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From the Editors' Desk...

Myanmar: democracy on the back-foot, again

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With an increasing number of Myanmar cities -- Naypyidaw, Yangon, Bagan and others --witnessing rising numbers of protestors and its international partners' halting several ongoing partnerships and projects, how long is military likely to take to relent and release elected leaders and revive the process of democratic reforms? From the face of it, the military seems well entrenched in power and innovative in its strategies. The new administration under General Min Aung Hlaing has sought to assuage various internal and external actors. It justifies its take over by declaring November elections as fraudulent and made promises to its citizens as also major external players including New Delhi. Besides, it has announced holding fresh elections and creating a multi-party system defying insinuations of each time military stage-managing political control by propping its own political party.

Prima facie, compared to earlier instances of military take over in 1962 and 1990, the presence of social media may have made democratic forces much more visible, yet opposition to the military's take over of power seems disjointed, half-hearted and lacking unanimity and therefore efficacy. There are a large number of countries and companies that have not severed ties and several stakeholders, both inside and outside, continue to prefer an easy fence sitting posture. Still others have called it an internal affair of Myanmar. Even normative policy positions are circumspect by axiom of not taking harsh measures that may hurt Myanmar people. These have clearly restricted the likely nature of sanctions, especially so in the midst of the raging pandemic. Even during the 1990s, Myanmar military had withstood sanctions.

The Military today seems well-oiled machine and confident of dealing with criticism and censor. Indeed, this military under General Hlaing has been the target of global ire since 2017 episodes of its crackdown on Rohingyas which several nations and agencies had described as genocide. There were experts making insinuations of General Hlaing -- due to retire this July -- taking over as President. What makes the military hopeful is also the fact that unlike its take over in 1990, the civilian leaders have had their innings during the last decade of its gradual power-sharing and elections. Leading in the struggle for democracy, the National League for Democracy was in power during and since 2017 military crackdown on Rohingyas.

Also in the 1990s, iconic Aung Saan Suu Kyi was in house arrest (during 1989-1995) and conferred a Noble Prize for Peace in 1991. But her silence on military crackdown on Rohingyas had raised demands for stripping her of her Noble Prize which has severely compromised her charisma and appeal. She is now 75 years old. Conversely, last ten years of power-sharing has made the military much more acceptable to the world. Some of its external partners like China indeed may sense an opportunity akin to the early 1990s when Beijing had an almost exclusive engagement with Myanmar's military leaders. Response from its other major investors from Thailand and Singapore have been mixed to say the least. With the world being distracted by pandemic situation, all that the military is doing is buying time which is likely to push democratic reforms back by decades.

*Prof Swaran Singh
Dr. Reena Marwah
Editors*

Civil-Military tug in Myanmar and A Song of Resistance

On 2 February, 2021, a video of a woman going about her regular aerobics exercise on the streets of Myanmar's capital, oblivious of the tatmadaw (military) convoy approaching in the backdrop, went viral on social media.



by Shrabana Barua

While later, many pointed out to the Indonesian origin of the song playing in this video, Ampun Bang Jago, some underlined the apt symbolism of the lyrics to the moment it was filmed. The song talks about bowing down to the authority Bang Jago, before the oppressed rise up in resistance.

The military coup d'état that took place in Myanmar on the day when the newly elected parliament was to meet for the first session after its 8 November 2020 election, pushed the country eerily close to a situation mentioned in the song. The question is, much like the song, whether the people will be able to successfully rise in revolt and function like a democracy once again? While the former has already begun to unfold itself, the chances for the latter remain rather bleak so far.

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Military Coups of the past

Myanmar has been ruled by the military for larger part of its independent history. A democratic Burma (name used until 1988) was established after the British relinquished powers in 1948.

The government under Prime Minister U Nu failed to handle various groups that rose in rebellion, despite U Nu having legitimacy through the 1951-52 general elections. Unlike in the recent scenario, what was interesting was that, in 1958,

U Nu had invited General Ne Win to be the caretaker prime minister. The arrangement that was based on the 1947 constitution ended with Ne Win transferring back authority, albeit briefly. The lust for power perhaps, led Ne Win to stage the first military coup in Burma in 1962, toppling the democratic government elected through the February 1960 elections. People who raised their voices, especially at Rangoon University as the center of protest, were silenced.

The ingredients for another coup was found in 1988. Ne Win's reforms, termed as 'Burmese way to Socialism', were extensive and a new constitution had come about in 1974. But people began to demand greater political reforms. On 8 August 1988, a pro-democracy movement led by students was crushed brutally on Ne Win's orders. This upheaval became the pretext of a takeover by the military junta, a coup that replaced the one who had come to power through a coup! When Ne Win resigned, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), representative of the military, promised multi-party democracy.

The general election of 1990 did not turn out as the tatmadaw expected. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won by a majority. The military refused to transfer power, leading to a coup-like situation yet again. Much like the recent events, in 1990 too, newly elected popular leader Suu Kyi and many others were arrested. Neither domestic clamour nor international uproar for a return of democracy managed to change anything. The State Peace and

Development Council (SPDC) of the military, attempted to seek legitimacy through the National Convention process. A seven-step road map to democracy was announced and a new constitution was promised. The civil-military tug continued.

Recent developments

Since 2010, Myanmar has had timely multi-party elections as per the 2008 constitution. One of the basic principles stated in Article 6 of the constitution “enables the Defence Services to be able to participate in the National political leadership role of the State”. To facilitate this, 25 per cent of the seats in the parliament stands reserved for the tatmadaw, an arrangement that reflects the tug between civil and military rule. Though real power seems to lie with the former, the recent events make it clear that the latter is not ready to embrace any real democratic change. This is evident from a second reference in the Constitution that enables the President to transfer all ‘legislative, executive and judicial powers of the Union to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services’ (Article 418a).

The NLD’s boycott of the 2010 general elections had led to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USPD), representative of the army, forming the government and in 2011 General Min Aung Hlaing became the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services. Though the NLD government came to power in 2015, General Hlaing maintained his position, from which he was to retire this July. The November 2020 election saw the NLD win by an even larger majority so something had to be done to ensure military’s continued hold on power.

The Tatmadaw alleges that the November 2020 elections, termed ‘free and fair’ by external observers and Union Election Commission of Myanmar were fraudulent. On this pretext,

General Hlaing has taken over the country’s political reign, pushing the country’s process of democratisation decades behind. The official announcement of a year long state emergency in the early morning of 1 February, by acting President U Myint Swe, was followed by a transfer of power to the military. The arrest of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President at the time, Myint Win, along with the entire NLD leadership, as well as many other dissenters leaves the democratic process crippled. What provides a glimmer of hope is that in spite of crackdown and internet blackout in many parts of Myanmar, the people have begun to stand up to the Bang Jago, the symbolic oppressor in the garb of military rule. But with history repeating itself for the third time, even most optimistic assessments expect a return of democracy to be a long haul.

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Unilateral Sanctions amidst pandemic: Implications for SDGs

One of the most difficult problems in international relations is to determine how best to prevent or respond to unacceptable political behaviour, violations of agreements and norms related to international security, without the use of force. Under the Charter of United Nations, Security Council is vested with the 'primary responsibility' for maintaining international peace and security through multilateral sanctions.



by Ms Upasna Vashisht

Unilateral sanctions, on the other hand, refer to economic measures taken by one State to compel a change in policy of another State. However, it is argued that unilateral sanctions lack legitimacy as opposed to the UN sanctions or other multilateral sanctions. The Covid-19 pandemic that has devastated economies is revealing humanity's starkest inequalities. UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres called it "the most challenging crisis we have ever faced since the Second World War". He said that Covid-19 pandemic has profound implications across multiple issues of trade, public health, socioeconomic inequality, and human rights.

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Among others, pandemic has adversely impeded the ability of states and international organisations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The imposition of unilateral sanctions have especially added to the additional economic, commercial and financial burden, impinging on

access to humanitarian aid and constraining the effectiveness of response to the Covid-19. International Progress Organization recently expressed concerns against state-imposed sanctions that especially affect the poor and needy children, disabled and the elderly.

International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies have also made appeals to countries imposing unilateral sanctions.

UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur, Alena Douhan recently spoke on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures, and raised alarm against unilateral sanctions imposed on about 20 per cent of UN member states in the times of Covid-19. Douhan states that such sanctions are discriminatory and impact targeted populations, especially women, children, medical personnel, refugees, migrants, the elderly, and people suffering from chronic diseases. For countries that depend on food imports, such unilateral sanctions disrupt existing food supply and result in increasing prices for food and medicines.

Douhan has urged states for lifting or suspension of all such unilateral sanctions as their humanitarian exemptions to these sanctions has not helped anybody. She also calls for minimising the scope of unilateral sanctions. Such review would ensure that the humanitarian exemptions (solidarity) or Tlaleng Mofokeng (UN special rapporteur on the right to health), Michael Fakhri (UN special rapporteur on the right to food), and Agnes Callamard (UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions) have voiced concerns and issued similar warnings on unilateral sanctions.

The 17 SDGs together cover many areas, such as poverty, health, environment, education,

innovation, inequality, peace, justice and institutions, and partnerships for development. Unilateral sanctions, on the other hand, are violative of the principles of International Law of Territoriality, Sovereignty and Self-determination. They also violate certain core principles of the UN Charter, like principle of sovereign equality and territorial integrity, principle of non-intervention, and duty to cooperate and the core principles of 1970 Friendly Relations Declaration. These include the principle of sovereign equality of states and peaceful settlement of disputes.

Unilateral sanctions place severe constraints on inclusive development and decision-making by choosing coercion over dialogue. These restrain the fulfilment of SDG 16 specifically that talks of Peace Justice and Development and aims to promote strong institutions. Sanctions per se may seem to be an appealing foreign policy tool intending to bring defaulting states in compliance with the demands of the UN Charter and international law, and COVID-19 should not be used as an excuse to disregard sanctions compliance in toto yet there is a strong case for re-evaluating unilateral sanctions. The maintenance of law and order in such unprecedented times of pandemic and ensuring inclusivity and justice requires a multilateral approach and a holistic review of the sanctions regime in general and of unilateral sanctions in particular.

In the past, UN sanctions have been successful, for example in Liberia where UN sanctions were placed on lucrative timber trade in 2003 and contributed to the downfall of President Charles Taylor. Joan B. Kroc, a leading Sanctions expert suggests that sanctions within a larger framework of dispute resolution become more robust and more effective. However, there also have been instances where UN sanctions have been marred by the power politics and narrow interests of five permanent members of UNSC like the sanctions proposed against North Korea and Sudan were,

weakened under Chinese pressure. Such politics leads to overshadowing concerns for improving the ability of the UN system to implement and design effective sanctions. As noted by Kimberly Ann Elliott, “it’s differences in interests and politics undermine the UN sanctions more than anything else”.

In the past, UN sanctions have been successful, for example in Liberia where UN sanctions were placed on lucrative timber trade in 2003 and contributed to the downfall of President Charles Taylor.

At the macro level there is an urgent need for reforms in sanction regime to ensure their efficacy without obstructing work towards realisation of SDGs. Involvement of major stakeholders is necessary as they are the actors responsible for the implementation of UNSC resolutions. Ian Johnstone suggests including non-Council members in Sanctions Committees to reduce deliberative deficit, and thereby enhance effectiveness of sanctions regimes. The international community must eliminate unilateral coercive measures that are not authorised by UN organs and are inconsistent with international law, basic principles of the multilateral trading system and violate fundamental norms of human rights. The fight against Covid-19, which knows no limits and borders, requires inclusive development in spirit of mutual respect to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity among people, states and international organisations.

Rise of China and the Quad Strategy: Implications for India

Imaginations of President Xi Jinping's 'China Dream' have been causing convulsions in the Indo-Pacific region. Major stakeholders like the US, Japan, India, and Australia (that together form Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad) have come together to evolve innovative strategies to manage China's unbending maritime assertions in and around the South China Sea. China's continued rise, and President Xi Jinping's pursuit of national rejuvenation of 'wealth and strength' has raised this disquiet and anxiety among academic and policymaking circles as well. Even in face of Covid-19 pandemic that triggered global health and economic crises, Beijing has claimed 2.3 percent economic growth taking its GDP to new heights of \$15.5 trillion which makes it all the more significant to reckon with its ever expanding footprint.



by Priyabala Singh

In this backdrop, it is intriguing how China's continued belligerence, especially its encroaching upon territories in the East and South China Seas, and in the Southern Pacific and the Himalayan landmass have witnessed a spike even during the difficult times of the pandemic. And as countries in China's immediate neighborhood have been reassessing their extant strategies to counter their shared China challenge, this Quad has come to be one such mechanism that seeks to evolve innovative ways in ensuring China following established rules of inter-state ties. This has seen Quad members deepen their strategic cooperation and launch new initiatives like ministerial level dialogues and joint naval exercises.

So much so that Quad has come to be recognised as an important constituent of their Indo-Pacific strategy and often referred as the Asian NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) that had

undergirded global stability during cold war years. To say the least, Quad aims to establish rules-based regional order with maritime, economic and diplomatic cooperation and connectivity. This is often read as their response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) symbolising its increasing influence in this region and beyond. After its inception as an idea following the joint response by these four countries to the 2004 Tsunami, the Quad was first initiated in 2007 but became dysfunctional in face of Beijing ire but also for change of leadership in Japan and Australia to be revived a decade later in 2017.

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China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is also perceived as its attempt to create parallel institutions to Bretton Woods institutions and especially a counter to Asian Development Bank. These financial institutions can promote China's soft balancing U.S. global leadership at a time when anti-China sentiment is at an all-time high due to the belief that ongoing coronavirus pandemic had originated in China and for its continued dangerous territorial expansionism. This is what makes experts assume that US would like to promote Quad as the new axis of regional security architecture to provide a secure and stable Indo-Pacific.

India's active engagement in the Quad therefore indicates its strategic calculus to secure its interests with a stronger maritime engagement and foreign policy outreach in the region. India as the only non-alliance partner in Quad was once considered its 'weakest link' has come to be questioned in view of souring Sino-Indian relations in recent times. The most recent Sino-Indian border tensions and especially the Galwan Valley incident of last summer has made India's engagement and enthusiasm in Quad a multiplying force in its Indo-Pacific strategy. India, that was so conscious of China's sensitivities that sees Quad as an anti-China enterprise, had shown some reluctance during the first phase of Quad in 2007. However, China's recent attitude towards India has goaded India to be far more pragmatic in engaging the Indo-Pacific strategy.

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It was to India's immense irritation that China has envisaged and sustained a special partnership with Pakistan resulting lately in its taking control of Gwadar port, selling submarines to Pak Navy and in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir thereby encroaching on India's sovereignty. China continues to block India's way into the Nuclear Suppliers Group and veto UN sanctions on a Pakistan based terrorist group that have committed acts of terror in India. All of these have compelled India to revisit its regional strategy where Quad is increasingly seen as the answer to countering China's expanding footprint in India's periphery.

And now, since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, China's relations with other Quad members have also deteriorated. This has together given Quad a new lease of life -- with fresh vigour, more commitment, and immense drive to emerge as a stronger axis of new regional security architecture for the Indo-Pacific geopolitics. India can be an asset to this new axis with the world's second-largest population, third-largest defence budget, fifth-largest economy. India can contribute immensely to the strength of the Quad and regional collective security strategy. Then, the combined strength of the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia can easily deter China's unilateral undermining of norms.

Quad represents a quarter of the world's population, more than 25 percent of the world's GDP, more than double the size of China's economy, and four times its military budget. However, while building new partnerships and alliances in Quad and Quad plus, India should not ignore its immediate neighborhood. One of the central goals of India's foreign policy should be to strengthen its relations with its neighbours like Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh, especially where China has been exerting its influence and trying to isolate India in the Indian Ocean and South Asia. India's Quad strategy therefore will have to be a 'multiyear, multi-layered' strategy. The success of Quad lies not in fighting but in winning without fighting.

Webinar Session 35: January 20, 2021

Dr Oliver Stuenkel; “The Emerging Tech War and the Future of Global Order”



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*Participants will be given E-Certificate on request, who either made comments or asked questions during webinar

AAS Webinar Series (every 1st & 3rd Wednesday): Session 35
20 January 2021 (Wednesday), 05:30 PM- 07:00 PM (IST)

THE EMERGING TECH WAR AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL ORDER

POST WESTERN WORLD
 HENRI STUENKEL

Speaker:
Dr Oliver Stuenkel
 Associate Professor of International Relations at FGV in São Paulo, Brazil

Chair:
Prof Swaran Singh
 President, AAS

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Webinar Host: Dr. Reena Marwah, Secretary-General, AAS

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The AAS hosted Prof. Oliver Stuenkel, Associate Professor of International Relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV) in Sao Paulo, for the 35th session in the webinar series. Prof. Stuenkel believes that the world has become increasingly multipolar not only through the economy and military power but also through the intellectual growth. He further added that Brazil needs to engage more in IBSA and BRICS for its better foreign relations. He says that the stronger the institutional ties, the better the relations between the countries. He emphasized the on-going ‘Battle of Digital Supremacy’ by mentioning the Huawei’s 5G. The meeting of President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and the then President Trump of the United States of America in 2019, led to Mr. Trump asking the Brazilian government to ban Huawei. This caused hesitation that turned to an ideological debate in Brazil. The country that is trying to balance its powers with the USA might consider Huawei to expand its technology. Yet again, the country is sceptical about availing the 5G network from China due to data privacy. Letting a country handle its internet, a free space, can lead to privacy issues especially when banking, military, and other things of national importance are now operated with the help of the internet. The speaker pointed out that there are many other issues involved too, like the cost of installing the

cyber architecture required for the 5G. Brazil is not a technologically savvy country unlike many of its allies. The economy is greatly supported by its large agriculture sector. Brazil might not be able to set up its own architecture, also because the leap from 4G to 5G is much greater than that of 3G to 4G. On the other hand, farmers of Brazil, who are the backbone of the Brazilian economy, are enthusiastic about the 5G which might make their work easier. Prof. Stuenkel also elucidated about the ‘New Cold War’ between China and the USA. He has mentioned that it can be less of cold war because China doesn’t emphasize the spread of communism and is rather more capitalist than the capitalist countries. Yet, he believes, the term ‘New Cold War’ is too important to be ignored. Nonetheless, Brazil, during these times, is adopting ‘Strategic Neutrality’, like India’s ‘Strategic Autonomy.’ In the speaker’s opinion, with the arrival of the new government in the USA, there might be less aggression between the USA and China but the hostility might remain. These uncertain times might help countries like Brazil and India to create their own niche in global politics. Prof. Stuenkel concluded by mentioning that Brazil antagonizes neither China nor the USA. Brazil is trying to establish its own position in the world.

by Kura Sunaina

News in Pictures



North Korea: Kim Jong-un organized a parade in the capital city Pyongyang on 15th January 2021 to launch the submarine ballistic missiles. Credit: Defence News



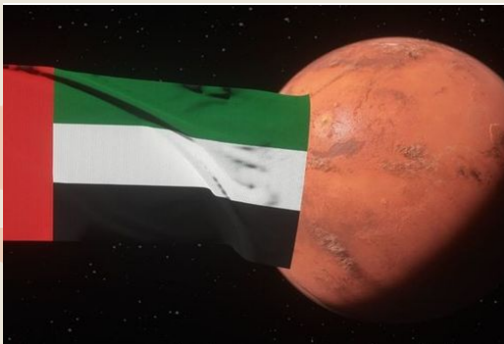
United States of America: Joe Biden becomes the 46th President of USA and Kamala Harris becomes the 49th vice-president of USA. Credit: National Herald



Bhutan: Bhutan becomes the first country to get the Indian Covid-19 vaccine. Credit: dnaindia.com



Myanmar: On 1st February 2021 Myanmar military did a coup. In this picture we can see Myanmar Prime Minister Aung San Suu Kyi with the army chief Min Aung Hlaing. After the coup, Aung San Suu Kyi was detained by the Myanmar military. Credit: India.com



United Arab Emirates: UAE becomes the first Arab as well as the first Islamic country to enter the Mars orbit. Credit: express.co.uk



Sri Lanka: The island country cancels port deal with India on the Eastern Container terminal of the Colombo port. Credit: IndianExpress.com



China: World Health Organization [WHO] visits Wuhan, start fieldwork by visiting Wuhan Institute of Virology and CDC lab to trace virus origin. Credit: mynews13.com



Yemen: Joe Biden has decided to pull his support from Saudi Arabia in the Yemen civil war. Credit: JNS.org



India: The Bangladeshi Military taking part in the Republic day parade of India, Credit: DY365



Myanmar: People are also demanding to free Aung San Suu Kyi, Credit: The Bangkok Post

Feedback

It was a great opportunity to collaborate with the Association of Asia Scholars (AAS) to organize a discussion on the Future of Disarmament and Nuclear Arms Control. AAS always has an excellent line up of amazing discussions on important issues.

Dr. Pramod Jaiswal
Research Director
Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement

The AAS webinars are very educational and thought provoking. The best part about them is the diverse array of topics which are covered and the expertise that gathers to discuss them. Attending these seminars helps me understand how theories and academic knowledge transforms into real world solutions when put to use by the right minds.

Abhyoday Sisodia
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This issue is comprised of theoretically well-grounded and evidence-driven research papers on comparative issues of Asian countries.

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