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# Military Rule in Myanmar: Through the Landscape of Authoritarian Power Consolidation

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## Abstract

*Military government in Myanmar is often considered most durable and powerful military rule in the world. Since 1962, the Junta has been ruling the country facing a lot of internal and external challenges and succeeded to consolidate its rule under various titles (Burma Socialist Programme Party, State Law and Order Restoration Council, and State Peace and Development Council) until 2011. This paper attempts to find out the distinctive factors that contributed to the military's ability to prolong its rule using authoritarian regime consolidation theory. It argues that the junta had strengthened its regime by applying a series of management policies such as establishing patronage network with different civilian sections of people, emphasising national ideology, directing coercive mechanism against anti-government forces, launching educational propaganda, applying media censorship, establishing a monopoly of power under a self-written Constitution, receiving external aid and assistance, etc. It is wholly a qualitative work based on secondary data sources and follows the historical and content analysis approach.*

**Keywords:** *military regime, authoritarian regime consolidation, clientelism, ceasefire capitalism, ethno-nationalism, ideology, authoritarian constitutionalism*

## Introduction

Most of the underdeveloped and developing countries suffer from military interventions in their early post-independence period. The jump from a subjugated status to a sovereign state heightens people's ambition for more opportunities in all spheres of life. In

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contrast, poor economy, weak leadership, inefficient bureaucracy, divided society, and illiterate population increases the pressures for the nation. The militaries then shoulders the responsibility of state building and establish their own regime. This type of regime, “basically, a system of managing government by the military”<sup>1</sup> is more or less authoritarian and interestingly Perlmutter finds that this is a fusion of civil and military in composition.<sup>2</sup> Whilst genuinely unable to handle governmental responsibilities and relying primarily on coercion, the military seeks the assistance from technocrats, politicians, businessmen, and even the working class.<sup>3</sup> In the context of Myanmar, a state created as military occupation where the Tatmadaw was seen as the main foundation for safeguarding national sovereignty and considered legitimate heir to Burma’s past, had repeatedly indulged in military intervention. The first military intervention occurred in 1958 but the 1962 military coup led by Ne Win led to a military rule over a longer period. Although the Tatmadaw handed over power to the civilian government (backed by its proxy party) in 2011, military still secures a dominant position in government.

This paper explores the strategies behind Myanmar’s military regime consolidation (mainly from 1962 to 2011) using the theory of authoritarian regime consolidation. Although literature is available to understand the reasons responsible both for military intervention and its withdrawal from politics in Myanmar, it is not enough to explain how Myanmar’s military rule evolved in the course of time in the modern world history in the face of sufficient external and internal obstacles.

In this regard, based on the secondary data sources and the historical and content analysis approach, this study analyses the factors directly or indirectly responsible for Myanmar’s prolonged military rule. It also answers why the responses in the shape of public demonstrations or any change of rulers resulted in repeated military

coups. It illustrates how the civilian society like students, monks, political parties, ethnic minorities, anti-state groups, business community, media, etc. played a vital role in consolidating the military regime in Myanmar.

This paper is divided into six sections, including an introduction and a conclusion. In the second section, an array of literature is discussed to identify the gaps in the existing body of knowledge on the subject of inquiry. The third section develops the theoretical ground for understanding the authoritarian aspects of military government. Additionally, it introduces three dimensions of power, e.g., discursive, infrastructural, and despotic to show how an authoritarian regime spreads its web of control in the society. A short backdrop of the origination of military force in Myanmar has been drawn in the fourth section. The fifth section is divided into eight subsections to discuss the major target groups and social issues identified by the Tatmadaw in terms opportunities and threats. This section finds out that people had not only been brutally oppressed through the strong coercive apparatus of the state but had also been facilitated through maintaining patronage networks in order to strengthen the military regime. In addition, civil society protests and ethnic insurgencies aimed at achieving greater autonomy were not only unable to challenge the Tatmadaw's control over the country but also provided a strong pretext for it to stay in power through a continuous emphasis on national ideology. While the generals repeatedly insisted on national ideology to highlight the civilian government's fragile rule, it was inherently just a ruse for enhancing the Tatmadaw's legitimacy to rule. In the face of sanctions, condemnation from Western countries, however, assistance and diplomatic support from China, India, and Japan played a key role in advancing the stability of military rule in Myanmar.

## Literature Review

Chu and Min<sup>4</sup> have contributed to build a theory on the repeated return of military to power after short spans of civilian government, termed 'military relapse'. The theory claims that the plausibility of relapse decreases if the political elite and military enjoy coequal unity. Chu and Min opine that in spite of inability to govern and in the face of domestic as well as international condemnation, the Tatmadaw did not give back power to civilian government due to a fear of retribution and the perceived higher cost of remaining in the barracks for them. It is true that these reasons cannot be ignored for explaining the willingness of the military to continue stay in power but are not enough to understand the tactics followed by the military regime to consolidate its control over the government.

Huang<sup>5</sup> has traced the current developments in Myanmar politics as 'a diminished form of authoritarianism'. According to the author, all institutional settings and historical succession of the Tatmadaw's role in state-building provide it with the ample opportunity to establish its dominance over the future government. In contrast, this work focuses not only on the institutional mechanism but also the socio-political, economic, and diplomatic factors responsible for Tatmadaw's regime consolidation.

The work of Bunte<sup>6</sup> argues that the military's withdrawal from direct rule does not mean return into the barracks; instead it expounds additional institutionalisation of military domination over the civilian government through setting up of a serious autocratic system called 'disciplined democracy' and, thus, ensuring its safe return to barrack. Jones<sup>7</sup> shows that the 'disciplined democracy' has originated from a methodology of coercive state-building, diplomatic setting, and economic incorporation through 'ceasefire capitalism' that reduces centrifugal challenges and makes the system adequately certain to impose its preferred settlement. Although Bunte and Jones have tried to find out the reasons behind the Myanmar military's prolonged rule, their explanation was limited to 1988-2010 period based upon the disciplined democracy. Moreover, Jones's political-economy explanation fails to articulate the Tatmadaw's response to the social obstacles.

Thawngmung<sup>8</sup> addresses four contributions that non-armed members of ethnic minority groups may make to the political system:

1. Supporting the status quo;
2. Transforming or undermining the status quo;
3. Promoting collective identity and culture and addressing humanitarian needs; and
4. Helping to mediate ceasefire agreements.

Her concentration only on the decisive role of non-armed minorities does not include the contribution of media or authoritarian Constitution in legitimising military rule.

Cook<sup>9</sup> has highlighted the multifaceted relationship between Myanmar and China. Although Myanmar wants to maintain a strong relationship with China for its 'more powerful global position', it follows 'equal distance diplomacy' because of China's affinity with its ethnic groups. However, this work does not cover the most important external actor's responses to the military government in Myanmar even though its role is crucial.

Guilloux<sup>10</sup> has tried to find out the possible key external interveners in case of an internal chaos leading to a transfer of power, based on their strengths and multifarious interests in Myanmar. Bert<sup>11</sup> points that the close ties between China and Myanmar have been built up as a complement to their self-interest. According to Zhao<sup>12</sup>, since 1990s, China has conducted a long-term strategy of developing its border regions as well as to monitor the important sea-trade routes through Myanmar. However, all of these papers focus on Myanmar and its neighbours' relationship after 1988 and that is why these cannot answer how the military regime survived during its self-isolated period (1962-1990).

In fact, Myanmar is a very exceptional state in the modern world which wants to keep itself aloof from all sorts of communication from the outside and this tendency has made it a land of curiosity. Many scholars have worked hard to understand its government, politics, economics, society, foreign relationship, and so on but all attempts are fragmented in timeframe, national issues, or societal divisions. Here, the authors have tried to give a

comprehensive account of military strategies for establishing control over society and eradicating the obstacles toward its reign.

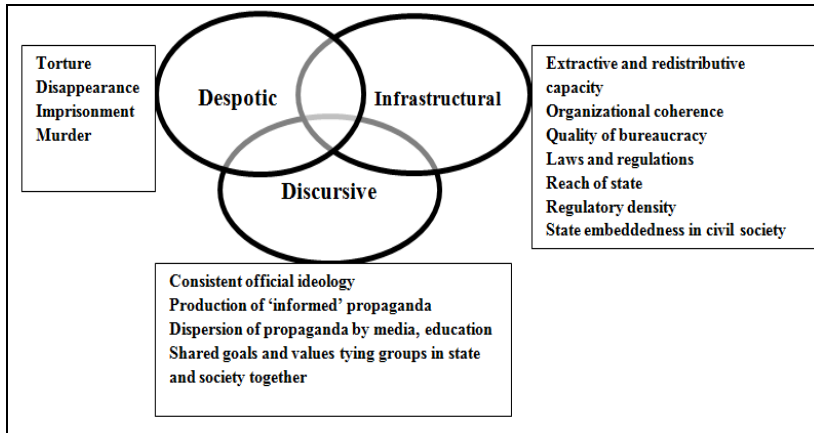
## **Theoretical Framework**

Regime is a name “given to a government or sequence of governments in which power remains essentially in the hands of the same social group”<sup>13</sup> and it “determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not.”<sup>14</sup> In a military regime, military rulers consider themselves the main political actors by strengthening their coercive means of power<sup>15</sup> in which they take important actions to maintain their regime’s persistence and control over government. Usually, the military regime arranges necessary measurements to strengthen its control over the government.<sup>16</sup> Generally, authoritarian consolidation is a process of regime maintenance as well as a procedure of state that figures out how authoritarian leaders manage coercion by establishing state mechanisms to increase regime stability for governing society. It tends to build strategies to prevent factionalism in leaders and appease demonstration or protest by reaching assistance with opposition as well other sections of society. According to Goebel,<sup>17</sup> “authoritarian consolidation is understood to be a deliberate state project driven by political elites seeking to secure their ruling position.” He has shown three distinctive forms of power such as despotic, infrastructural, and discursive to strengthen its non-autocratic capability to be connected with social, political, and business communities. These powers, influential over each other, recognise the capacity to force one’s will on individuals, institutional capacity for managing society, and the ability to make individuals need what the government needs them to want. The authoritarian government usually exerts despotic power (imprisonment, lawlessness, torture, disappearance, murders, illegal seizure of private property or business, media censorship and intimidation, disappearance of anti-regime forces, and systematic terror against the whole population or race) in order to prevent regime

breakdown and these acts of coercion help to develop infrastructural and discursive power for managing society.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1**

**Indicators for the Three Power Dimension<sup>19</sup>**



Goebel also explained three levels of authoritarian consolidation which is mostly focused on infrastructural and discursive power. At the macro level, authoritarian leaders consolidate their regime by developing institutional structure and granting citizens incentives to ensure people's belief in the regime 'logistics of political control'.<sup>20</sup> This enables the regime to reduce complexity, social grievances, and increase the capability of the state to coordinate society. This explanation denotes three dimensions to deal with infrastructural power. To be specific, 'state capabilities', 'their sub national variation', and their impact on society, that is, the 'weight of the state'.<sup>21</sup> State capabilities indicate the "resources at the disposal of the state for exercising control over society,"<sup>22</sup> where the second dimension refers to the 'territorial reach' of the state, or "the ability to penetrate society not only with respect to policy issues, but also to maintain a state presence in even the remotest parts of the state territory."<sup>23</sup> The third dimension is explained at the meso level that depends on how state aims to penetrate in society. In its regime

consolidation game, the military builds links between state and society through its dense state apparatus in order to legitimise government decisions. Furthermore, it “feeds the preferences and grievances of different social groups...”<sup>24</sup> instead of developing democratic manners like competitive or institutionalised party system, highly diverse civil society, autonomous media, etc. In a micro sense, authoritarian consolidation refers to discursive power which “means securing the active complicity of the subjects of power in their own self-regulation” to construct political and societal minds.<sup>25</sup> This contributes to authoritarian leaders with a greater attention toward identifying social issues and regime challenges than cracking down on opposition which inflicts a huge price in terms of gaining legitimacy in both internal and external spheres as well as indicates state failure.

**Table 1**  
**Levels of authoritarian consolidation<sup>26</sup>**

	Authoritarian consolidation	Power dimension
Macro-level	Communication, bureaucracy, legal system	Infrastructural power: density and reach of state organisation
Meso-level	Meritocratic, networks, semi-competitive, elections mass, organisations, complaint mechanisms	Infrastructural power: embeddedness
Micro-level	Attitudes and behaviour (elites, population)	Discursive power

**The Independence struggle and the Military**

The independence struggle of Myanmar is deeply connected with the Second World War. This battle provided the Burmese nationalists with an opportunity to revolt against the British



administration. Aung San decided to defeat the British forces in collaboration with Japanese invaders in Myanmar and, thus, to free his motherland. For this purpose, he fled to Japan with a few of his colleagues (later known as *the thirty comrades*) and received military training there. Then he set up the Burma Independence Army in December 1941 and started combating against the British army. On the contrary, other ethnic minority groups, specially Karen, Kachin, and Chin assisted the allied force as the continuation of their loyalty to British. However, the Burmese revolting Burmese soldiers, upon reluctance of Japan to free Myanmar, revolted against Japan and entered into the British camp in March 1945. Before joining the opposite side, Aung San formed the 'Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League' (AFPFL) in a secret meeting with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), the Burma National Army, and the Socialist People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) in August 1944. At the end of the war, the interim military administration of the colony composed of the new Burmese army, an uneasy coalescence of two flanks: a) nationalist Burman forces of the Burma Independence Army, and b) non-Burman minority units from the old colonial army on 28 September 1946. Following the 1947 general election for a Constitutional Assembly, Aung San was appointed as the fifth Prime Minister. After being criticised for working with the British by the Burmese Communist Party, the Premier banned all communists from his AFPFL on 3 November 1946. A delegation led by him signed an agreement with Lord Attlee (then British Premier) on the conditions of Burmese freedom on 27 January 1947. However, the Prime Minister and his new cabinet were assassinated by a political rival in a meeting on 19 July 1947. On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1948, the country was declared independent. The Union of Burma started as a democratic republic and U Nu took the office of the premier. By August 1948, the Burmese military and various insurgents, even the communists and ethnic troops, were engaged in a civil war. For the first time in the independent Burma, the

military got itself entrenched into politics in the guise of a caretaker government in 1958. Although it handed over power to the civilian government after a general election in 1960, it returned as the military junta in 1962 and prolonged the position under different titles like the BSPP, SLORC, and SPDC until 2011. During this period, it held elections in 1974, 1978, 1981, and 1990 only to legitimise the military in power. Public demonstration also broke out several times against the military dictatorship but all ended in smoke in the face of severe military oppression except in 1988 that led the Tatmadaw to replace the national ideology.

### **Military Strategies for Regime Consolidation in Myanmar**

By and large, among various type of authoritarianism, military regimes are viewed as the most fragile type. As per Barbara Geddes, who examined the durability of 163 authoritarian regimes from 1945 to 1998, military regimes have a normal life expectancy of just seven years, while single-party regime have a normal life expectancy of 35 years.<sup>27</sup> The tide, however, is turning<sup>28</sup> because some military regimes have more durability prospects than others. The persistence of “an authoritarian regime increases to the extent that regime elites manage to substitute coercion for governing by organization, regulation and the management of discourses.”<sup>29</sup> This section of the paper discusses how the junta government had been able to constantly sustain its rule over society and kept up the record of lengthy predominance in politics notwithstanding serious obstacles like ethnic conflicts, economic crisis, massive demonstrations, foreign sanctions, civil dissatisfactions, etc.

### **Game of Ideology**

The Burma Independence Army (BIA) was established by the command and force of the politicians during the independence struggle of the country, most of them were very strongly connected

with the socialist or communist parties in their pre-war political career. The nationalist leaders Aung San, Ne Win, and Setkya were especially trained in the military camp to form the Burmese government. In fact, Aung San was appointed as the fifth Prime Minister and Ne Win was made commander-in-chief of the BIA later. Thus, the ideological contexts and backgrounds of a number of influential colonels<sup>30</sup> illustrate why these nationalist leaders in military uniforms preferred the 'new professionalism' than 'old' for demarcating the role of military in politics. Moreover, the declaration of founding 'a people's democratic socialist state'<sup>31</sup> through the parliamentary democracy not to practice democratic values made by demagogues (from different ideologies) gave a good opportunity to the military to emphasise the 'ideology' (goal) instead of the type of government (the means for achieving the goal). Thus, they had successfully exploited ideology as a pretext for seizing power and rule legitimisation. Depicting civilian government's switch toward privatisation as a divergence from the nation's spirit,<sup>32</sup> General Ne Win captured power through the 1962 coup. On the contrary, he lacked much interest in national ideals and his revolutionary council had just followed previous ideological foundations. In Mehden's words, "The difference was primarily a hardening of tone and position."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, when the national ideology was enunciated by the military, the politicians reacted very mysteriously. The first military coup in the guise of a caretaker government might gotten people's support because the army had vowed to hand over power to the political parties after easing the communal tensions against the civilian government's various unpopular programmes. The fear of torture, detention, and conspiracy were not less responsible for providing military with supports. However, it was late to perceive the substantive intention of the Revolutionary Council of Ne Win. A series of student-led protests of 1976, 1987, and 1988 that ultimately took the form of mass uprisings had recurrently demonstrated the failure of the 'Burmese Way to

Socialism' to unite the citizens. At the peak of movement, Ne Win was compelled to resign from the post of the Chairman of the 'Burma Socialist Programme Party' (BSPP) on 23 July 1988. Within two months of the replacement of the government by Ne Win's close friends General Saw Maung and Khin Nyunt,<sup>34</sup> the second innings of 'ideology'-centred politics had already been upheld by the SLORC regime (The State Law and Order Restoration Council). Hliang<sup>35</sup> claimed that the SLORC Generals being irritated with the mess caused by the pro-democracy movement removed the previous government. However, the unrestrained mass anger coerced the SLORC to declare a general election for establishing parliamentary democracy. The previous ideological goal of 'sociology' had been replaced by the new objective 'democracy' as a strategy of the Tatmadaw to appease the domestic and foreign grudge in addition to drawing their attention to the next regime. Invalidating the forecast of the Tatmadaw that "their own National Unity Party would win,"<sup>36</sup> the 1990s election compelled them to resort under 'disciplined democracy' (in 2003) that assisted the military in coming back to power in a legitimate way.

### **Authoritarian Constitutionalism**

Authoritarian constitutionalism denotes the manipulation of the constitutional order and the purposeful use of constitution making through the autocratic exercise of power to enhance further stabilisation and undermine democratic practice. The factor behind the non-existence of a constitution is direct military rule, yet some other regimes use old constitution or others may intend to make a new constitution for keeping the military a key political actor in order to consolidate their power. According to Crouch,<sup>37</sup> the pre-emptive function of constitution-making in regimes that may have endured for many years without a constitution is to stave off threats of constitutional democracy. After independence, within a short span of time, the constitutional rule in Myanmar had been ended by a military coup in 1962 condemning the existing civil government as they

intended to accept the demand of federation which was considered a threat to territorial integrity and by then the junta was governing the state through extra-constitutional rule. Surprisingly, the military government had to embrace the same demand of federation in the 1974 constitution which later proved to be merely an instrument used by Ne Win to remain in power. It also failed to provide actual autonomy to the ethnic minorities as the power was concentrated in the hands of a few representatives of the Council of State and especially of Ne Win, the Council Chairman. Even they promoted the 1982 Citizenship Law, which fragmented citizens into three levels of citizenship: citizens, associate citizens, and naturalized citizens by limiting the rights of associate and naturalized citizens.<sup>38</sup> For an example, the 1982 Citizenship Law denied citizenship and institutionalised the Rohingya's statelessness. Their "ancestry related documents prove that the government enacted the new law simply to deny the Rohingya identity."<sup>39</sup> This misappropriation facilitated the military with a new civil unrest issue to validate its power position. The continuation of constitution-making game for prolonging power had been continued under SLORC after their seizing of power in 1988 as they abolished previous existing constitutional norms (1947, 1974).

Consequently, they had a logic to prolong their imposition in the name of developing a new constitution. In 1993, the SLORC arranged the National Convention (NC) which was unsuccessful due to the junta's suspicious rules and lack of proportional and justified representation of the political parties and ethnic minorities. "Lacking the strength to simply impose its will"<sup>40</sup> the Tatmadaw came to end the convention in 1996. However, the junta has finally succeeded in ensuring military dominance over the democratic government in the second call for NC (2004-2007), reserving 25% seats in regional and national parliament with a privileged position to access executive power in the emergency period and exercise influence on state resources and power as well as military's autonomy in security-related

ministries. Besides, the constitutional change needs 75% military consent to get approval in the parliament.<sup>41</sup> By these self-written constitutions centred on the 'three national principles' (non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national unity, and the protection of national sovereignty),<sup>42</sup> the junta intended to continue the Union and establish its monopoly power.

### **Strategy on Ethnic Minorities**

The non-Burman groups, such as the Karen, Chin, and Kachin were recruited for the army, police, and bureaucracy<sup>43</sup> and accepted for self-governance in the British period (1886-1941, 1945-1948). The difference in political experience along with culture, tradition, language, and even territorial possession led the Burman and non-Burman relation toward hostility, which exploded during the liberation struggle. Some minorities like the Shan, Karen, Kachin, Kayah, and Chin, proposed to dwell autonomous under British rule, even the Mon and Arakanese called for establishing own states. Centring these issues the ongoing conflict consolidated the military regime for a long time in Myanmar. The Tatmadaw took the advantage of it in two ways:

- a) justified its power capture calming down the mutineers; and
- b) showed as pretext for staying longer to remove the disunity within the ethnic groups.

The BSPP government adopted two kinds of strategies for armed and non-armed members of ethnic minorities. Ne Win implemented a black 'four-cut policy' that targeted armed resistance organisations (those who fighting for self-determination) by cutting off their food, funding, intelligence, and popular support.<sup>44</sup> In this period, the Tatmadaw displaced millions of people while taking billions of dollars in profit from jade mines, teak forests, and other natural resources. The non-armed members action (supporting government or acting in government-controlled areas) and inaction (silence against governmental programmes) augmented the political and economic power of government elites.<sup>45</sup> With the culmination of

economic sufferings and insecurities, end to interaction with the armed mutineers, and the prolonged period of bloodshed changed the view of the masses about the warring tribes. The governments' assimilation and co-optation strategy also exposed the success in altering their mindset. It patently split the non-armed residents from their counterparts integrating them as 'good citizens' by different tactics. The domination of Burman and Buddhist over government's representation to educational curriculum had generated a negative impression, but development programmes and long military rule accustomed the new generation of minority with political acquiescence for their rudimentary survival.<sup>46</sup>

The SLORC used the same strategy to strengthen its position in statecraft. Moreover, the border states had extended their cooperation in handling insurgents by ceasing all economic, logistic, and asylum support for them in exchange for economic relationship with the Myanmar government. By this chance, the Tatmadaw compelled the mutineers to fight until final defeat or to push them to resume normal lives. The 'ceasefire capitalism' continually inserted rebels into a national system "through economic means: development spending; joint business ventures; and the re-routing flows to benefit the regime"<sup>47</sup> in return for abandoning armed struggle. Consequently, the military established more administrative, economic, and military control in the remote areas of the country.<sup>48</sup> In the SPDC period, only four major groups remained in armed resistance—the Chin National Front, the SSA-South, the KNU, and the Karenni National Progressive Party<sup>49</sup> by 2009. The Tatmadaw was also aware of the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic rivalry and took advantage of the strife. It grinded all probable unifying forces that would inspire ethnic based nationality among the people in future. For example, the Shan region has been kept under three military commands: a) the Triangle Region Command, b) the North-East Command, and c) the Eastern Command after 1989 and the other communities especially the Wa and Pao are

stimulated to contest with various groups of Shan. The military has intentionally propagated resentment and phobia among the Buddhist against the Rohingyas and consequently many inter-communal riots to military confrontation took place there.<sup>50</sup>

### **Management of Political Parties**

Every period of military regime was determined with cruel application of despotic power over the opponents. In order to justify their actions, the despots displayed the antagonists as enemies of national sovereignty, solidarity, and ideology through the fulcrum of discursive force. Nonetheless this strategy could not gather much popularity for the generals if they had not enhanced their capacity to rule over the state.

During 1962-88, all political parties were abolished and the BSPP—consisting primarily of army officials—was declared the sole political representative of the people which “eliminated their civilian counterparts once and for all.”<sup>51</sup> The opponents were coerced to join the BSPP or to leave the political career. Ne Win’s authority over both the military and the party swiftly helped him to purge the probable competitors from any field. ‘The divide and rule policy’ assisted him to keep the subordinates weak and control without much trouble. However, the government adopted two types of strategies for different groups of activists. First, those who expressed royalty to the leadership were co-opted by the patron-client relationship where it donated luxury goods and different legal permissions to those leaders so that they could move their colleagues and subordinates toward the regime’s support. Secondly, those raising voice for any kind of change in economics, politics, or even in society were labelled as the enemies of the country and suppressed with a high hand. For example, when the Pyidaungsu Party leadership was decimated by arrests, its Secretary-General, Thakin Kyaw Dun, was the first opponent who joined the BSPP.<sup>52</sup> Ne Win’s leadership increased political turmoil with the oppression and repression towards minority groups.<sup>53</sup> Stokke, Win,



and Aung<sup>54</sup> show three types of political parties during the time: a) parties associated with Myanmar's authoritarian legacy, b) society-centred pro-democracy parties, and c) ethnic parties. Although the general arranged several elections, he failed to reduce mass anger. Failed economic policies, administrative incompetency, rampant corruption and isolating foreign policy of the Tatmadaw led people against Ne Win but flinched in establishing a civilian rule. In Mydans<sup>55</sup> observation, the lack of concentration, disarrangement of the movement and failure to lead people unitedly against the government ended all the efforts in smoke. The SLORC regime showed "a dual role of pro-democracy suppressor and 'principled democracy' promoters."<sup>56</sup> In spite of approving multi-party politics, opening economics for private entrepreneurship, legitimising the ethnic armed groups, and particularly, holding a national election, the defeat of its backed National Unity Party (NUP), the successor of the former BSPP, rang bells for its departure. Hence, it resorted to its predecessor's mood, boycotted the results of election and started to arrest pro-democracy and NLD (National League of Democracy) members including the leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Only ten legal parties existed between 1990 and 2009.<sup>57</sup> The military officers, having connection with activist friends or relatives, were deprived of promotion even forcefully retired.<sup>58</sup> However, the prosperity of the higher class of the military at the cost of antecedent political and social elites<sup>59</sup> caused them to fear any changes in the regime that could bring them under penalty for misappropriation. Hence, the SLORC had no choice except sheltering under the massive 'state-building project' after the 1990s election to appease both the Burman people and ethnic leaders. But the SPDC's gradual move towards liberalisation upheld its strength and confidence.<sup>60</sup> It ensured the victory of its proxy party the 'Union Solidarity and Development Party' in the 2010 election where its legal barricade coerced the main opposite party the NLD to boycott the contest.

### **Clientelistic Approach**

After independence, the colonial weak economic structure of Myanmar had the practice of clientelism which also turned into state's fundamentals in the military regime after nationalising the economy. During the BSPP rule, the patron-client relations among party-state officials involving illegal business community had hugely appeared, wherein the officials wished to get high-ranking appointments in both state and local party committees. Local officials (clients) intended to consolidate their connection with the patron to prevent their replacement. In return, they offered resources, management of local tension, and arrangement of enormous ceremonies in the name of their entertainment and honour.<sup>61</sup> In that case, local officials required financial support from both legal and illegal business communities who had the ability to fund their activities. With the assistance of their patrons (local officials), the associated business community figured out access to the scant resources required for their business or to shield their business (illegal/black market) from the intervention of government officials. Police and customs authorities, hence, didn't trouble illicit business group known to be old buddies of local state officials.<sup>62</sup> They were either downgraded or moved to peripheral assignments for making any disruption or coercing cash from the clients. In the SLORC and SPDC periods, borderland elites were facilitated to invest their illegal resources in the national economy to augment the government's expenditure capacity in various development projects. After paying a 25% 'whitening' tax, drug barons and smugglers could launder their money through state-owned banks and invest in legitimate national businesses. Loyal individuals who rendered useful services again received extensive patronage, with borderland kingpins establishing large-scale conglomerates, receiving lucrative government contracts, and dominating the emerging private banking sector.<sup>63</sup>

After independence, Buddhist monks had profound influence and connection in society and civilian government. The junta regime, especially in the BSPP period, banning all the political activities of the Buddhist monks permitted only religious organisations and even incorporated nine sects of monks to control the politically active monastic community. In spite of facing coercion and restrictions, Monks participated in the 1988 pro-democracy protests alongside anti-government students and also extended their anti-military agitation even in SLORC rule. Although, SLORC government initially used coercive apparatus, it later altered the despotic path by adopting the co-optation policy that facilitated the monks with particularistic benefits such as building up more religious institutions, opening universities of culture and of Buddhism, offering huge donations and luxury goods, treatment facilities, cultural, religious and sports activities, cremation rites for renowned monks, titles to powerful monks to encourage them to control politically, etc.<sup>64</sup> Many monks became so influential that local party and state officials lobbied with them to influence the central decision. Despite a few monks who distanced themselves from the benefits, notable monks mostly in the 1990s joined state-backed Sangha Council at divisional and township level to appease the anti-state activities of monastic communities and build support systems for the military regime in exchange of special favours.

### **Educational Propaganda and Coercive Apparatus**

Students acted as an anti-government force that was always concerned about the shortcomings of governmental policies and led massive demonstration to overthrow the regime or to bring changes to the system. Myanmar's military government had exerted an all-surrounding approach to manage several sections of students alongside its consecutive repression and crack down. It basically applied three-pronged tactics (discursive, despotic, and infrastructural) targeting two types of students: a) students organised under political

affiliation and b) general students not having an interest in risking their career and livelihood for political reasons. For the former group, the government offered political incentives not to join anti-state force and to support the government. The TBSPP established few youth unions namely Te-za Youth, She-saung Youth, and Lanzin Youth Organizations, mostly focused on students in opposition political forces. These unions not only supported the government activities but also checked students' participation in anti-government protests. There was a fear of retribution for opposing the junta government among the students. On the other hand, it could be beneficial for them not be in any protests against the government and supporting or joining the association to show dedication and secure positions. The students who were found in protestations or such any activities that questioned the governments' legitimacy or accountability, or even contained different political views, became victims of detention, disappearance, and even assassination. During the series of anti-government movements (1965, 1969, 1970, 1975, 1976, 1987, and 1988) several students sacrificed their lives. Especially after the immediate crackdown on the pro-democracy agitation, more than ten thousands youth took shelter in border areas.<sup>65</sup> During this period (since 1988), all schooling had reached a conclusion in the border areas.<sup>66</sup> Although students fought against the military government in cooperation with ethnic revolts and the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), the lack of funds, division within the organisations, and inadequacy of modern military technology compelled them to step back.

For the latter part of students who were concerned about their future, the military government dealt with them indirectly by providing them incentives and making them politically apathetic. The study of Hlaing<sup>67</sup> showed that merely 2% of the students intently participated in student unions. Many of them left the ideologies, very few engaged with political parties after getting degrees, and mostly

joined the civil services. Besides, the government had directed various propaganda as well as martial law regulations to suppress educational freedom, murder and torture of protestors, the shutdown and reorganisations of educational institution (through strict monitoring and scrutiny), attack on decadent Western culture, building up universities to segregate student clusters, etc.<sup>68</sup>

### **Media Censorship**

After independence, Burma witnessed a golden period of mass media. Especially in Rangoon around 30 daily newspapers were published in Burmese, English, Chinese, and South Asian languages. But over the last five decades (mostly from 1962 to 2011), the draconian censorship in Myanmar has added to a culture of denial. The junta government was intolerant of any criticism against the government and cut the regime off from the other nations not to be cognisant about Myanmar's internal circumstances. The privately-owned print media was highly restricted and only a couple of state-run newspapers that were published were committed to government propaganda.<sup>69</sup> The junta imposed restrictions on freedom of speech and media were severely persecuted in the name of protecting state security and public order.<sup>70</sup> The Tatmadaw targeted the press and while imprisoning news editors it created two state-owned newspapers, the *Working People's Daily* and *Forward Weekly*.<sup>71</sup> Besides, the junta did not accept the opposite political view, foreigners movement was restricted by short visa periods, media was censored and restricted by the Burma Press Council (only few shortwave radios but no television), monitored all books and magazines.<sup>72</sup> Even their different undefined regulations provided the military government with their very own interpretation and ability to enforce authoritarian decisions. The repeatedly regulatory density of the junta on media and freedom of speech was also an important factor behind their prolonged rule in Myanmar.

**Table 2****Different Regulatory Mechanisms<sup>73</sup>**

The Printers and Publishers Registration Law, 1962	Books and publication were required to submit to the Press Scrutiny Board for obtaining permission
The Constitution, 1974	Declared freedom of speech and Media under restrictive interpretation in order to prevent dissemination of anti-government opinion
The State Protection Law, 1975	Granted up to five years' imprisonment as well as detention without trial for disseminating certain information that was deemed to be threatening the sovereignty, security, or order of the state.
The Printers and Publishers Registration Law, 1989 (Amended)	Imposed penalties from up to five years to seven years and fined maximum 30,000 kyats on those convicted of violation
Martial Law Order 3/89	Publications required permission from the Ministry of the Interior and Religious Affairs, otherwise it was considered a criminal offence
1995, Memorandum to All Printers and Publishers Concerning the Submission of Manuscripts for Scrutiny	Imposed restrictions on publications presenting anything threatening to the Burmese socialist programme, ideology of the state, the socialist economy, national solidarity and unity, security, the rule of law, peace and public order, criticism of the functions of government departments, etc.

The Television and Video Act, 1995	To have TV and video device acquire prior permission of the Ministry of Communications
The 1996 Motion Picture Law	Need to get approval (before censor) from the Myanmar Cinema Company to produce films.
The Computer Science Development Law of 1996	Required permission of the Ministry of Communications to own and use a computer to publish on internet
Wide Area Network Establishment and Service Providing order No. 3/2002	Taking prior concern for creating a computer web.
The Electronic Transactions Law, 2004	Imposed punishment on crime (undefined) using electronic transactions technology
The constitution, 2008	Granted freedom of Media only on paper, the junta never abolished previous restrictive Acts related to the media

### **External Assistance**

The colonial experience and the contemporary politics of the cold war period left a deep mark over the thought of Myanmar politicians and generals that its cautionary moves aimed at avoiding the same hardship of the third world countries had entrapped itself. Both Japanese and British forces led to widespread modernisations of the military in the colonial period that left the military as the only cohesive social unit after achieving independence in Myanmar.<sup>74</sup> The colonialists' cross alignment with different sections of society had both intensified and systematised the conventional conflict between the Burman and other ethnic groups. In addition, their mass militarisation disintegrated the indigenous social and political order that even continued in the post-independence time.<sup>75</sup> This sagacity led the

nationalist leaders to have recourse to complete isolation policy from the outers and to emphasis on national security that was depicted as a combination of "strong nationalism, notions of self-reliance, and distrust of foreigners, the West in particular."<sup>76</sup> The Generals had a fear of overt intervention from the big powers like in Iraq and East Timor.<sup>77</sup> However, it accepted a confined level of cooperation from its neighbouring country, China, until the 1967 anti-Chinese riots. China maintained a strategic alliance with Myanmar by providing political, economic, and military assistance to consolidate authoritarianism, fulfilment of their tactical interest, and to terminate foreign influence especially to protect the whole struggle of anti-US imperialism in Southeast Asia. Even it notified Ne Win personally through its Burmese delegate (Geng Biao) about three issues: "1. The plot of military coup against him; 2. Inquire on what kinds of aid Burma urgently need; 3. To inform Ne Win that Zhou Enlai or Chen Yi willing to go to Rangoon to exchange views with him if necessary."<sup>78</sup> But the countrywide anti-Chinese riots in Myanmar created a wedge between the two neighbours that lasted until the 1988 massive pro-democracy movement. In that time, Myanmar received a good amount of economic assistance from Japan that became a vital part in the Burmese economy. In 1988, the proportion of Japanese assistance represented 78% of all respective aid to Myanmar. Besides, the economic remodel in Myanmar during the 1990s stirred trade connection with external industrialist economies particularly with the Chinese. To accomplish its superpower status, trades security, and countering Indian domination in the South and Southeast Asian territory, Chinese diplomacy prioritised Myanmar's geo-strategical position, natural resources, and relations as an important political and military ally. Since then, Chinese constant aid and assistance toward Burma under various diplomatic and military agreements kept aside the other external powers like Japan, Thailand, India, and the US as well as other Western nations and regional organizations (ASEAN)<sup>79</sup>



that advanced higher stability of the military regime. Furthermore, India had no major connection with Burma till 1990 because of its limited interest and capability to extend influence beyond its borders and Myanmar's undemocratic principles. But the Sino-Burmese strategic involvement pushed India toward more participation with Burma regarding joint military activities and coordinated efforts to stifle insurgents groups. Later, Indian efforts toward road connectivity, gas pipeline projects, deep sea port, and border security issues with Burma was noticed in the military regime.

Additionally, Burma's membership in ASEAN (1997), which prohibits direct interference in member nations' domestic issues, would have allowed the junta government to expand its economic volume and contacts with the rest of the world. This enrolment of Myanmar also aided the junta in expanding some spaces for common society and acceptance of global standards,<sup>80</sup> reducing the junta's total reliance on China. Thailand, Malaysia, and North Korea also assisted Myanmar's military regime's stability by different development programmes in order to resolve longstanding rivalry and tensions stirred up by steady issues with refugees, severe border incidents (2001-2002) and insurgent groups fighting against the junta through several summit meetings.<sup>81</sup> The hardliners (Australia, the US, and the European nations) imposed economic sanctions and banned on aid, travel, and arms trade considering of Burmese government as a threat to regional security. These hardliners kept their pressure on the junta to transfer power to civilian and return to the barracks. In return, the military leaders accused the Western sanctions as an attempt to establish neocolonialism and interference in Myanmar's internal affairs. However, the growing competition between China and India made hardliners to pull out the Western influence over Myanmar. The US and the UK's less likely attention, lack of political engagement and disinterestedness, absence of the execution of responsibility to protect (R2P) principles, steady position for a pluralistic or liberal political

framework rather focusing on empowering the cycle of democratization into Myanmar helped junta regime to get its peak.

## **Conclusion**

The interdependence between the Tatmadaw's origin, the national leaders' dimensional political career, and the liberation struggle of Myanmar had crystallised the new professional sentiment of the military and provoked to establish its control over the state apparatus in the face of severe political violence. However, like the civilian government, the military regime failed in bringing social, political, and economic advancement. A circle of public demonstrations and strikes proved the governments' unpopularity, albeit it repeatedly justified its necessity for remaining in power through an emphasis on national ideology, imagined external threat, and danger of different ethnicities' demand for more autonomous power. However, the Tatmadaw had finally succeeded in power consolidation through a series of group management. The ethnic minorities, political parties, student organisations, business community, monks, and media press were the principal rivals for the generals but they successfully handled them following Goebel's three types power, i.e., despotic, infrastructural, and discursive. It built up a business network with black-market by which the junta had just continued economic survival during its period of isolation from the outside world. A patron-client network has also been constructed that not only enriched the generals but also incorporated various sections of civilians. The fear of being a victim of different deprivation policies with coercive laws and the hope for an advantageous opportunity to have incentives for supporting the government had developed a group within the society that worked as a power-base for the military regime. Beside, the disorganisation, lack of focused and united leadership, shortage of fund and disconnection with outside world, closure of educational institutions for a long time, as well as military guidance and training for academicians led to the failure of all the

attempts for military overthrow. Access to resources and monitoring power over rebel groups through ceasefires consolidated the military's position in state apparatus with more economic, administrative, and diplomatic capacity. Although the Western countries recurrently emphasised transfer of power to a democratic government, constant Japanese aid and Chinese investment had both reduced the economic sufferings and encouraged the pro-democracy supporters like India to be more involved with the military government in Myanmar. Indirectly, all of these made room for the military government in world politics without providing overt support and enabled the regime to consolidate its control over state and society.

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