>184</sup>.

Specifically, sanctions were issued pursuant to the Executive Order 14014 (EO) and the United States targeted all the persons who are either an official of the Government of Burma on or after the 2 February 2021, have operated in the defense sector, are involved in certain specific actions or policies who contributed to the current situation in

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Sydney, Tucker. "Myanmar Reveals ASEAN's Weak Spot Again". Stimson Center. (2023).

<sup>181</sup> General Secretariat of the Council. "Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma". 22/2/2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/22/myanmar-burma-council-adopts-conclusions/>

<sup>182</sup> White House Press Room. "Remarks by President Biden on the Administration's Response to the Coup in Burma". 10/2/2021. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-administrations-response-to-the-coup-in-burma/>

<sup>183</sup> Avvenire. "Colpo di Stato in Myanmar, San Suu Kyi arrestata. Appello dei vescovi alla pace". 1/1/2021. <https://www.avvenire.it/mondo/pagine/colpo-di-stato-in-myanmar-aung-san-suu-kyi-arrestata>

<sup>184</sup> Office of Foreign Asset Control. "Executive Order 14014 of February 10, 2021, Blocking Property With Respect to the Situation in Burma". 10/2/2021. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/12/2021-03139/blocking-property-with-respect-to-the-situation-in-burma>

Myanmar or have materially assisted, sponsored, provided financial material, technological support for, goods or services to in support of a blocked party<sup>185</sup>. These sanctions were conceived with the aim to target the Tatmadaw leadership and its business interests and consisted in the freezing of assets of Myanmar government held in the US and restrictions on sensitive goods.

Although the US kept a distant profile, Washington considered the military coup in 2021 and the following deflagration of anti-junta protests into a civil war as an opportunity to serve its interest in case of a democratic restoration. The most important consist in the awareness of the huge geostrategic importance of Myanmar within the Indo-Pacific, given that Naypyidaw bridges both South and Southeast Asia and all revisionist players (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea) and, in particular, is vital for all Chinese efforts to solve the “Malacca dilemma” and bypass the Straits of Malacca.

A weakened and dependent Tatmadaw would have become extremely dependent towards Beijing, while a democratic Myanmar would likely be less susceptible to Chinese influence<sup>186</sup>. A second important US policy target regards the consolidation of ASEAN as a relevant regional actor and ally in the Indo-Pacific. As aforementioned before, the Myanmar crisis unveiled evident divisions within ASEAN. The overthrowing of the SAC would have removed a dividing issue and would be conducive to a third US interest, a concrete demonstration of the strength of democracies and democratic movements against authoritarian regimes and of the validity of the value-based foreign policy of the Biden administration<sup>187</sup>.

With regard to the EU, in March the European Council adopted a first round of sanctions against Myanmar consisting of restrictive measures such as travel bans and an asset freeze towards eleven people responsible for the coup. The list includes against the highest ranks of the Tatmadaw, including the Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Soe Win, and the chairperson of the Union Election Commission Thein Soe<sup>188</sup>. The escalating violence led the EU to adopt another round of

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Lucas, Myers. US Policy on Myanmar for 2024 and beyond, Wilson Center. (2024).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Press release of the European Council. “Myanmar/Burma: EU sanctions 11 people over the recent military coup and ensuing repression”. 22/3/2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/myanmar-burma-eu-sanctions-11-people-over-the-recent-military-coup-and-ensuing-repression/>

sanctions, who extended the range of the sanctions to the companies controlled by the Tatmadaw<sup>189</sup> (the Myanmar Economic Holdings Public Company Limited, or MEHL, and the Myanmar Economic Corporation Limited, or MEC) and other ten individuals. In June, the EU further extended the scope of the sanctions by adopting a third round of restrictive measures, adding eight individuals and three economic entities and the ministers and deputy ministers<sup>190</sup>.

### 3.4.5 Other ASEAN members' policy

Another player which, at the opposite of the other aforementioned three actors, did not manage to stay relevant after February 2021 was the Association of South-East Asia Nations (ASEAN), except Thailand. It is noteworthy to remind that ASEAN includes democratic and authoritarian countries following different foreign policies. This initial division limits considerably the strength and the influence of its decisions. The Myanmar crisis has repeatedly shown the divisions of the ASEAN member states and the different aims that guide their policies in Myanmar.

Nevertheless, with regard to the reaction to the 2021 military coup, in April 2021 ASEAN MS managed to reach a unified position through the elaboration of a “Five-Point Consensus” (5PC) Programme during a leaders’ meeting which took place at Jakarta in April 2021<sup>191</sup>. Given the divisions among the ASEAN Member States, the 5PC Programme issued by ASEAN leaders during the Jakarta meeting was purposefully generic and recalls, as Robert Matheus Michael Tene mentioned, general objectives. These objectives include the immediate cessation of violence, a dialogue process under the aegis of ASEAN to seek a peaceful solution, the appointment by ASEAN of a Special

---

<sup>189</sup> Press Council of the European Council. “Myanmar/Burma: EU imposes sanctions on 10 individuals and two military-controlled companies over the February military coup and subsequent repression”. 19/4/2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/myanmar-burma-eu-imposes-sanctions-on-10-individuals-and-two-military-controlled-companies-over-the-february-military-coup-and-subsequent-repression/>

<sup>190</sup> Press Council of the European Council. “Myanmar/Burma: third round of EU sanctions over the military coup and subsequent repression”. 21/6/2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/21/myanmar-burma-third-round-of-eu-sanctions-over-the-military-coup-and-subsequent-repression/>

<sup>191</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Republic of Indonesia. “Chairman’s Statement on the ASEAN Leaders’ Meeting”. 24/4/2021. <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-on-the-asean-leaders-meeting-24-april-2021-and-five-point-consensus-2/>



Envoy to facilitate a political mediation, the provisioning of humanitarian assistance, and the organization of a visit of the Special Envoy in Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned<sup>192</sup>.

Despite the adoption of the 5PC Programme, the ASEAN did not manage to achieve any meaningful result to found a peaceful solution to the conflict in Myanmar<sup>193</sup>, leading to the failure of the proposed solution, thus clearing the way for the progressive marginalization of the organization in the resolution of the crisis. Furthermore, the Myanmar crisis has severely undermined the importance of the founding principle of the organization: the principle of non-interference.

Specifically, evident differences emerged both among the various ASEAN members with regard to their positioning on Myanmar and to the role that ASEAN should play in the crisis. With regard to the former division, ASEAN member states gradually became divided on two blocks. On one side, all the states located in the Indochinese peninsula (Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) adopted a very cautious stance and favored a policy of pursuing engagement with the SAC.

On the other side, Malaysia and Indonesia adopted a more hostile stance by pushing for the expulsion of Myanmar. The two countries were concerned by the chaos following the coup, while their Myanmar policy was influenced by the brutal repression of the Rohingya people by the Myanmar government<sup>194</sup>. Later, Indonesia and Malaysia were joined by Singapore, which holds relevant ties with Myanmar, Brunei and Philippines.

These divisions already emerged relatively early in June 2021, after a vote of the UN General Assembly of a resolution to condemn the coup and demand the release of political prisoners, with the ASEAN bloc fractured in half. Six countries (Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar) and four abstained (Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand). As further confirmation of the ambiguities and hesitations of ASEAN countries, nine member states have demanded the removal of a

---

<sup>192</sup> Robert, Matheus, Michael, Tene. "CO24106 | ASEAN Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar". *S. Rajaratman School of International Relations*, Nanyang Technological University. (2024): pp.1-3.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Gwen, Robinson. "The diminishing role of ASEAN in Myanmar crisis". *ASEAN Focus*, ISEAS Yusof Ishak. (2023).

provision within the text of the resolution demanding an arms embargo<sup>195</sup>. In addition, ASEAN member states were then divided on the role of the international organization with regard to Myanmar in similar blocks of countries.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore were supporters of an increased role of the ASEAN in dealing with the crisis. These three states affirmed that, beyond exhorting the Parties to cease violence and delivering humanitarian assistance, ASEAN should also favor the restoration of a democratic polity in Myanmar. Conversely, other member states, such as Cambodia and Thailand, stated that the engagement of the ASEAN in the crisis should be minimal, given that the organization established in 1967 does not have competences in foreign policy; the remaining member states did not choose either one of the two blocks<sup>196</sup>. The lack of unity of ASEAN, led to an array of unilateral actions by the various South-east Asia countries.

Among these initiatives, the most important were those of Brunei, which was able to reach a consensus within ASEAN on the 5PC programme during its chairmanship in 2021, and the “quiet diplomacy” pursued through the chairmanships of Cambodia and Indonesia focusing on a direct engagement of Myanmar stakeholders rather than ASEAN members.

Brunei managed to reach a consensus among member states on the importance of preserving regional stability, menaced by waves of displaced people towards neighboring countries and increased illicit crime. In addition, Brunei highlighted the necessity that Myanmar should be represented by a non-political representative for Myanmar rather than expelling Naypyidaw from ASEAN<sup>197</sup>.

Following the relatively successful Brunei chairmanship of ASEAN, Cambodia and Indonesia followed up. Cambodia decided to engage the Tatmadaw in the hope that this move would favor finding a mutual trust among other ASEAN members and enacting a plan of action to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the population, becoming a facilitator rather than an enforcer. However, after multiple unsuccessful meetings, the Cambodian efforts failed when Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Sen realized that the

---

<sup>195</sup> Tom, Allard and Michelle, Nichols. “SE Asia states want to drop proposed U.N. call for Myanmar arms embargo”. 28/5/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/southeast-asian-nations-oppose-arms-embargo-myanmar-report-2021-05-28/>

<sup>196</sup> Gwen, Robinson. “The diminishing role of ASEAN in Myanmar crisis”. ASEAN Focus, ISEAS Yusof Ishak. (2023).

<sup>197</sup> Sydney, Tucker. “Myanmar Reveals ASEAN’s Weak Spot Again”. *Stimson Center*. (2023).

military government would have never followed the 5PC and the other ASEAN members viewed the policy of Cambodia as conducive to the legitimization of the SAC.

Indonesia decided to implement a policy of “quiet diplomacy” consisting in keeping contacts with Myanmar stakeholders through backchannels. In addition, Jakarta established a special envoy office led by the then-foreign minister Retno Marsudi and the

Former Indonesian ambassador to Singapore, Ngurah Swajaya. Since the creation of the post, Indonesia has brokered over 60 meetings between the junta, the National Unity Government and the EAOs<sup>198</sup>. Nevertheless, also the Indonesian policy of quiet engagement with all actors did not manage ASEAN to envision a credible framework for Myanmar, given that the sole consensus emerged in over three years remains the Five-Point Consensus programme<sup>199</sup>.

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusions

The February 2021 military coup decided by Tatmadaw has led to a series of events that anyone would have ever taken into consideration, from the peaceful mass protests in the streets to the inability of the military to reassert full control over the country leading to the ongoing civil war. Given that premise, it can be reasonably said that the 2021 military coup can be considered both as the trigger who unleashed all the following events and as a turning point in the history of Myanmar, whether the outcome of the civil war would be. For the first time in over thirty years, a majority of the population openly challenged the involvement of the Tatmadaw in the political arena as well as its privileged role as the guarantor of the unity of Myanmar.

Unlike the 8888 uprising of 1988, pro-democracy protests were not confined to the urban areas but managed to spread to other parts of the society and to resist to the repressive apparatus of the military junta. In conclusion, the strength of the anti-junta protests and the weakness of the junta opened an unexpected window of opportunity for the EAOs to break with the 2011 status quo and defeat definitively a centralized and nationalist Myanmar central government.

Conversely, with regard to the civil war, the future scenarios appear bleak, with violence among both parts not expected to cease soon. It is noteworthy to highlight that from May 2021 until October 2023, before the beginning of Operation 1027, the Tatmadaw had always benefitted from a substantial military advantage and controlled the most part of the country, despite the fact that their forces were overstretched all along the territory. At the opposite, the EAOs and the PDFs control mainly peripheric areas and the zones that were already under control of the ethnic armed groups.

Conversely, Operation 1027 changed the course of the war in favor of the anti-junta opposition. The Three Brotherhood Alliance significantly pushed back the Tatmadaw in northern Myanmar and obtained significant territorial gains, while opposition forces showed an unexpected and unprecedented level of coordination<sup>200</sup>. Furthermore, Operation 1027 revealed how China was increasingly unsatisfied with the inability of the Tatmadaw to guarantee security for its sizeable investments in the

---

<sup>200</sup> Yun, Sun. "Operation 1027: Changing the tides of the Myanmar civil war?" *Brookings Institution*. (2024).

countries and gave a tacit approval to the military offensive. Now the momentum was on the side of the anti-junta rebels, while the Tatmadaw saw its capacity of exerting control and guarantee security over its territory significantly affected. After the offensive, many analysts began to wonder whether the success of the military offensive would be conducive to a rapid collapse of the military junta.

Nevertheless, in 2024 the junta, despite a further advance of the anti-junta rebels which led to the loss of strategic localities such as Lashio or Myawaddy, managed to resist and retreat its troops towards the main urban centers. The only possibility for the anti-junta opposition to determine the collapse of the SAC and keeping the territorial integrity of the country would be a decisive military victory leading to the control of Mandalay<sup>201</sup>. An eventual victory in central Myanmar would demonstrate to the international community that the SAC is not able to keep control even in its strongholds and that it would not be able to survive any longer<sup>202</sup>. Further signs that a sudden collapse would become a concrete possibility would be an internal coup against Min Aung Hlaing, a diminution of military airstrikes and the loss of further state capitals and regional military command centers. Nevertheless, a military victory of the EAOs and the PDFs would not be the guarantee of the end of the hostilities, given the heterogeneity of anti-junta forces, pushing for an intervention of China or other regional powers<sup>203</sup>. Otherwise, the conflict is heading towards a stalemate, with no end in sight.

With regard to the possible outcomes of the conflict, some analysts are already weighing on future scenarios. At the moment, the likeliest scenario would consist of the pursuing of a protracted conflict, where anti-junta would continue to obtain minor territorial gains but not enough to topple the junta. In the meantime, the military junta would continue to resort to indiscriminate violence and systematic air bombings to deepen divisions between the EAOs and the PDFs and gain the upper hand.

The prolongation of the conflict would increase the spillover effect of Myanmar's civil war, mainly through the increase of refugees coming into South and Southeast Asia. With anti-junta forces controlling and exerting an effective control of the majority of the territory, a battle for international recognition would begin to play out. Some countries

---

<sup>201</sup> Joshua, Kurlantzick. "Will 2024 Be the Junta's End in Myanmar?" *Council on Foreign Relations*. (2024).

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

would recognize the National Unity Government while other actors, including ASEAN, would adopt a more nuanced position<sup>204</sup>.

In addition, a protracted conflict would make possible the worst-case scenario, an irreversible fragmentation and balkanization of Myanmar after a military collapse of the State Administration Council. In that case, any effort to unify Myanmar under the banner of a federal state fails, and the central authority is left weakened and permanently unable to reassert its authority over the periphery. The EAOs would govern *de facto* independent small ethnic states and would fight against each other or against the NUG and the PDFs for the control of the territory<sup>205</sup>.

It would be possible that the civil war would end in other ways, but other scenarios are less likely to happen. These include a Tatmadaw victory, which would rely on favoring as much as possible divisions between the EAOs and between EAOs and the PDFs and on sustained political, military support by its backers, such as China. In addition, in this unlikely hypothesis the Tatmadaw would be able to boost the low morale of its troops, and increase recruitment of new soldiers to replenish its troops<sup>206</sup>. Nevertheless, this is a rather unlikely, given that now the SAC must fight for its very survival by not losing control of central Myanmar and by avoiding cracks within the high commands of the Tatmadaw.

Finally, a last, unlikely scenario that would materialize after the end of the conflict consist of a negotiated settlement between the NUG, some major EAOs and the Tatmadaw. In that scenario, the Tatmadaw would recognize the impossibility to restore its full control of the control and consider the anti-junta forces as normal interlocutors, an active role of ASEAN nations with SAC officials to favor a negotiated peace agreement, the recognition of China as the mediator of the peace, a willingness of the NUG to participate to negotiations and the signing of temporary ceasefires between the remnants of the SAC and the EAOs<sup>207</sup>.

Nevertheless, neither the junta nor anti-junta forces are interested in peace negotiations. The junta is aware that any outcome other than its military victory would represent the end of its involvement in politics, while anti-junta forces would not agree

---

<sup>204</sup> Prashanth, Parameswaran. "Myanmar rebels seek to topple military junta". *GIS reports*. 29/1/2024.

<sup>205</sup> Thitinan, Pongsudhirak. "Revolution leaves Myanmar up for grabs". *GIS reports*. 16/5/2024.

<sup>206</sup> Prashanth, Parameswaran. "Myanmar rebels seek to topple military junta". *GIS reports*. 29/1/2024.

<sup>207</sup> Dragonfly intelligence. "Myanmar | Scenarios for ongoing civil war in 2024". 10/5/2024. <https://dragonflyintelligence.com/news/myanmar-scenarios-for-ongoing-civil-war-in-2024/>

to spare the Tatmadaw from total defeat. Anti-junta forces know that the momentum is on their side and have the support of a large majority of the population<sup>208</sup>.

The civil war would both transform Myanmar into a failed state or make possible a new power sharing agreement. Given its strategic geographical position and the difficulties to replace a centralized state with a federal one in unfavorable conditions, the only feasible solution to prevent the dissolution of the country would be a concerted action of the relevant foreign actors on Myanmar stakeholders leading to a confederal arrangement. In that scenario, the hostilities would not cease immediately, but the international community would recognize the defeat of the Tatmadaw as inevitable and favor all efforts on the ground to enact a new governance of the post-junta Myanmar<sup>209</sup>. The country would see a reduction of the power of the central government, especially in favor of autonomous regions such as Rakhine, Karen or Shan, but its territorial integrity would be guaranteed<sup>210</sup>.

To guarantee the success of the confederal arrangement, the NUG would recognize the necessity to abandon a “top-down federalism” in favor of a “bottom-up” federalism, where local and regional would favor the creation of permanent structures be the main actors rather than the central government<sup>211</sup>. Local governance would be built on pre-existing local government structures, which should become the essential partners of the central government. In addition, in the case the local governments lack the capacity to satisfy the needs of the population, the central should strengthen them or assign their competences to higher tiers of government.

The necessity to define concrete proposals build a confederal Myanmar would become increasingly urgent with the formation of autonomous state governments by EAOs, the majority of which do not recognize the legitimacy of the National Unity Government (NUG) and of the Federal Democracy Charter established in 2021. In conclusion, with a combination of negotiations, compromises and agreements between the EAOs, PDFs and international actors would guarantee the existence of a unified Myanmar.

---

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Kow, Ewe. “How Myanmar’s Civil War Could Actually End”. Time. 31/2/2024. <https://time.com/7160736/myanmar-coup-civil-war-conflict-timeline-endgame-explainer/>

<sup>210</sup> Thitinan, Pongsudhirak. Revolution leaves Myanmar up for grabs. *GIS reports*. (2024).

<sup>211</sup> Khanu. “Local Government’s Role in Bottom-Up Federalism for Myanmar Democratic Future”. School of Public Policy, Chiang Mai University. (2024).





## Bibliography

Agence France-Presse, “Myanmar military seizes Yangon city hall”. Deccan Herald, 1/1/2021. <https://www.deccanherald.com/world/myanmar-military-seizes-yangon-city-hall-945891.html>

Agence France-Presse. “Myanmar Violence Escalates With Rise of 'Self-defense' Groups, Report Says”. Voice of America, 27/6/2021. [https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific\\_myanmar-violence-escalates-rise-self-defense-groups-report-says/6207546.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_myanmar-violence-escalates-rise-self-defense-groups-report-says/6207546.html)

Alexandra, A., Lina and Kharisma, Waffaa, Muhammad. “Myanmar’s National Unity Government Foreign Policy Agenda and Approach”. Center for Strategic and International Studies. (2022).

Al Jazeera, “Myanmar shadow government calls for uprising against military”, 7/9/2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/7/myanmar-shadow-government-launches-peoples-defensive-war>

Ambarkhane, Saket and Gathia, Valentine, Sanjay. “Over a Year Later, Myanmar’s Military Coup Threatens India’s National Security”. United States Institute of Peace, (2022).

ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Republic of Indonesia. “Chairman’s Statement on the ASEAN Leaders’ Meeting”. 24/4/2021.

Avvenire. “Colpo di Stato in Myanmar, San Suu Kyi arrestata. Appello dei vescovi alla pace”. Avvenire, 1/1/2021. <https://www.avvenire.it/mondo/pagine/colpo-di-stato-in-myanmar-aung-san-suu-kyi-arrestata>

Chambers, Paul and Chotisut, Kridsana. “Neighbour to Civil War: Thailand’s Relations with Myanmar in 2024”. Fulcrum, 8/7/2024. <https://fulcrum.sg/neighbour-to-civil-war-thailands-relations-with-myanmar-in-2024/>

Charney, Michael. A history of modern Burma, 1-9 chapters. Cambridge University Press, p. 5-200, (2009).

Chinese Embassy in Myanmar. “Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar H.E. Mr. Chen Hai gives an interview to Myanmar Media on the current situation in Myanmar”. Global Times, (2021). <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215672.shtml>

Chongkittavorn, Kavi. Thailand recharges Myanmar policy. Bangkok Post, 18/6/2024. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2812910/thailand-recharges-myanmar-policy>.

Desai, Niranjana, Rami. “From Shared Past to Uncertain Future: India’s Strategic Calculus in a Coup-Stricken Myanmar”. India Foundation. (2024).

Eleven Media Group Ltd. “The Tatmadaw announced that arrest warrants have been issued for Ko Min Ko Naing, Ko Jimmy, singer Lin Lin, Insein Aung Soe, Ko Myo Yan Naung Thein, Pan Se Lo, and Maung Maung Aye under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code”. 13/2/2021. <https://news-eleven.com/article/204606>

Epstein, Khaerani, Adinda. “ASEAN still torn over security challenges”. GIS reports. (2024).

Ewe, Kow. “How Myanmar’s Civil War Could Actually End”. Time. 31/10/2024. <https://time.com/7160736/myanmar-coup-civil-war-conflict-timeline-endgame-explainer/>

Frontier Myanmar. “Teachers, students join anti-coup campaign as hospital staff stop work”. 3/2/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/teachers-students-join-anti-coup-campaign-as-hospital-staff-stop-work/>

Frontier Myanmar. “After coup, medical workers spearhead civil disobedience campaign”, 2/2/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/after-coup-medical-workers-spearhead-civil-disobedience-campaign/>

Frontier Myanmar. “Aung San Suu Kyi, Win Myint to face charges as NLD calls for ‘unconditional’ release”, 3/2/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/aung-san-suu-kyi-win-myint-to-face-charges-as-nld-calls-for-unconditional-release/>

Giordana, Emanuele. “Myanmar: il ruolo della Cina nel conflitto”. ISPI, (2024).

Graceffo, Antonio. “Myanmar War: China’s Support for Ethnic Armed Groups”. Special Eurasia, (2024).

Hein, Ye, Myo. “The Root Causes of Myanmar’s coup go deeper”. Wilson Center, Indo-Pacific Program, (2021).

Hein, Ye Myo. “Understanding the People’s Defense Forces in Myanmar”, US Institute of Peace. (2022).

Hutt, David, “What is the West's response to China's role in Myanmar war?” Deutsche Welle, 29/11/2024. <https://www.dw.com/en/what-is-the-west's-response-to-china's-role-in-myanmar-war/a-70922423>

Asia Report N°319, “Myanmar’s coup shakes up its ethnic conflicts”. International Crisis Group, (2022).

Aung, Thazin, Su Mon and Lwin, Nan. 2022/74 “What do the Official Chinese Media’s Mixed Messages on the Myanmar Coup Mean?”. ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, (2022).

Jones, Lee. “Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: the periphery is central”. Taylor & Francis Online. (2014).

Khanu. “Local Government’s Role in Bottom-Up Federalism for Myanmar Democratic Future”. School of Public Policy, Chiang Mai University (2024).

King, Anna. “Myanmar’s coup d’état and the struggle for federal democracy and inclusive government”. Multi-Disciplinary Publishing Institute, (2022).

Kurlantzick, Joshua. “ASEAN’s Complete Failure on Myanmar: A Short Overview”. Council on Foreign Relations, (2022).

Kurlantzick, Joshua. “The Regional Implications of Myanmar’s Coup”. Originally published by Aspenia Online, Council on Foreign Relations, (2021).

Maizland, Lindsay. “Myanmar’s troubled history: Coups, Military Rule and Ethnic conflict”. Council of Foreign Relations, (2022).

Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. “Press Statement on developments in Myanmar”. 1/1/2021. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl%2F33434%2FPress+Statement+on+developments+in+Myanmar>

Myers, Lucas. “China’s Economic Security Challenge: Difficulties Overcoming the Malacca Dilemma”. SFS Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. (2023).

Myers, Lucas. “China Is Off the Fence in Myanmar”. War on the Rocks, Texas National Security Review, (2024).

Myint-U, Thant. Dove la Cina incontra l’India. Torino: Add editore, 2015.

Myint-U, Thant. L’altra storia della Birmania. Una distopia del XXI secolo. Torino: Add editore, 2020.

Aung, Sithu, Myint. “Could Min Aung Hlaing’s retirement break the political deadlock?”, Frontier Myanmar, 12/1/2021. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/could-min-aung-hlaings-retirement-break-the-political-deadlock/>

Nichols, Michelle. “United Nations calls for halt of weapons to Myanmar”. Reuters, 19/6/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-deports-first-group-myanmar-refugees-who-fled-2021-coup-2024-03-08/>

Pande, Aparna. “India’s Realpolitik Myanmar Policy”. GIS reports online. (2023).

Chambers, Justine and Dunford, Michael. “Myanmar in Crisis: Living with the pandemic and the coup”. Pedersen, Morten, eds., *The 2021 Military Coup: Causes and Consequences*, pp.41-68. ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.

Pollock, John and Symon, Damien. “Is Myanmar building a spy base on Great Coco islands?” Chatham House. (2023).

Pongsudhirak, Thitinan. “Internal divisions spell the end of ASEAN as we know it”. Australian Strategic Policy Institute. (18 October 2022).

Press Council of the European Council. “Myanmar/Burma: EU imposes sanctions on 10 individuals and two military-controlled companies over the February military coup and subsequent repression”. (19 April 2021). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/myanmar-burma-eu-imposes-sanctions-on-10-individuals-and-two-military-controlled-companies-over-the-february-military-coup-and-subsequent-repression/>

Press Council of the European Council. “Myanmar/Burma: third round of EU sanctions over the military coup and subsequent repression”. 21/6/2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/21/myanmar-burma-third-round-of-eu-sanctions-over-the-military-coup-and-subsequent-repression/>

Press release of the European Council. “Myanmar/Burma: EU sanctions 11 people over the recent military coup and ensuing repression”. 22/3/2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/myanmar-burma-eu-sanctions-11-people-over-the-recent-military-coup-and-ensuing-repression/>

Reporter Without Borders. “Myanmar junta now publishing lists of wanted journalists”. 19/4/2021. <https://rsf.org/en/myanmar-junta-now-publishing-lists-wanted-journalists>

Reuters. “Crisis in Myanmar after army alleges election fraud”. 1/2/2021. <https://www.deccanherald.com/world/explained-crisis-in-myanmar-after-army-alleges-election-fraud-945874.html>

Reuters. “Statement from Myanmar military on the state of the emergency”. 1/2/2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-military-text/statement-from-myanmar-military-on-state-of-emergency-idUSKBN2A11A2/>

Robinson, Gwen. “The diminishing role of ASEAN in Myanmar crisis”. Fulcrum. (2023). <https://fulcrum.sg/aseanfocus/the-diminishing-role-of-asean-in-the-myanmar-crisis/>

Sidhu, Sandi and Regan, Helen. Burmese actress goes into hiding as celebrities opposing Myanmar coup added to arrest list, CNN World. 18/1/2021. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/18/asia/myanmar-protest-celebrities-arrest-intl-hnk/index.html>

Silverstein, Josef, Burmese Student Politics in a Changing Society, Daedalus (1968).

Simpson, Adam. "Myanmar military under pressure as legal jeopardy builds". East Asia Forum. 21/12/2023. <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/12/21/myanmar-military-under-pressure-as-legal-jeopardy-builds/>

South, Ashley. "Towards "Emergent Federalism" in post-coup Myanmar". ISEAS- Yusof Ishak Institute, Contemporary Southeast Asia, (2021).

Steinberg, Isaac, David. The Military in Burma/Myanmar: On the Longevity of Tatmadaw Rule and Influence". Cambridge University Press. (2024)  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/military-in-burmamyanmar/military-in-burmamyanmar-on-the-longevity-of-tatmadaw-rule-and-influence/0D1D905253066443158E0625BB8EA7AA>

Storey, Henry. "China puts the squeeze on Myanmar's Tatmadaw". The interpreter. 29/8/2024. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-puts-squeeze-myanmar-s-tatmadaw>

Sun, Yun. "Operation 1027: Changing the tides of the Myanmar civil war?". Brookings Institution. (2024).

Robert, Matheus, Michael, Tene., "CO24106 | ASEAN Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar". S. Rajatnam School of International Studies. (2024).

Thai PBS World's regional desk. "Thailand must act decisively on Myanmar crisis, say experts". Thai PBS World. 24/12/2024. <https://world.thaipbs.or.th/detail/thailand-must-act-decisively-on-myanmar-crisis-say-experts/55915>

The Irrawaddy, "Thousands Take to Streets of Myanmar to Protest Military Takeover". 6/2/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/thousands-take-to-streets-of-myanmar-to-protest-military-takeover.html>

The Irrawaddy. "Myanmar's Medics Launch Civil Disobedience Campaign Against Coup". 3/2/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-medics-launch-civil-disobedience-campaign-coup.html>

The Irrawaddy. "US Ambassador Calls for Myanmar Military to Restore Power to Elected Government". 8/2/2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/us-ambassador-calls-myanmar-military-restore-power-elected-government.html>

Tower, Jason. "As Myanmar's Junta loses control in the North, China's influence grows". US Institute of Peace. (2024).

Tucker, Sydney. "Myanmar Reveals ASEAN's Weak Spot Again". Stimson Center, (2023).

U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Treasury Sanctions Military Holding Companies in Burma". 25/3/2021. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0078>

U.S. Department of the Treasury. "United States Targets Family Members Profiting from Connection to Burmese Coup Leader": 10/3/2021. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0051>

Walker, Tommy. "Myanmar: How far will China go to keep junta afloat?". Deutsche Welle. 26/11/2024. <https://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-how-far-will-china-go-to-keep-junta-afloat/a-70888339>

White House Briefing Room. "Remarks by President Biden on the Administration's Response to the Coup in Burma". 10/2/2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-administrations-response-to-the-coup-in-burma/>

Win, Hlaing, Htet. "A hidden key player? Thailand's role in the Myanmar crisis". Central European Institute of Asian Studies. 24/10/2024.

Win, Pyae Sone. "Myanmar election commission rejects military's fraud claims". AP News. 28/1/2021. <https://apnews.com/article/aung-san-suu-kyi-elections-myanmar-cc1b225b806c27dda748d3ab51d0e47f>

Wintour, Patrick and Borger, Julian, Myanmar coup: Joe Biden threatens to resume sanctions. The Guardian. 1/1/2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/01/myanmar-coup-us-and-china-divided-in-response-to-army-takeover-aung-san-su-kyi>

Yousouf, Danish. “Myanmar Crisis and Future of India’s Act East Policy”. CLAWS (Center for Land Warfare Studies). (2024).

Yumlembam, Ophelia. “Decoding China’s multi-stakeholder strategy in Myanmar,”. Observer Research Foundation (2024).