

# Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the *Tatmadaw*

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Even after the November 2015 landslide electoral victory of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy the armed forces of Myanmar (Burma) continue to be the country's most powerful *political* institution. This is hardly surprising. The Burmese military—also known as the *Tatmadaw*—has been the most influential political player since the country's independence from Britain in 1948, and outright ruled it from 1962 to 2011.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the 2015 election itself was the culmination of a deliberate—if extremely cautious and non-linear—liberalization process, the regime started over a decade earlier. Since the elections, Burmese military leaders have found ways to work together with State Counselor (and *de facto* government leader) Aung San Suu Kyi and her government.

The United States should recognize and encourage the *Tatmadaw*'s cooperative role and foster its professionalization and speedy withdrawal from politics. The Pentagon—in close consultation with the State Department and Myanmar's civilian leadership—should intensify its thus far minimal engagement with the Burmese army. At the same time, the United States must ensure that the government in Yangon retains significant leverage to use against the army if necessary.

## **Background: The Exceptionality of Burmese Military Rule**

Even before General Ne Win mounted a coup d'état in 1962, the Burmese military enjoyed significant political influence.<sup>i</sup> The coup heralded one of the longest periods of uninterrupted military rule in modern times. The *Tatmadaw* was officially in power until 2011, when it created a pseudo-civilian government—virtually all of its members were former generals—that ruled the country until last November.

Although numerous Asian countries—and, in particular Southeast Asian ones like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand—experienced long stretches of military rule after World War II, the Burmese generals' dictatorship was extraordinary in several ways.<sup>ii</sup> More than anything, a *combination* of five factors render the Burmese version of military authoritarianism unique, and uniquely disastrous, in the annals of modern praetorian rule.

The first of these factors is the sheer longevity of military rule in Myanmar. It makes an enormous difference whether a repressive authoritarian regime is in power for seven years (say, the Colonels' Greece [1967-1974]), sixteen years (Pinochet's Chile [1973-1990]) or fifty years, as in Burma. In

Myanmar, entire generations of people had known nothing but military rule. This prolonged reign permitted the *Tatmadaw* exceptionally deep penetration of society, culture, and even religious life.

Second, unlike most military regimes elsewhere, the *Tatmadaw* wrested control of the national economy. General Ne Win (1962-1988) embarked on a comprehensive program, “The Burmese Way to Socialism,” that transformed one of the continent’s richest countries into one of its poorest. One of the many lamentable milestones of this process was comprehensive nationalization in 1964 that caused an exodus of the middle class, destroyed entrepreneurship, and started black markets; a veritable avalanche of decay that the government could do nothing to reverse. Another damaging policy was the government’s demonetization in 1985 and 1987 of various denominations of the Burmese currency, the *kyat*, without advanced warning. These measures wiped out whatever meager savings ordinary people might have had and were a contributing cause of the 1988 uprising.

Enduring security threats is the third factor that explains the *Tatmadaw*’s uniquely long rule. Throughout its post-independence history Myanmar has never been entirely at peace. In 1950 Chinese nationalist (Kuomintang) forces fleeing from the People’s Liberation Army invaded Burma and did not withdraw until 1961. The main domestic dimension of the security threat has been the civil war between ethnic minorities (Chins, Kachins, Karens, etc.) and the regime that has lasted with various participants and levels of intensity to the present. Owing to military elites’ economic stakes—involvement in the illegal trade in drugs, gems, lumber, etc.—they had a vested interest in the continuation of hostilities. Furthermore, the generals could use the on-going conflict to further justify their claim to their rule.

The fourth feature that made Myanmar’s military regime exceptional was its comprehensive isolation of the country from the outside world. Burma is situated between two Asian behemoths, India and China, with a combined population of three billion people.<sup>iii</sup> Remaining independent and maintaining full sovereignty was one of the main objectives of the ruling generals. The *Tatmadaw* often astutely maneuvered between the opposing sides of the Cold War, drawing benefits whenever possible. The regime seemed remarkably unconcerned about international respectability or whether the world had approved of them. The general population was almost totally cut off from the outside world, so much so, that in this former British colony few people, even among the elites, was allowed the opportunity to learn passable English.

Finally, the long and pervasive rule of the *Tatmadaw* was inadvertently facilitated by an extremely weak political opposition. This weakness had two principal causes. First, the price of resistance was so high—torture, long prison sentences, or death and persecution of the would-be activist’s family—that few people dared to openly challenge the regime. Second, the opposition was deeply divided along several different axes (urban vs. rural, elites vs. students vs. workers, Bamar [ethnic Burmese] vs. ethnic minorities, etc.) and even in major upheavals such as the People Power Uprising of 1988, or the 2007 “Saffron Revolution” protest leaders were unable to bridge the gaps between them.<sup>iv</sup> In sum, the opposition’s shortcomings helped keep the military in power.

## **Liberalization**

On August 30, 2003 Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt announced Burma’s roadmap to democracy (officially, the “Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy”). The stated objective

of the seven-step plan was to restore full democracy to the country. The steps involved reconvening the National Convention, an often sham consultative process involving various ethnic, societal, and political constituencies; drafting a new constitution to be adopted through a national referendum; holding free and fair elections, and building a developed and democratic nation. Importantly, there was no indication how long the process was to take and what societal groups were to work with the military in its implementation.

Why Than Shwe, the junta's leader in 1992-2011, decided to liberalize remains a bit of a mystery.<sup>v</sup> After all, there was no robust opposition movement forcing his hand and no foreign power threatening the military's rule. Nonetheless, there are a number of clues. Unlike Ne Win, Than Shwe actually consulted with and listened to some trusted advisers and ministers—especially Admiral Soe Thane, General Aung Min, and Colonel Zaw Min (all retired)—who pushed for liberalization.<sup>vi</sup> Burma's enduring international isolation and archaic centrally planned economy accentuated its backwardness and poverty especially in sharp contrast with the rapid economic growth of neighboring Thailand and China.

Western sanctions following the 1988 uprising and the junta's refusal to honor the results of the relatively free 1990 legislative elections—won resoundingly by the National League for Democracy (NLD)—limited the business opportunities of Myanmar's small entrepreneurial class composed almost exclusively of the generals and their cronies. Aung San Suu Kyi, one of the NLD's founders who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, had become the focus of Western diplomatic, political, and media attention.<sup>vii</sup> Shunned by the West, the junta reluctantly turned toward China, India, and Thailand for support and much needed economic assistance. Still, China's increasing international assertiveness worried the generals who were becoming overwhelmed by Beijing's political and military influence. For a post-colonial country that managed to safeguard its sovereignty throughout the Cold War, becoming a *de facto* Chinese colony was a detestable prospect.

It is important to recognize that the junta's conception of liberalization was vague and did not include any specific timetable let alone a sense that power would be turned over to an opposition that, in any case, was not legalized until 2010. Throughout the 2000s, the junta faced multifaceted challenges that included the 2007 uprising—sparked by the unannounced five-fold increase in fuel prices—and Cylone Nargis in the following year that cost nearly 140,000 lives and massive devastation that laid bare the regime's spectacular ineptness.<sup>viii</sup>

The regime succeeded in negotiating, one by one, cease-fire agreements with at least seventeen armed ethnic groups that included granting different degrees of autonomy.<sup>ix</sup> A side benefit of these pacts was that they allowed the junta to gain control over prized trade routes and made their wholesale export of the country's riches all the easier. The *Tatmadaw* began liberalize the economic system that went hand-in-hand with its growing rent-seeking activities. The culture of impunity and the growing temptations boosted by expanding opportunities greatly increased large-scale corruption, something that was unusual during Ne Win's rule.

In 2008, the generals wrote a constitution that was supposed to ensure their dominant political position for the long-term, even after a democratization process was to begin in earnest. The new basic law is a veritable constitutional bunker for the *Tatmadaw*, tilting the playing field in its favor

by limiting—though not eliminating—the opposition’s prospects to form a government, name a president, and to amend the constitution. Importantly, it also identifies protecting the constitution as one of the armed forces main responsibilities.<sup>x</sup>

The 2010 parliamentary vote, a heavily rigged affair, ended, unsurprisingly, in the massive victory of the regime’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Although some forty parties competed at the polls, the NLD boycotted the bogus elections from which the junta barred international observers. By the end of that year the junta, in a sense, ran out of steam, weary of economic sanctions, was aware of its loss of societal legitimacy, and was ready to embark on more substantive political liberalization. On November 13, 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi—widely known in Burma as “the Lady”—was released from house arrest where she spent fifteen of the previous twenty-one years.<sup>xi</sup> In the following month, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met her during a memorable visit to Myanmar that was a clear triumph for U.S. foreign policy.

In the 2012 by-elections the NLD won 43 of the 44 parliamentary seats it contested. Western governments relaxed or lifted some economic sanctions and Myanmar’s isolation began to decrease. The economy had begun to grow rapidly—by about 8% annually—albeit from a dreadfully low base. The regime legalized thousands of new local organizations that engaged in a wide array of cultural, educational, political, and social activities. In addition, hundreds of NGOs from the United States, Europe, and Japan started to work in Burma for causes ranging from democracy promotion to disaster relief. The media, too, became much freer and the number of political prisoners diminished. Nonetheless, rights abuses and daily humiliations by soldiers were still the fact of life in many out-of-the-way rural areas. And corruption remained rampant: Transparency International rated Burma 147<sup>th</sup> out of 168 countries in its 2015 report.<sup>xii</sup>

## **Accepting Defeat, Working with the Government**

November 8, 2015 will go down in Burmese history as the day democracy was finally given a chance of taking root. Virtually everyone not in uniform predicted a big win for the NLD. But in order to be able to form a government of its own “the Lady” needed a landslide given that the constitution assigned one quarter of the legislative seats to the military’s representatives. Regime officials and *Tatmadaw* officers were confident that the USDP would do well enough to prevent that from happening and the NLD would not garner enough votes to gain a majority of the seats.

In the end, the NLD showed up all the skeptics and scored a massive win at the polls.<sup>xiii</sup> It gained 135 seats (60.26% of all seats, and 80.35% of the 168 it could compete for) in the 224-seat upper house. The USDP obtained only 12 seats (5.36%), just two more than the ethnic Arakan National Party (10/4.46%); the rest went to smaller ethnic parties, each obtaining 1-3 seats. The elections for the 440-seat lower house yielded similar results: NLD 255 seats (57.95% of all and 77.27% of those contested), USDP 30 seats (6.81%), with ethnic parties dividing up the rest. The turnout was high; slightly more than 80% of the registered voters—more than 32 million people—cast their ballots. At the same time, the USDP had suffered a humiliating defeat and had to realize that in a fair contest it had no chance against the democratic opposition.

Prior to the elections pundits and ordinary people were openly wondering whether the generals would honor the electoral results or reject them as they did a quarter century earlier. Nevertheless,

President Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the two most powerful people in Burma, continued to insist even after the votes were tallied that the results stood and the transition of power would go ahead smoothly. And, to the surprise of many doubters, they kept their word. In late 2015 and early this year Suu Kyi and her advisors conducted talks about the shape of the new government with the *Tatmadaw* led by Min Aung Hlaing. The *Tatmadaw* played a neither accommodating nor disruptive role but continued to stand by the constitution that heavily favored the armed forces.

One of the key issues the NLD unsuccessfully tried to find a way around was the constitutional provision that prevented “the Lady” from becoming president. In the end Suu Kyi created the position of “State Counselor,” something akin to prime minister, a post the junta abolished in 2011. She also took several ministerships in the new cabinet: education, electric power and energy, foreign affairs, and minister of the president’s office. Although she gave up the first two after a week, she retains the others, as well as the presidency of her party.

She is, there is no doubt, the government’s *de facto* leader. Her position as foreign minister allows her to sit on the powerful National Defense and Security Council. The NDSC oversees the armed forces and is responsible for security and defense. Yet even in the new NLD-dominated regime, six of the 11 members of the NDSC come from the military—they are appointed by the Commander-in-Chief—a stark reminder that it is still largely in control.

On March 15, members of the bicameral legislature elected Htin Kyaw, a long-time Suu Kyi confidante, as president. His is a mostly ceremonial office. The legislature also elected two vice presidents: Henry Van Thio, selected by the NLD, and Myint Swe, nominated by the military-appointed delegation. The former is a member of the Chin ethnic minority and is a Christian (notable in a state that is about 90% Buddhist). Myint Swe is a retired lieutenant general and a hard-liner: as the feared chief of military security affairs, he oversaw the repression of the 2007 uprising and was known for his brutal treatment of dissidents. He has recently been the focus of corruption charges and remains on the U.S. sanctions list. Myint Swe is known to be close to Than Shwe who is widely assumed to have maintained an influential role behind the scenes.

Perhaps the most important task for the NLD has been to develop an effective working relationship with the military. Unless the party can persuade at least some of the military-appointed legislators, the NLD will be unable to amend the constitution to allow Suu Kyi to become president or to relax the stipulation requiring a 75% approval to change the basic law.

Most important, although the *Tatmadaw*’s control of the defense and border affairs ministries does not particularly constrain the NLD at this point in the transition process, its hold over the ministry of home affairs seriously restricts the NLD’s authority. This body oversees not only the entire police and security apparatus but also the General Administration Department (GAD). The GAD is the country’s administrative heart, staffing every regional and state-level government and managing thousands of districts and townships.

Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing has not sabotaged the transition process thus far but there is every reason to believe that he will continue to appoint individuals loyal to the *Tatmadaw*. He turns 60—the military retirement age—this year, but the army recently announced that it would

extend his term in office by another five years because of the transition and his close involvement in an ongoing peace process with ethnic militias. For now, the *Tatmadaw* does not appear interested in giving up any more of its political influence than it already has by allowing the election results to stand. Nevertheless, the top brass has gradually developed a cooperative atmosphere with the new government since it took office, and has been receptive to and appreciative of the non-confrontational approach “the Lady” and her government so wisely adopted.

The NLD’s governing role notwithstanding, the structure of the state is still very much the same with a politically dominant military whose powers and “guiding role” are guaranteed by the 2008 Constitution. Nevertheless, in the last six months, in particular, there have been several indications the *Tatmadaw*’s behavioral norms may have begun to change. Several examples illustrate this point.

In the past, military officers and even ordinary soldiers routinely got away with all kinds of crimes committed against the regular population. These included not just the institutional-scale theft or confiscation with little or no compensation of hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, but also violent crimes, such as rape and murder. The victims seldom dared to complain and if they did, they often found out that they were worse off than if they had not. In recent months, however, the *Tatmadaw* held accountable a number of its members for their criminal deeds and publicized their prosecution.<sup>xiv</sup> This is a major departure from the past.

For decades—and especially during the rapid expansion of the armed forces during the 1990s and 2000s—the regime required village and town leaders to fill recruitment quotas. The army leadership employed various coercive measures that included the deceptive conscription, forced enlisting, or outright kidnapping of thousands of children as young as fifteen.<sup>xv</sup> Western governments and NGOs were vocal critics of this practice for many years and there is evidence that in the past couple of years it has been drastically reduced and, perhaps, entirely eliminated.

Until about a year ago, military leaders seldom if ever submitted to unscripted interviews or explained their policies and actions to genuine interlocutors. This, too, has changed as *Tatmadaw* elites have seemingly realized that it was to their benefit to respond to queries, outline their positions, grant interviews, hold press conferences, and communicate with the media and through them with the citizenry during the current period of democratic transition.

Perhaps most importantly, after decades of fighting, the military has become more willing to resolve the conflict with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Already in October 2015, President Thein Sein convened a major convention of the National Ceasefire Agreement, which was signed by eight and ended fighting in many parts of the country. That effort ultimately failed because a number of the EAOs—including some of the largest and most influential groups, such as the Kachin Independence Organization and the United Wa State Army, the latter is reportedly composed of 30,000 armed men<sup>xvi</sup>—refused to satisfy the regime’s preconditions of participation and would not give up their weapons and renounce resistance. By late summer 2016, however, the *Tatmadaw* had softened its position making the symbolic but important gesture of encouraging the hold-out EAOs to participate in the peace process even if they only “committed” to disarm.

At the four-day Union Peace Conference (August 31–September 3, 2016) hundreds of representatives of ethnic minorities, EAOs, the government, political parties, and the military met together for the first time since independence, although some groups still stayed away. At the meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing urged the participants to abide by the controversial “six principles for peace,” outlined by then-President Thein Sein in 2011, one of which included the demand that EAOs adhere to the constitution which, as noted above, preserves key roles for the *Tatmadaw*.<sup>xvii</sup> That said, Min Aung Hlaing, and the top brass in general, have adopted an increasingly pragmatic point approach toward the ethnic peace process—which “the Lady” has identified as her top priority—well aware that the army also stands to gain from ethnic peace.

## **Why Should the United States Increase Military Engagement?**

Min Aung Hlaing has repeatedly stated that his goal was to build a professional military that could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the other armies of the region’s states. At present, the *Tatmadaw* is a large force, keeping 406,000 people in uniform, but its equipment is overwhelmingly obsolete, many of its facilities are decaying, its soldiers are poorly trained and, by all accounts, have low morale.<sup>xviii</sup> The military has long depended on Chinese training and arms, but army leaders would like to break out of their isolation and participate in regional exercises and conferences—but their opportunities have been limited. In particular, *Tatmadaw* elites, like those of other developing countries such as neighboring Bangladesh, would like to take part in international peacekeeping operations, which provide officers and soldiers with important professional experiences as well as financial benefits.<sup>xix</sup> (At present only four Burmese soldiers are participating in United Nations activities [two each in Liberia and Sudan]).

Not surprisingly given its size, proximity, and economic and military power, China has been the most important foreign player in Myanmar.<sup>xx</sup> For many years the Chinese have armed and provided sanctuary when necessary to numerous ethnic armed groups, some of them predominantly ethnic Chinese, in Burma’s northern frontier.<sup>xxi</sup> During Suu Kyi’s August 2016 state visit to Beijing there were indications that Chinese officials—whose country would benefit from legal cross-border commerce that the on-going armed conflict has stunted—were willing to persuade some of these groups to enter the peace process.<sup>xxii</sup>

They managed to convince some, but all three ethnic groups that would not renounce armed resistance and therefore were prevented from attending the conference—the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta’ang National Liberation Army, and the Arakan Army—had ties to China.<sup>xxiii</sup> Notwithstanding Beijing’s decades-long support of Myanmar’s junta, Chinese involvement in Burma’s ethnic conflict and Beijing’s condescending treatment of Yangon as its junior partner hint at the reasons why *Tatmadaw* elites, to put it politely, are not overly fond of their colleagues north of the border.

Until recently, Western democracies and Japan have had very limited interaction with Myanmar’s armed forces. More recently, ties between the *Tatmadaw* and democratic states have increased, but these links are still very rudimentary. A number of NGOs like the Japanese Nippon Foundation have held workshops for *Tatmadaw* officers in Japan focusing on democratic civil-military relations and exposed them to military life in a democratic state. The Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) in Yangon—funded by Norwegian, European Union, Japanese, and UN agencies—aspires

to provide technical support and promote and facilitate dialogue for the peace process. Some of these organizations are doing useful work although a number of experts have claimed that others, including the MPC, do more harm than good owing to their lacking understanding of the complex historical and political background of armed non-state ethnic minorities.<sup>xxiv</sup> In recent years a number of Western and Asian armies have started to develop relationships with their Burmese counterpart. Shared activities have included exchange programs, training exercises, and medium- and high-level visits to foster professionalization and enhance international contacts.<sup>xxv</sup>

The United States has done comparatively little military-to-military engagement with the *Tatmadaw*. There are several important reasons, perhaps most importantly the reluctance to become involved in a U.S.-Myanmar military relationship by some U.S. generals, congressional leaders, and diplomats and by some leading circles of the Burmese military whose top elites are often divided on important issues. Washington's past reluctance to get involved in military-to-military activities was perfectly reasonable given that the Obama Administration decided early on to take its cues from Aung San Suu Kyi. The U.S. position was, and continues to be, that our key allies in the country are "the Lady" and her government who best understand the intricate nature of domestic political issues.

In June 2012, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced at a meeting of Asian defense leaders that the Obama Administration was open to improving military ties with the *Tatmadaw* if democratic reforms continued and human rights conditions improved.<sup>xxvi</sup> In fact, prior to the U.S. imposition of sanctions on Burma in the early 1990s when military links were frozen, the two armies cooperated on drug eradication efforts and some *Tatmadaw* officers even studied in the United States under the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET).

Despite the continuation of the democratization process and the recent change of government, since Panetta's statement there has been very limited interaction between U.S. and Burmese military personnel that included some dialogue on civil-military relations in democracies, military justice, and other basic issues. The *Tatmadaw* leadership's acceptance of the election results, their recent modifications in behavior, and their general willingness to collaborate with Aung San Suu Kyi's government is certainly not sufficient reason to throw caution to the wind and engage in a full-bore cooperation. The United States should continue to listen to "the Lady's" advice with regard to the armed forces. That said, given other democratic states' attention to the Burmese military and China's long-standing involvement in Myanmar's military development, it may well be time for Washington to initiate, cautiously to be sure, military-to-military relations with Yangon.

The United States can draw on its proven and ample capacity and decades of experience to assist in the professionalization and democratization of the *Tatmadaw*. American military colleges and academies are well equipped to train and advise Burmese armed forces personnel on key issues, such as the rule of law, civilian control over the military balanced between the executive and legislative branches, military withdrawal from politics, transparency in budgeting, eschewing involvement in business and commercial ventures, etc. The participation of *Tatmadaw* officers in the IMET program could be renewed and the very limited scope of current programs expanded.<sup>xxvii</sup> Whatever the particulars, raising the level of American military-to-military engagement with Myanmar ought to be seriously considered. At the same time, this engagement must be leveraged

and kept easily reversible. In other words, empowering the *Tatmadaw* in some inappropriate way must be avoided.

America has been a steadfast supporter of Myanmar's democratization process since it began in late 2010. Both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton made historic visits to Yangon. Just as importantly, the United States has sent ambassadors to Myanmar—Derek Mitchell from 2012 to 2016, and now Scot Marciel—who are deeply knowledgeable about the country, Southeast Asia, and democratic transitions from military rule more generally, indicating that Washington takes Myanmar seriously. In a nation that tends to be at best cautious of foreigners' intentions, the United States is generally held in high regard, in sharp contrast to the suspicious attitudes toward China and India that prevail throughout Myanmar.

The United States should not miss this opportunity. Myanmar occupies a strategic location in Southeast Asia, and its need for political support, developmental aid—everything from infrastructure improvement to educational programs—and targeted investment is acute. There are few societies where democracy promotion efforts could find more fertile ground or where they would be more gratefully accepted. Ultimately, advancing military-to-military engagement may well enhance, promote, and deepen the professionalism and democratic outlook of Myanmar's officer corps and accelerate their withdrawal from politics.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> See Robert H. Taylor, *General Ne Win: A Political Biography* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015).

<sup>ii</sup> See Marcus Mietzner, ed., *The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia: Conflict and Leadership* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>iii</sup> For an excellent analysis of the complex relationships in this region, see Bertil Lintner, *Great Game East: China, India, and the Struggle for Asia's Most Volatile Frontier* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), especially 171-203.

<sup>iv</sup> See Zoltan Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 74-100.

<sup>v</sup> To understand him better, see Benedict Rogers, *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2010).

<sup>vi</sup> See Nayee Lin Let, "Naypyidaw: No More 'Military' Government," *Irrawaddy*, 6 May 2010; and more generally, Min Zin, "The New Configuration of Power," *Journal of Democracy*, 27:2 (April 2016): 116-131.

<sup>vii</sup> See Josef Silverstein, "Aung San Suu Kyi: Is She Burma's Woman of Destiny?" *Asian Survey*, 30:10 (October 1990): 1007-1019; and David I. Steinberg, "Aung San Suu Kyi and U.S. Policy toward Burma/Myanmar," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 29:3 (2010): 35-59.

<sup>viii</sup> On Cyclone Nargis and how the regime dealt with it, read Emma Larkin's exceptional *No Bad News for the King: The True Story of Cyclone Nargis and Its Aftermath in Burma* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>ix</sup> For a most informative catalogue and analysis of ethnic armies, see Paul Keenan, *By Force of Arms: Armed Ethnic Groups in Burma* (New Delhi: Vij Books India, 2014).

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<sup>x</sup> For perceptive analyses of the constitution, see Susanne Prager Nyein, “Expanding Military, Shrinking Citizenry, and the New Constitution of Burma,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 39:4 (November 2009): 638-648; and Aurel Croissant and Jil Kamerling, “Why Do Military Regimes Institutionalize? Constitution-making and Elections as Political Survival Strategy in Myanmar,” *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 21:2 (2013): 105-125.

<sup>xi</sup> See Peter Popham, *The Lady and the Generals: Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma’s Struggle for Freedom* (London: Rider, 2016),

<sup>xii</sup> See <https://www.transparency.org/country/#MMR>.

<sup>xiii</sup> For figures and analysis, see Zoltan Barany, “Moving toward Democracy: The 2015 Parliamentary Elections in Myanmar,” *Electoral Studies*, 42 (June 2016): 76-79.

<sup>xiv</sup> See, for instance, “Myanmar Army Admits Villagers Killed During Interrogation,” *Bangkok Post*, 20 July 2016.

<sup>xv</sup> Andrew Selth, *Transforming the Tatmadaw: The Burmese Armed Forces since 1988* (Canberra: Australian National University, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 1996), 50.

<sup>xvi</sup> Kyaw Kha, “Govt Invites UWSA, MNDA to the Peace Table,” *Irrawaddy*, 8 June 2016.

<sup>xvii</sup> Lun Min Mang and Ei Ei Toe Lwin, “Speech Highlights from Panglong Conference Opening Ceremony,” *Myanmar Times*, 1 September 2016.

<sup>xviii</sup> For current figures on manpower and equipment, see *The Military Balance 2016* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016), 275-277. For valuable studies on the Burmese military’s evolution, consult Andrew Selth, *Burma’s Armed Forces: Power without Glory* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2002), and Maung Aung Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces Since 1948* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).

<sup>xix</sup> Vincenzo Bove and Leandro Elia, “Supplying Peace: Participation in and Troop Contribution to Peacekeeping Missions,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 48:6 (2011): 699-714.

<sup>xx</sup> Bertil Lintner, “China Is the Most Important Foreign Player in the Peace Process,” *Irrawaddy*, 17 August 2016.

<sup>xxi</sup> See, for instance, Donald M. Seekins, “Burma-China Relations: Playing with Fire,” *Asian Survey*, 37:6 (June 1997): 525-539; Kevin Woods, “Ceasefire Capitalism: Military–Private Partnerships, Resource Concessions and Military–State Building in the Burma–China Borderlands,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38:4 (2011): 747-770; and author’s confidential interviews with recently retired *Tatmadaw* generals (in Naypyidaw and Yangon, October 2014, August 2015, and May 2016).

<sup>xxii</sup> See Jane Perlez and Wai Moe, “China Helps Aung San Suu Kyi with Peace Talks in Myanmar,” *New York Times*, 20 August 2016; and Shing Jiangtao, “China’s Key Role in Helping Aung San Suu Kyi Reconcile Myanmar’s Decades-long Ethnic Conflicts,” *South China Morning Post*, 3 September 2016.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Stéphanie Giry and Wai Moe, “Myanmar Peace Talks Begin, High in Symbolism and in Skepticism,” *New York Times*, 31 August 2016.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See, for instance, Saw Yan Naing, “Peace Brokers Lack a Mandate: Burma Expert,” and “Where Has the Peace Money Gone,” in *Irrawaddy*, 18 March 2014 and 1 April 2016, respectively.

<sup>xxv</sup> See, for instance, “Thai Armed Commander Visits Myanmar,” *Chiangrai Times* (Thailand), 15 September 2011; Andrew Selth, “Defence Relations with Burma: Our Future Past,” *Interpreter* (Australia), 4 March 2013; and Rakesh Krishnan Simha, “Rangoon Realpolitik: Russia, India Courting Myanmar,” *Russia & India Report*, 31 January 2014.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> This paragraph draws on Murray Hiebert, “Carpe Diem: U.S. Military Engagement with Myanmar,” Center for Strategic and International Studies Commentary (Washington, DC, CSIS, 8 June 2012).

<sup>xxvii</sup> See “The US Should Reach Out to Myanmar’s Military,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 3 August 2016 – authored by Col. William C. Dickey (Ret.), the recently retired US Defense Attaché to Yangon.