

# Research report

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Stabilizing the Myanmar situation

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## Introduction

At least 740 deaths. 3,331 people under detention. 1,059 more arrest warrants. 20 death sentences and 14 facing three years in jail with hard labor. These are just a few of the horrifying statistics as a consequence of the ongoing situation in Myanmar. On February 1, the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi was removed from office by the Myanmar army, officially known as the Tatmadaw. The group seized power and declared a national state of emergency, to last a full year. All executive, legislative and judicial powers were handed over to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) published a statement on behalf of her urging people to protest against the coup. The entire situation has since then escalated severely, worrying international human rights organisations and global economic relationships. A large death toll and high number of arrest warrants call for the Myanmar situation to be stabilised.

In this report, a history of the region and country will be provided in order to understand the current situation, supported by a timeline of the recent events of the past year. The goal of this report is to aid delegates in gaining a general understanding of the different perspectives to the situation and an insight into the different relations between the parties involved in order for them to use the information in the debate.

“Under the UN Charter, ECOSOC is responsible for promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems; facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. ECOSOC's purview extends over 70 percent of the human and financial resources of the entire UN system.”[UN.org]

In light of this, this report will mostly review the economic and social issues which have arisen in and due to the Myanmar situation, encompassing human rights violations and economic setbacks for the people of Myanmar and its closest trade partners and both their influences on global social justice and economic prosperity.

Stabilisation in Myanmar and the surrounding region is of detrimental importance, seeing as people will keep suffering; their human rights violated and their quality of life diminished.

## Definitions of key terms

### Burma

Another name for the country of Myanmar. The official English name was changed by the country's government from the "Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" in 1989, and still later to the "Republic of the Union of Myanmar". Controversy remains over the use of either one, with countries not willing to recognise the changed name. [Wikipedia]

### Failed State

A state that is unable to perform the two fundamental functions of the sovereign nation-state in the modern world system: it cannot project authority over its territory and peoples, and it cannot protect its national boundaries. [Britannica]

### Five-Point Consensus

Reached on the 24th of April, during the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting (ALM) in Brunei Darussalam, in which five points were laid out with which the ASEAN would seek to tackle the issues in Myanmar. [ASEAN.org]

### Junta

A military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force. [Oxford Languages]

### National League for Democracy

is Aung San Suu Kyi's political party in Myanmar, founded on 27 September 1988. The party is an advocate of non-violence movements towards multi-party democracy in Myanmar. NLD proclaims to support human rights, the rule of law and national reconciliation. [Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats]

### National state of emergency

Entails, under the Myanmar Constitution of 2008 section 418, that all legislative, executive and judicial powers of the Union are transferred to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services, enabling them to carry out necessary measures to restore the Union. All legislative functions of the parliament of Myanmar are automatically suspended and dissolved from the day of declaration. [Myanmar Times]

### Tatmadaw

Literally 'Armed Forces', is the official name of the armed forces of Myanmar (Burma). It is administered by the Ministry of Defence and composed of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. [Wikipedia]

# General overview

## History

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, previously also known as the Union of Burma is located in Southeastern Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, between Bangladesh and Thailand. It is home to a plethora of religions and ethnic groups, leading to numerous internal conflicts over the years and distressing human rights organisations. According to statistics from 2014, the largest part of the population is Buddhist (87.9%), followed by Christian (6.2%) and Muslim (4.3%).

Historically, most of the land in Myanmar is either covered in forests or used for agricultural purposes, consequently the majority of the population lives inland and off farming and agriculture. Another large source of income to Myanmar lies in the export of the substantial revenue of natural gas to be found in the country, with 3739 km of pipes. Myanmar is the 16th largest exporter in comparison to the world, with its biggest partners being China and Thailand (24%), making the internal affairs of Myanmar important to global economic proceedings and thus the interest in its political and social stability of equal importance.

Myanmar gained independence in 1948 from the United Kingdom and since then the armed forces have been heavily involved in domestic politics and ran the country through a junta for five decades following a military coup in 1962. With the new regime came a new constitution in 1974, later amended and newly drafted in 2008 (still used today) with consequences to the recent events. As a result of the Constitution of 2008, even though other parties might gain power, the Tatmadaw retains substantial power. The Burmese military controls the People's Militia, Border Guard Forces and three key security ministries; the Ministry of Home Affairs, Defense and Border. Moreover, the Tatmadaw controls 25% of the parliamentary seats, two vice presidential appointments, and has a proxy political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

The Union of Myanmar is a parliamentary republic led by a president, a Chief of State and since the National League for Democracy came to power under leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi a State Counsellor, to be seen as an equal to the position of prime minister.

Before Aung San Suu Kyi became State Counsellor in 2015, she returned to Myanmar in 1988, as pro-democracy protests erupted against the junta (Tatmadaw) in which security forces opened fire on demonstrators in the August protests and hundreds were killed. Aung San Suu Kyi became increasingly outspoken against the military leadership and was put under house arrest by the junta as a consequence in July 1989.

In 1990, The National League for Democracy (NLD) was founded by Suu Kyi and won a landslide victory in the elections. The military, however, refused to hand over power. In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her peaceful struggle in Myanmar

against the regime, while still under house arrest. It was not until 2010 that she was officially freed from detention, all the while a pro-junta party had won Myanmar's first open elections in 20 years, a vote that was boycotted as 'unfair and rigged in its favour'. Finally in 2012, Suu Kyi took her seat in Burmese parliament after winning a byelection; a landmark for democracy with this her first time holding public office. Things seemed to be taking a turn for the better and in favour of democracy, reaching a high tide in 2015 when the NLD won a sweeping victory in the first openly held general elections since 1990. Unlike the unacceptance of the junta of the results at that time, now, Suu Kyi gained the position of State Counsellor, a post specially created for her to lead the government seeing as the constitution barred her from the presidency due to her British nationality (not Burmese).

Today, Myanmar is party to Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Climate Change-Paris Agreement, The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Nuclear Test Ban, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 2006, and Wetlands; all has signed and ratified all. Myanmar is also an active member of ADB, ARF, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, CP, EAS, EITI (candidate country), FAO, G-77, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCs, IHO, ILO, IMF, IMO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, IPU, ISO (correspondent), ITU, ITUC (NGOs), NAM, OPCW (signatory), SAARC (observer), UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WHO, WIPO, WMO, and WTO.

### Current situation

On February 1 2021, the Tatmadaw or military of Myanmar committed a coup against the reigning government; the State Counsellor in power and her party, the NLD.

The coup is the result of the most recent general elections held in Myanmar on November 8 2020, where the National League for Democracy party once again won the elections with an overwhelming majority. In the Burmese House of Nationalities, the NLD won by 61.6%, followed by a second place of 3.1% for the USDP. Moreover, the NLD won substantially in the House of Representatives with 58.6% to a runner-up percentage for the USDP of 5.9. Nevertheless, the history of 1990 repeated itself and the Tatmadaw disagreed with the results, in this instance claiming voter fraud.

On January 29 2021, Myanmar's election commission rejected the military's allegations of fraud in the elections, finding no evidence to support the claims.

As could be seen on February 1, the Tatmadaw did not accept this outcome. As legal backing for

their coup and removing the NLD from power, the military used section 417 of the Burmese Constitution: "if there is sufficient reason for the disintegration of the Union or national solidarity or that may cause the loss of sovereignty due to acts or attempts to take over the sovereignty of the Union by insurgency, violence and wrongful forcible means, the President may, after coordinating with the National Defence and Security Council, declare a state of emergency."

Section 417 is followed by section 418, in which is put forth how a state of national emergency is to be implemented and what measures are to be taken. Section 418 states: "The President shall declare the transferring of legislative, executive and judicial powers of the Union to the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services to enable him to carry out necessary measures to restore the Union. All legislative functions of parliament will be suspended and dissolved automatically from the day of declaration of the state of emergency."

And thus, Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing is now in power of the State of Myanmar, while Vice President U Myint Swe serves temporarily as President instead of Win Myint, who together with Aung San Suu Kyi is put under house arrest, the NLD and Suu Kyi's lawyer stated. The NLD urged its followers and the people of Myanmar to retaliate. The protests as seen on the news are the result, as are the horrifying injuries of these peaceful protesters. On February 2, newly appointed Chairman of the State Administration Council of Myanmar Min Aung Hlaing established a State Administration Council as the executive governing body to replace the dissolved Burmese parliament, chaired as said by himself and of which half the members are military personnel.

Many people of Myanmar immediately took to the streets in formal and informal protests, quickly broken up by soldiers of the Tatmadaw. People ceased going to work, in strike against the regime. As per the constitution, the government controls all domestic broadcast media and has now, as a measure of the state of national emergency, withdrawn all access to electricity and internet throughout the country. The first large-scale protests were seen on February 6 and 7 in the city of Yangon and which spread quickly to other cities. By February 8, the police were using water cannons to disperse the crowds, and the junta proclaimed that any action taken against them, including protests, would be seen as unlawful. In lieu of this, the Tatmadaw imposed martial law and a nightly curfew that same day. People still demonstrated on February 9 and the military reacted with live and rubber bullets to break up the protests, prompting the United

Nations office in Myanmar to issue a statement: 'calling the use of disproportionate force against demonstrators unacceptable.

Protests have continued throughout the year, both pro-junta and by those opposed.

Essentially, the biggest concern is the ease of which the Tatmadaw is now in power and the way

they gained it and are defending it against protesters. Peaceful protests are protected by international law, included in article 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (click [here](#) to view). The harmful way in which the military are dispersing crowds of protestors is only part of the social injustice occurring in Myanmar. With the government's focus on retaining power and breaking up protests, measures to eradicate the Covid-19 virus are minimal, with a collapsed health system and infections and death tolls rising all the time.

Together with these social and humanitarian disconcertments, economic repercussions are rising. Distressing examples are the plummet of shares in Burmese stocks and the Norwegian telecommunications company Telenor Group saying it is in the process of evaluating its presence in Myanmar due to the ongoing situation. Telenor is one of the biggest foreign investors in Myanmar and the second-largest mobile provider in the country.

In addition to Norwegian interests, China is also deeply invested in the fate of Myanmar, counting on the country's stability for its import of natural gas from Burmese plants. Contingency plans seem to be in place, with Chinese troops assembling on the border of Myanmar, worrying international institutions. For further reading see source ...

In March UN Special Envoy Christine Schraner already cautioned Myanmar was on the verge of spiralling into a failed state and UN Special Requetor Tom Andrews going so far as to call the situation of human rights in Myanmar crimes against humanity. Both these statements are a call for immediate action in the region.

## **Major parties involved**

### *Myanmar (NLD)*

One of the most obvious major involved parties. The NLD has most of the people of Myanmar as its followers, as the party fights for democracy in Myanmar under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. As a result of the coup, many NLD members have been arrested alongside Suu Kyi. The NLD would seek to be reinstated as the governing party of Myanmar, as it won the elections on

November 8 2020 with an overwhelming majority.

### *Myanmar (Tatmadaw)*

The military of Myanmar, the Tatmadaw is a major party in this issue with its interests being to retain their newly gained power over the state of Myanmar. The Tatmadaw is currently the official governing party of Myanmar, with its leader the Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing. The Tatmadaw will always remain powerful in Myanmar, due to the Constitution of 2008, in which it is given indefinite power over a few Ministries and other governmental and military institutions.

### *China*

The People's Republic of China is heavily invested in the political and economic outcome of the situation in Myanmar. Since 2010, China and Russia have been the leading suppliers of military hardware to the country. China is also Myanmar's largest export partner and has several factories on and pipelines in Burmese land. As a precaution to guard their interests in the country, Chinese troops have been seen gathering on the border of Myanmar; said to have rapid response capabilities if it is deemed necessary to guard the Kyaukpyu pipelines. The pipelines are a significant part of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Myanmar, along with the Muse–Mandalay highway, the Myitkyina Industrial Zone and the Yangon Redevelopment plans. China is a member of the UN Security Council and thus can wield a lot of power over the measures the UNSC might implement in tackling the issue. China is also a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

### *Russian Federation*

The Russian Federation is an influential party in the situation in Myanmar, as it is the leading supplier of military hardware to the country together with China. The Russian Federation is part of the East Asia Summit, closely connected to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Russian Federation has expressed support for a ASEAN diplomatic effort and for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus.

### *United States of America*

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The United States of America is the 10th-largest source of investment in Myanmar, invested in six Burmanese enterprises with nearly \$330 million since September 2020. The US wanted to provide a strong foundation for the country's continued democrati-zation and expressed alarm at the deteriorating situation in Myanmar. A statement by the US stated it will take action against those responsible if these steps (the coup) are not reversed.

### *OHCHR*

The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner is the UN body responsible for international human rights and conflicts in which they are compromised. Basic human rights

have been violated in Myanmar, for example the freedom of expression and the freedom to meet with others in a peaceful way. Protestors have also been fired upon without just cause and arrested with unjust detention or fair trial.

## ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a UN body of Southeast Asian countries to further cooperation and relations between these nations. The ASEAN has taken a diplomatic route and has opened talks with the Tatmadaw, effectively legitimizing the country's military rulers. To honour diplomacy, the ASEAN has presented the world with a Five-Point Consensus together with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing of the Tatmadaw. The consensus would serve as a basis for the stabilisation of the situation in Myanmar. Click [here](#) for the Five-Point Consensus.

## Timeline of Key Events

4 January 1948 Myanmar gains Independence from the United Kingdom 2

March 1962 First coup of the military of Myanmar

August 1990 August Protests, first large-scale protests against military regime

8 February 2016 Aung San Suu Kyi takes her place as Myanmar's head of government for the first time

8 November 2020 The National League for Democracy wins a landslide victory in the general elections of Myanmar

29 January 2021 Myanmar's election commission denies military claim of voter fraud at general elections

1 February 2021 The Tatmadaw commits a coup and proclaims a national state of emergency

9 February 2021 The military uses live ammunition for the first time to disperse protests against the regime

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24 April 2021 ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in Jakarta, Five-Point consensus announced

26 July 2021 The Myanmar junta cancels 2020 election results: "It was not free and fair.."

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

The situation in Myanmar has been in need of stabilisation ever since February 1, and a few efforts have been attempted. Numerous GoFundMe accounts have been initiated for alarmed people around the world to donate to local journalists, protestors via the Civil Disobedience Movement and other local organisations. Through these donations, the people of Myanmar are aided in their struggle for democracy and freedom of press. Another way in which people have aided the cause in Myanmar is through international journalism, informing the world of the Burmese situation. Whilst

Myanmar's health system is in a diminished state, countries around the world have donated oxygen equipment and vaccinations to hospitals across the country.

While the composition of the UN Security Council and its directives makes it hard for the SC to take hard and immediate action, in June the General Assembly has been able to adopt a resolution which condemns the military's use of lethal force and violence, and supports the efforts by the Special Envoy and regional bloc ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The European Council has numerous times implemented sanctions against the state of Myanmar. The ASEAN has put forth a Five-Point consensus, said to be usable as a basis for the resolve of the issue. These efforts made by the ASEAN seem to have the most potential.

## Possible solutions

To stabilize the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, all the efforts already in place are necessary and possible solutions to be prolonged and expanded. Donations to local efforts and protest groups are essential, helping the people of Myanmar on a small, but useful scale. To uphold the human rights of the people, social and economic stability, however, measures on a large scale need to be taken. Such initiatives as resolutions by the UN General Assembly and Security Council are a way forward, yet these are only effective if the regime in Myanmar is willing to listen and adhere to the regulations put forth by these international institutions. Sanctions against the country are useful, except for the fact that sanctions also have detrimental effects for the working people of Myanmar and their income stability. The Five-Point consensus proposed by the ASEAN is a diplomatic approach to the situation, considered through talks with the regime and such initiatives are even more important to stabilizing the area than sanctions, due to the fact that talking and discussing is always the better way forward, as opposed to threats and sanctions. The constitution of Myanmar needs to be taken into consideration, as it aids the Tatmadaw more than the democratic NLD.

To tackle the issue, both small-scale efforts such as donations and large-scale efforts such as keeping the world informed on the situation in Myanmar and implementing measures to halt the aggressive actions taken against protests are essential possible solutions. Proposing action to safeguard the human rights of the Burmese people is also necessary, as is freeing the arrested protestors and members of the NLD. Organising peace conferences with all sides present is also a

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possible solution, yet contingency plans need also be considered such as expanding sanctions already in place. Effective and sustainable solutions are called upon, in order for the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to prosper and peacefully move forward.

## Further reading

Read the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting's Chairman's full statement. [[ALM Meeting Statement](#)]

See any of the used sources of the bibliography and read local newspapers of Southeast Asia, such as the Myanmar Times and Channel News Asia.

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