Contesting US hegemony: a case study on Myanmar

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Abstract

In the "unipolar" world, the US claims to use its power to liberal states and civil societies. Myanmar is an anomaly, seemingly untouched by this influence. Since 1988, the military has vastly expanded its power and its roles in the society. The number of armed forces has increased. Intelligence gathering has proliferated. Military-created institutions have taken a larger role in the economy, generating more funds for various activities. The military has neutralized most of the ethnic insurgents, and created a wide range of organizations with roles in society. It has also inculcated an ideology in which the military is indispensable for political stability, and demands attention as a source of mobility and patronage. At the same time, there is no independent judiciary; civil society organizations are crushed; political parties are harassed; the universities are strictly controlled; and the Buddhist sangha is closely monitored. Sources of change lie in outside pressure, economic crisis, and internal conflicts within the military machine.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism as an alternative political and economic order have led some to suggest that the new international environment would turn into a "unipolar" system, directed by the only remaining superpower, the United States. The success of Bush Senior in the first Gulf War along with Clinton’s interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo appeared to indicate that “Pax Americana” was in fine shape. The quick triumph in Afghanistan and the initial military success in Iraq strengthened the belief that now and more than ever the US has a greater share of world power than any other country since the emergence of the nation-state system. The US claims to use this power to support the growth of liberal states and civil societies. But in former colonies without active political participation at the grassroots level, efforts to create a military strong enough to protect the political community from internal and international threats may result in a military that dominates the state and becomes an instrument for

internal repression. This is especially interesting in a country with cultural pluralism, since communal disparities between ethnic groups pose difficulties for an orderly democratic regime. To control inter-communal conflict, the army sometimes assumes command of the state and expands its role beyond national security to include politics, government, and economy. Myanmar stands out in South East Asia on such a case in point.

**Literature review: military, political science, and the debates**

The literature in English on post-colonial Myanmar discusses the rise of direct military rule. Some analyses focus on control and coercion. Martin Smith, for example, terms the Myanmar regime as a state of fear. According to Smith, despite the promise of fundamental change since the great democracy uprising, the situation today is without doubt more repressive than at any time in the recent past. Christina Fink agrees with these diagnoses when she maintains that successive military regimes in Myanmar have managed to hang on to power by using a combination of repression, intimidation, financial incentives, and propaganda. Given the extremity of the situation, it is not surprising that some recent works have preferred to highlight the roles of repression, media bias, patronage, coercive legislation, and politically motivated arrests of oppositional figures. Unfortunately, these accounts fail to distinguish whether the authoritarian characteristics of the regime merely act as an added lever for dominance, or are fundamentally responsible for military rule.

Another genre of explanations has been based on widespread traditionalist claims that military rule in Myanmar came about due to flaws in Myanmar society. Lucian Pye says that the military rule derived from Myanmar socialization practices: infants are not given predictable security, children are routinely subjected to fear, and Myanmar culture evinces a deep ambivalence about power. Mikael Gravers claims that the initial explanation of Myanmar’s present situation must be sought in the legacy of the colonial era or rather in the nationalistic paranoia which was generated by developments following independence in 1948—a paranoia linking fear of the disintegration of both union and state with fear of a foreign takeover of power and the disappearance of Myanmar culture. In these traditionalist claims lies the notion that military activities, behaviour, and characteristics are determined primarily by social forces—classes, political associations and collective personalities. However, one can argue that the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the
populace in Myanmar have changed since independence, but the dominant military state remains entrenched for other reasons.

New institutionalist writers have demonstrated in their studies of the state that institutions are not only influenced by society but also influence these social forces and structure their opportunities, possibilities, and problems. David Steinberg finds that the nature of power and its structure of organization remained unchanged throughout the BSPP and SLORC/SPDC periods, but there have been changes in the way the state has responded to both mass mobilization and civil society. Mary Callahan maintains that the endurance of the military regime in Myanmar in the 1990s must be read not as a story of building an omnipotent monolith, but as a story of attempts to obfuscate the shortcomings and failure military rule. Although there are cracks in the military edifice, the regime has survived in part because of the population’s ambivalence about the military, in part because of the resonance of the military’s views of society with important segments of the population, and in part because of the way military leaders have held the armed forces together against centrifugal forces.

From the above discussion, we see that there is no shortage of variables that are seen to produce the unusual durability of military rule. They include the role of control and coercion, flaws in the society, as well as institutional development of the army. In my view, the endurance of the military regime in the 1990s results from a complex interaction between state and society in which none of these factors, considered alone, are sufficient to explain its continued existence. In some sense, all of the explanations above play a role. But such analyses will be incomplete if they neglect the role of civil society organizations in shaping social structure as much as they are constrained by it. In other words, their inability to develop more dynamic organizational mechanisms has been another critical aspect in rejuvenating the military rule.

**The origins of military rule in Myanmar**

The post-war period began in chaos. In 1945, nationalist leader General Aung San and his nationalist forces turned against their Japanese allies by forming a shaky alliance with communists and the British Special Operation Executive. The result was a tenuous coalition of mostly ethnic Burmese nationalists fighting alongside the Anglo-Burman and Karen troops against whom they had fought in 1942 and whom they considered “mercenaries.” Upon defeating the Japanese, these British-led
forces were reorganized under conditions of considerable division both between and amongst British officials, indigenous loyalists, Burmese socialists, communists, and rightists. Tension was rife and within two months of independence in 1948 the country was beset by rebellion, insurrection, and disorder. By this time, one half of the government troops had mutinied and nearly that proportion of the army’s equipment was gone; important cities like Mandalay, Maymyo, Prome, and even Insein (a suburb of the capital, Rangoon) fell to insurgent control. At the same time, private “pocket armies” were rallying under competing politicians all around the country. Hence, by the time Ne Win assumed the position of commander-in-chief in 1949, he commanded only two thousand remaining troops.

In part, the tatmadaw developed the governing capabilities that made military rule possible because civilian rulers despatched the army to many parts of Burma to fight communists and US-backed Kuomintang units, to enforce martial law, and to establish military administration during internal crises. In the first step toward reform, Lt. Col. Aung Gyi formed the Military Planning Staff (MPS) to provide immediate advice in “charting a clear cut course of military activities and in advising the Government to map the road to peace within the State and readiness for national emergency covering all aspects, military, political, social, economic, etc.” The military was alone among the state’s three major institutions—the others being the bureaucracy and the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL)—in consolidating some kind of authority that stretched to the borders.

The development of the Cold War also privileged the tatmadaw among institutions in Burmese society. Responding to the insecurity of Burma’s geographical and ideological position in the Cold War, the MPS completely restructured the division of labour between civilian and military leaders over defence policy, notably shrinking the civilian secretary’s control over internal army affairs. Furthermore, the MPS terminated the contract of the tatmadaw’s British advisors, wrote the first draft of military doctrine, and created educational and training institutions that remain in place to today. As observed by Robert Taylor, the tatmadaw took a leading role in managing the impact of the world economy and of the international states’ system in the 1950s; by the end of the decade, the army fully managed the impact of the world economy on the national economy through its import-export operations under the Defense Services Institute. The MPS also created the Psychological
Warfare (Psywar) Directorate, a pet project of Prime Minister Nu, as a quid pro quo for Nu agreeing to finance the army's ambitious reorganization plans. Former communists and socialists were invited to write an ideology synthesizing communism and socialism within the context of Buddhist society. Oddly enough, the early drafts contain many sentences and concepts that became the basis for the post-1962 socialist regime's core ideology, "The Burmese Way to Socialism." The effectiveness and autonomy of the MPS contrasted with the position of the ruling AFPFL, and suggests another early source of the army's growing strength vis-à-vis other institutions within the postcolonial state. As weak civilian institutions came apart under the domestic and global pressures of the 1950s, the tatmadaw was busy with what can only be seen in hindsight as state-building activities.

The socialist period

The institutional innovations of the tatmadaw in the 1950s made possible the two coups of 1958 and 1962, which brought army leaders to national political power and eliminated their civilian competitors. Under the leadership of the commander-in-chief, General Ne Win, the 1962 coup group formed a Revolutionary Council and established the Leninist-style Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). The army-dominated BSPP restructured state and society and ruled unchallenged for thirty years. The strength of the regime merely represents one side of military rule. On the other, the failure of the armed forces and its founder to allow the BSPP to become a viable governing party in its own right gradually weakened the government in the long term. In Robert Taylor's view, the inability of the party to move away from its military character stemmed from the unwillingness of the army leadership, and especially General Ne Win, to allow autonomous institutions to develop—perhaps to safeguard the regime, perhaps for reasons of personal survival.

The failure of the BSPP regime to institutionalize itself was further reflected in the state's leaders' inability to incorporate their own ideological construction, the "Burmese Way to Socialism" and The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment, into their own beliefs. As Brig. Gen. Aung Gyi writes in a series of his open letters, "Just because the General wanted to go the way of socialism, did everyone try to out-socialist each other." Unlike the ideological beliefs of socialist leaders in China and Vietnam, these constructions had not grown out of
political or revolutionary experiences of party leaders or followers. As with one-party systems in Europe, Asia, and Africa, the military origins of the BSPP made it extremely difficult to develop into an institution able to provide individuals with either effective channels of communication or meaningful opportunities to participate in the country's political processes. The party's weaknesses became chronic when the larger state political and economic structures became bankrupt and the necessary financial resources to keep the system working were no longer available.

By 1988, the long-overdue collapse of the isolated socialist economy and severe mishandling by the police of a series of political disturbances led to an outpouring of anti-government demonstrations. With the resignation of party chairman General Ne Win and his promise of a multiparty system, it seemed to the Burmese public and the international community that a transition to democratic rule was inevitable. In the years surrounding the uprising, various state and social institutions competed for scarce material resources, human capital, and political power. The army suffered from organizational weaknesses during this period, yet its three decades of counterinsurgency warfare had built institutions with far more staying power than any others. On grounds that the army alone could contain the venality and self seeking of civilian politicians, *tatmadaw* units deployed throughout most of the major urban areas on 18 September 1988 and replaced the BSPP government with a new junta: the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

**The resilience of military regime in the 1990s: the military, economic, and political build-up**

In the first year after the 1988 uprising, the new SLORC regime seemed shaky, with no apparent sense of direction. Privately, a number of senior *tatmadaw* leaders admitted in off-record interviews during the 1990s that they never had any grand plan for government after the upheavals of 1988; for the first two years at least, they were simply reacting to events. As in the 1950s, the institutional renovations that transformed the army into a powerful force came out of day-to-day decisions by staff officers who were responding to particular crises, intentionally taking a chokehold on political power unparalleled in Myanmar history.

The reassertion of military dominance was achieved through a massive expansion and strengthening of the armed forces. According to
Andrew Selth, the tatmadaw has dramatically increased in size over the past ten years. Estimates vary greatly, but the number of Myanmar soldiers appears to have more than doubled from around 186,000 in 1988, to between 350,000 and 450,000 in 1999, besides another 85,000 personnel in the paramilitary People's Police Force and People's Militia, although these have limited combat performance. Myanmar's defence expenditure amounts to around 14 per cent of GNP, and the defence sector accounts for over 40 per cent of public sector spending. The annual defence budget is more than double that devoted to health and education combined. The United Nation Development Program has estimated that arms imports comprise more than one-fifth of Myanmar's total imports. All of these figures are approximate, but by any estimation it was a remarkable expansion in a very short time. Even without counting the People's Police Force and People's Militia, the Myanmar armed forces are now the second largest in Southeast Asia, and if Vietnam continues its planned troop reductions, Myanmar's may soon become the largest.

The regime's ability to maintain control over the whole country has been additionally underpinned by the military extensive intelligence apparatus. Although its structure appears in many respects to have remained the same, the size and scope of its operations, and the means by which they are conducted, have dramatically changed, according to J. H. Haseman and Andrew Selth. Enormous resources and effort are put into the surveillance of all potential enemies and dissidents, above and below ground, at home and abroad. Under the SLORC/SPDC, the National Intelligence Bureau has been retained as the country's highest intelligence organ, deciding broad policy and overseeing the activities of the country's other intelligence agencies. The Bureau reports directly to the SLORC/SPDC without going through the regional military commands. However, it appears that the Bureau is completely dominated by the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence which also directs the Military Intelligence Services, the largest intelligence organization in Myanmar. Outside the tatmadaw the intelligence agencies include the Criminal Investigation Department, the Special Investigation Department (or Special Branch), and the Bureau of Special Investigations, which are under the formal jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Other intelligence functions have also been exercised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, and the Ministry of Immigration and Population.
Winning civil war

Another part of the explanation of the Myanmar generals’ successful political recovery—or “re-equilibration” as political scientists call it—lies in their success over the last decade at forging “standfast” agreements with seventeen of the twenty-four ethnic armies that operate in or near sections of Myanmar’s long and remote land frontiers. Some claim that this has been achieved as a result of the expansion and enhancement of the tatmadaw’s operational capabilities since 1988. Others assert that the insurgent groups no longer have the same sort of external backing they once had and can hardly obtain resupply for major military equipment.

Whether or not the government’s counterinsurgency programme is sustainable, the benefits of ceasefire agreements for the tatmadaw are clear. They neutralize political challenges to the military regime and bring insurgent groups directly under the army’s management, through the border areas development ministry. They also keep the democratic opposition politicians out of reach of these ethnic groups. These quid pro quo arrangements mean that the Myanmar state, unlike such “failed states” as the government of Sierra Leone, has managed to reassert a degree of control over the disposition of the “lootable” resources that its country offers.

The management of dominance: economic growth and redistribution

The army modernization programme has additionally allowed the tatmadaw to strengthen the military’s predominance in key economic sectors. The military’s involvement in business has been firmly institutionalized. The Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Ltd (UMEH), formed in 1990 jointly owned with the Directorate of Defence Procurement, has established itself as the largest indigenous firm with a capital investment of over 4018 million kyats. As there is no public reporting of UMEH finances, the company operates an immense off-budget slush fund on behalf of the military leadership, who probably have channelled the profits into arms acquisitions programmes and dozens of initiatives aimed at constructing the tatmadaw’s new privileged social order and reordering the civilian population throughout the countryside.

Another military backed economic organization is the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC). The government authorized MEC to
undertake a wide range of economic activities and to act like a holding company for all other economic enterprises which were government monopolies under the State-Owned Economic Enterprise Law of 1989. The MEC has a capital of 10 billion kyats. In other words, MEC is a government within a government. The Directorate of Ordnance runs other tatmadaw-backed businesses some of which are commercial ventures and other exclusively for military supplies. According to Maung Aung Myoe, through the UMEH and MEC in particular, “the tatmadaw will be able to maintain its hold on various sectors of the economy.”

Managing dominance: stretching political bases, ideologies, and legitimacy

While the SLORC/SPDC seeks to consolidate its economic and military power, it is also building up bases for its political influence. One strategy is to guide the population through ideology. After dropping socialism as a state doctrine and tool of legitimization, the military has tried to place itself at the centre of national ideology and legitimacy. According to Steinberg, the tatmadaw has gone from being the “flag bearer” of socialism to becoming in a sense the central ideology of the state. However, the propagation of ideology has not been a total ideational construct. The military points to historical experience, especially the army’s role in winning independence from the British and the development of the tatmadaw as a powerful institution of control after Burma’s early years of insurrection and disarray, to give a certain plausibility to the idea of the tatmadaw as the stable and certain manager of society. When protests began in 1988, there was much anxiety in the officer corps about the future of the army and the integrity and independence of the state. The ethnic tensions that surfaced during the uprising also prompted a garrison mentality in which the tatmadaw portrayed itself as the guardian of the Myanmar people and protector of the Union. The tatmadaw proposed the ideology of the so-called “three national causes”: non-disintegration of the Union; non-disintegration of national solidarity; and perpetuation of national sovereignty. The SLORC/SPDC has further commissioned a series of new studies on Myanmar history and has built numerous museums throughout the country, all with the purpose of emphasizing to the people and its own personnel that “nothing good in contemporary Myanmar came to pass without the hard work of the tatmadaw.”

It is doubtful whether the SLORC/SPDC has succeeded in winning
the acceptance or support of significant segments of the civilian population. However, military control appears to be facilitated in more subtle ways by popular attitudes, beliefs, and values that impede the mobilization of organized opposition to the regime. Mary Callahan examines the attitudes of the population towards the military, and concludes that while the top generals and regional commanders are widely vilified, the military institution and particularly the individual soldiers are much less so. As she points out, one of the consequences of the militarization of Myanmar society is that almost every family has personal connections with the military. The military is practically the only avenue of upward mobility and an important source of patronage. It is thus "not a faceless institution, but a shelter, a benefactor and a safety valve." 

**Regime-sponsored organization**

The regime has also been extending control over the populace by establishing mass organizations under military leadership. The most important group is the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) which now has almost 12 million members. Registered as a social organization under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the USDA draws support mainly from military and civil servants who are not allowed to become members of political parties. Its membership is mandatory for all government employees and sometimes necessary for such fundamental transactions as school enrolment. It has also engaged in various economic ventures, and at the national level controls several companies. Some analysts points out that the USDA is the "Golkar for the tatmadaw," adapting the relations between the Indonesian armed forces and the Golkar party in Indonesia during the Suharto era into the Myanmar context. Furthermore, it is widely believed that the USDA will be transformed into a political party should the regime hold another election. In the mid and late 1990s, the regime also set up several new professional organizations such as the Auxiliary Fire Brigade, the Computer Entrepreneurs Association, Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, and the Myanmar Red Cross.

**The resilience of a military regime in the 1990s: state power**

The situation in Myanmar can be approached by highlighting the power of the state and the weakness of civil society. State power is
indicated by the high level of public revenues and surpluses which make up 46.7 per cent of GNP. State power is also reflected in what can be called state autonomy and capacity. The state is said to be autonomous because it is independent from intermediary institutions which in liberal society articulate the interests of citizens. In Myanmar, the state controls those interest groups in the sense that it has neutralized their potential to challenge the authority of the state. The power of the SLORC/SPDC also resides in a wide range of state instrumentalities (laws, legislative powers) which the regime controls and uses to ascertain compliance with its will. In particular, many of the laws which the military regime relies upon to support its actions are inaccessible and unknown. These laws are often introduced and applied in an ad hoc manner, and seldom do the authorities respond to requests for information or clarification concerning such laws. The power of legislation is strengthened by the lack of an independent and impartial judiciary and due process of law. According to Amnesty International, between 1988 and 1992 all political prisoners were tried by military tribunals—summary courts often held within jails—at which the defendants had no right to legal representation or to call witnesses.

State autonomy and capacity are likely to increase in the near future. A hand-picked National Convention was established to draft a new constitution promulgated in January 1993. The constitution provides for military control over the legislature and executive branches of government, with 25 per cent of seats reserved for tatmadaw officers in both houses of parliament, 110 out of 440 seats in the lower house (Pyithu Hluttaw) and 56 out of 224 in the upper house. In addition, the future president will be required to have military experience, and the three key security portfolios (defence, internal affairs, and border areas) are to be reserved for military officers.

**Civil society and its key actors: democratic opposition parties**

Democratic opposition parties continue to be the most significant factors in civil society although many have been de-registered and they cannot operate freely. The National League for Democracy (NLD) is the largest party. During the 1990 campaign it had over two million members and offices country-wide while winning 392 of 485 seats. Although the party is still legal, the regime attempts to squeeze it out of existence. Campaigns to crush the party have been waged using propaganda in the state-run media, labelling Aung San Suu Kyi as an
"axe-handle," "destructionist," and a "minion of neo-colonialism," among other hostile characterizations.\textsuperscript{53} MPs and other active members have been pressured to resign, and offices were closed. NLD associates who resist have been threatened with loss of business permits, transfers if they are civil servants, and denial of educational opportunities for their children.

The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), a legal party, continues to play a significant role in national politics. Its chairman Khun Htun Oo and several other SNLD delegates attended the regime-organized National Convention, but his party issued a letter of protest to the National Convention Convening Committee after that body proposed a constitution which bore little resemblance to the draft drawn up by the delegates. Khun Htun Oo has frequently represented the ethnic political parties in meeting with diplomats.\textsuperscript{54} In mid 2001, SNLD party members, like those of NLD, were reported to be under regular surveillance by military intelligence.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Students and the universities}

Another important intermediary between the state and the people is the education system. As elsewhere, the state uses its education system to inculcate certain attitudes in the minds of the country’s youth. University students’ political role effectively ended soon after the military retook control of the country in September 1988, with the arrest of student leaders and the imprisonment of hundreds of anti-government student activists. Teacher and student unions are banned, and in 1991 SLORC Law No. 1/91 prohibited all civil servants from engaging in politics.\textsuperscript{56} The decree does not however prohibit them from joining the USDA.

All universities' top administrators are government appointees. In 1991 and 1992, several teachers and university professors were believed to have been dismissed from their jobs for holding views contrary to those of SLORC.\textsuperscript{57} Some have been arbitrarily transferred, denied advancement, and ostracized by their more conformist and career-oriented colleagues. Academic conferences are tightly controlled to ensure that no anti-regime discussions emerge.\textsuperscript{58} Many scholars choose to emigrate to more liberal countries. The military government appears willing to sacrifice the country’s education system at all levels to keep trouble at bay. All universities were closed after the uprising on 8 August 1988, and not reopened until July 2000. Campuses were relocated from the capital to satellite towns, and a number of regional colleges were expanded.\textsuperscript{59}
Religious groups

Other organizations and institutions with the potential to counter the authority of the state are closely supervised or controlled by the government. The Buddhist sangha, which has traditionally been at the forefront of social justice movements in Burma such as the 1930s independence movement and the 1988 uprising, has been subjected to tighter control through a complex mix of regulations. Following the Saw Maung coup in 1988, the Buddhist clergy were again ordered to register themselves, as had been the case under the BSPP.\textsuperscript{60} To keep monks in line, the SLORC promulgated a new law in October 1990 banning all independent organizations of Buddhist monks and limiting sangha sects to nine.\textsuperscript{61} Leaders of the Christian and Muslim minorities have also complained of severe restriction under the SLORC/SPDC. Any activity that might be construed as proselytizing is banned and care has to be taken not to break the 2/88 Order which limits the size of public gatherings.\textsuperscript{62}

Conclusion: future openings and possibilities for change

The military government in Myanmar currently appears to be as strong as at any time in the country’s history. The regime controls all public aspects of political life and important parts of the private sector economy. Various institutional means have been put in place to ensure the continuity of military rule, including a robust and well-organized domestic intelligence apparatus. Despite its considerable strength, the regime’s stranglehold on power does have some vulnerability, especially economic fragility, international pressure especially from the United States and the European Union, and the possibility of intra-military rivalry—field commanders versus intelligence officers, the Yangon-based junta versus the regional commanders, and Defense Services Academy (DSA) graduates versus Officer Training School (OTS) graduates.

The military regime may be hurt by external sanctions, but domestically it seems to be in stronger position today than ever. A large scale expansion of the tatmadaw and its own intelligence apparatus over the last decade has greatly increased the junta’s capacity to control both the economy and politics. Besides a range of off-budget revenue sources, the generals’ involvement in business has been strengthened throughout the state economic enterprises which account for over three-quarters of medium and large establishments. The SLORC/SPDC has created state-
controlled mass organizations using ideological as well as institutional means in order to reinforce its civilian support base and pre-empt the formation of a genuine civil society. Moreover, the domestic military threat to the government in Yangon has been eliminated, at least for the time being, as most former insurgent groups have agreed to ceasefires.

The power of successive governments since 1988 also resides in a wide range of state instrumentalities and bureaucracy. The country’s legal system has been systematically run down in the absence of an independent and impartial judiciary and due process of law. Furthermore, the NLD, which remains the most significant political opposition force, has been under immense pressure from the authorities and is weakened by large-scale resignations from the party and the forced closure of many branch offices. It seems likely that the forces for democratic reform are supported by a majority of the population, but as long as these forces remain unorganized and immobilized, such support has little impact on national politics.

This is not to say that the current authoritarian rule is free from tensions. The government’s attempt to expand its administrative capacity throughout the country has been plagued by many difficulties. The intra-military rivalries cited above may develop into internal factions and collusive social-political links. A prolonged economic crisis and international pressure could very well test the legitimacy of the administration, although no one can be clear about what the political alternatives would be. Yet it is worth remembering that the tatmadaw is capable of institutional unification and has the option, if pressed, to rely on the more conformist and career-oriented corps. The tentative dialogue between military government officials and Aung San Suu Kyi in 2000 suggests that the generals could shift towards a more participatory system while gaining legitimacy in the process. With greater difficulty yet still within the realm of possibility, one could imagine the long-ruling military regime relinquishing its grip on power and giving way to democracy in the foreseeable future.

Notes

3 Mikael Graver, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on*
the Historical Practice of Power (Richmond: 1999), p. 8.


7 Callahan, ‘Origins of military rule,’ p. 4.


9 Callahan, ‘Origins of military rule,’ p. 5.


11 This term refers collectively to the army as well as the much smaller navy and air force. In this study, the name will be used interchangeably with “army” and “military.”


13 Mary P. Callahan, ‘Building an army: the early years of the Tatmadaw,’ Burma Debate 4, 3, p. 4.


15 Taylor, ‘Burma in the anti-Fascist war,’ p. 58.


17 Callahan, ‘On time warps,’ p. 60.


22 Andrew Selth, The Burmese Armed Forces Next Century: Continuity or


26 Selth, ‘Armed forces,’ p. 91.


34 ICG Report No, 11, p. 17.


36 Reynolds et al., ‘How Burma could democratize,’ p. 99


38 Maung Aung Myoe, *The Tatmadaw in Myanmar since 1988: An Interim Assessment*, p. 11


43 ICG Asia Report No. 11, p. 8.


45 Callahan, ‘Cracks in the edifice?’ pp. 31–3.

46 Callahan, ‘Cracks in the edifice?’ pp. 31–3.

51 Zunetta Liddell, ‘No room to move: legal constraints on civil society in Burma.’ In Burma Center Netherlands (BCN) and Transnational Institute (TNT), eds., *Strengthening Civil Society in Burma* (London: 1999), p. 57.
54 ICG Asia Report No. 27, p. 15
55 ICG Asia Report No. 27, p. 15.
57 Fink, *Living Silence*, p. 182.
58 ICG Asia Report No. 27, p. 19.
59 ICG Asia Report No. 27, p. 16.
61 Liddell, ‘No room to move,’ p. 66.