DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MYANMAR:
PATTERNS OF POLITICAL CHANGE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

POLITICAL SCIENCE

By

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Thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled "DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MYANMAR: PATTERNS OF POLITICAL CHANGE" to be submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is an original work carried out by me under the supervision of Professor K. C. Suri, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad.

I declare that no part of this thesis has been earlier submitted to this or any other university or institution for the award of any research degree or diploma.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Nehginpao Kipgen (Registration No. SP12PH11) has carried out the research work embodied in the present thesis entitled "DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MYANMAR: PATTERNS OF POLITICAL CHANGE" under my supervision and guidance for the fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in Political Science. I declare to the best of my knowledge that this thesis is an independent work and no part of it was earlier submitted for the award of research degree or diploma in part or full to this or any other university or institution.

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DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS

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Acronyms

ABFSU - All Burma Federation of Students' Union
ABPO - All Burma Peasants' Organization
ABSDF - All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ABWO - All Burma Workers' Organization
AFO - Anti-Fascist Organization
AFPFL - Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AIPMC - ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus
AKSYC - All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress
AKSYU - All Kachin Students and Youth Union
ALA - Arakan Liberation Army
ALD - Arakan League for Democracy
ALD Youth Wing-Exile - Arakan League for Democracy - Youth Wing (Exile)
ALTSEAN-Burma - Alternative ASEAN Network-Burma
AMRDP - All Mon Region Democracy Party
ANUO - Arakan National United Organization
ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASSO - All Shan State Organization
BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation
BCP - Burma Communist Party
BFDA - Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act
BGF - Border Guard Force
BIA - Burma Independence Army
BMA - Burma Medical Association
BNA - Burma National Army
BNB - Burma Nationalist Bloc
BSPP - Burma Socialist Program Party
CBC - Catholic Bishops' Conference
CIA - Central Intelligence Agency
CNF - Chin National Front
CNG - Compressed Natural Gas
CNLD - Chin National League for Democracy
CNN - Cable News Network
CNO - Chin National Organization
CNP - Chin National Party
CPB - Communist Party of Burma
CPCS - Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
CPP - Chin Progressive Party
CRPP - Committee Representing People's Parliament
CSO - Civil Society Organization
DKBA - Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DOKNU - Democratic Organization for Kayan National Unity
DP - Democracy Party
DPM - Democratic Party (Myanmar)

DPNS - Democratic Party for New Society
DPNS-Youth - Democratic Party for New Society - Youth
DVB - Democratic Voice of Burma
EBO - Euro-Burma Organization
ENDP - Ethnic National Development Party
ENSCC - Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee
EO - Executive Order
FAA - Foreign Assistance Act
FDI - Foreign Direct Investment
FRAA - Foreign Relations Authorization Act
GOSDA - Graduates and Old Students Democratic Association
GSP - Generalized Systems of Preferences
GSY - 88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar)
HRC - Human Rights Council
IAEA - International Atomic Energy Agency
ICG - International Crisis Group
ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP - Internally Displaced Person
IEEPA - International Emergency Economic Powers Act
ILO - International Labor Organization
IMF - International Monetary Fund
INDP - Inn National Development Party
INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization
IO - International Organization
JADE - Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts
KDA- Kachin Defense Army
KDL - Kayah Democratic League
KIA - Kachin Independence Army
KIO - Kachin Independence Organization
KKO - Klohtoobaw Karen Organization
KNC - Kachin National Congress
KNDA - Karenni National Defense Army
KNDO - Karen National Defense Organization
KNG - Kayan National Guard
KNLA - Karen National Liberation Army
KNLD - Kamans National League for Democracy
KNP - Kayan National Party
KNPP - Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU - Karen National Union
KNUL - Kayah National United League
KNGY - Kayan New Generation Youth
KNPLF - Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front
KPF - Karen Peace Force
KPP - Kayin People's Party
KSDDP - Kayin State Democracy and Development Party
KSDF - Kuki Students Democratic Front

KSNCD - Kachin State National Congress for Democracy
KSNLD - Kayah State Nationalities League for Democracy
KSNO - Karen State National Organization
KWAT - Kachin Women's Association Thailand
KYO - Karen Youth Organization
LAWPG - Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group
LNDP - Lahu National Development Party
MAMD - Mon Army, Mergui District
MAS - Military Affairs Security
MBC - Myanmar Baptist Convention
MCC - Myanmar Council of Churches
MI - Military Intelligence
MIC - Myanmar Investment Commission
MIT - Myanmar Institute of Theology
MKNSO - Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization
MNDAA - Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MNDF - Mon National Democratic Front
MNDO - Mon national Defense Organization
MOGE - Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
MPP - Mara People's Party
MWO - Mon Women's Organization
MYPO - Mon Youth Progressive Organization
NAM - Non-Aligned Movement
NBF - Nationalities Brotherhood Federation
NCCC - National Convention Convening Commission
NCUB - National Council of the Union of Burma
NCGUB - National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NDA-K - New Democratic Army-Kachin
NDF - National Democratic Force
NDF - National Democratic Front
NDPD - National Democratic Party for Development
NDPHR - National Democratic Party for Human Rights
NEA - National Emergencies Act
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
NHRPP - Naga Hills Regional Progressive Party
NLD - National League for Democracy
NLD-LA, Youth - National League for Democracy-Liberated Area, Youth
NMSP - New Mon State Party
NNLD-Youth - Naga National League for Democracy - Youth
NSA - National Solidarity Association
NSCN-K - National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Khaplang
NUF - National United Front
NUP - National Unity Party
OCAA - Omnibus Consolidated Appropriation Act
OSYNP - Organization of Students and Youth for National Politics
PATRIOT - Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism

PECDO - People's Economic Cultural Development Organization
PECDO (Kachin) - Peoples Educational and Cultural Development Organization PECDO (Kachin)
PND - Party for National Democracy
PNLA - Pa-O National Liberation Army
PNO - Pa-O National Organization
POCL - Patriotic Old Comrades League
PRP - People's Revolutionary Party
PSDP - Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party
PSRD - Press Scrutiny and Registration Division
PVO - People's Volunteer Organization
PYO - Pa-O Youth Organization
RASU - Rangoon Arts and Science University
RBC - Rangoon Bar Council
RC - Revolutionary Council
RFA - Radio Free Asia
RIT - Rangoon Institute of Technology
RNDP - Rakhine Nationals Development Party
SDN - Specifically Designated Nationals
SLORC - State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNDP - Shan Nationals Democratic Party
SNLD - Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
SPDC - State Peace and Development Council
SSA-N - Shan State Army-North
SSA-S - Shan State Army-South
SSKDP - Shan State Kokang Democratic Party
SSPO - Shan States Peasants Organization
SSUHPO - Shan States United Hill People's Organization
SYCB - Students and Youth Congress of Burma
TNLD - Ta-ang (Palaung) National League for Democracy
TPNP - Taaung (Palaung) National Party
TSYO - Ta'ang Students & Youth Organization
TYO - Tavoyan Youth Organization
UDAO - Union Democratic Alliance Organization
UDLD - Union Danu League for Democracy
UDPKS - Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State
UEC - Union Election Commission
UHPC - United Hill People's Congress
UK - United Kingdom
UN - United Nations
UNA - United Nationalities Alliance
UNDP - United Nations Development Program
UNDP - Union Nationals Democracy Party
UNFC - United Nationalities Federal Council
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UNLD - United Nationalities League for Democracy
UNPO - United National Pa-O Organization
UNSC - United Nations Security Council
UPNO - Union Paoh National Organization
USA - United States of America
USDA - Union Solidarity and Development Association
USDP - Union Solidarity and Development Party
USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VOA - Voice of America
WB - World Bank
WDP - Wa Democratic Party
YMA - Yangon Municipality Act
ZNC - Zomi National Congress
ZSYO - Zomi Students and Youth Organization

CHAPTER - 1

Introduction

1. 1. Significance and Objectives of the Study

Transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic form of government is one of the biggest challenges many countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa face. Some countries have seen a smooth transition while some others have gone through a painful process. The challenge continues in some countries and Myanmar is one such a nation. The ruling elites and the opposition forces have been engaged in a negotiated transition to democracy. It is pertinent for social science research to analyze the circumstances and conditions under which transition to democracy takes place. There seems to be no one single model of transition that is universally applicable. Democratic transition may be triggered by a single event or a protracted process marked by a series of events. In any case, a complex set of interacting factors and the abilities of the actors matter a great deal in steering a nation towards democratization or its failure to do so.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military government held election on May 27, 1990 in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory with over 80 percent of the national parliament seats. However, the SLORC military government refused to recognize the election result and the parliament was never convened. Consequently, the military continued to rule the country under an authoritarian regime. After two decades of military rule, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military government held general election on November 7, 2010. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won a landslide victory with over 70 percent of seats in both houses of the parliament - House of Nationalities (Upper House) and House of Representatives (Lower House). Subsequently, the USDP convened a parliament, which paved the way for a calibrated political transition from decades of military rule to parliamentary democracy. It took over a quarter century of military rule for an election to be held in 1990, and it took two decades for another election held in 2010. The 1990 election led to the continuation of

military rule, while the 2010 election holds the promise of institutionalizing parliamentary democracy in Myanmar.

This thesis presents a case study of democratic transition in Myanmar. The objectives of the thesis is to understand the factors that contribute to democratic transition, the circumstances and the ways in which transition takes place in a country ruled by military for nearly five decades. For several decades before the 2010 general election, the military had been hostile to the idea and practice of democracy. The study attempts to explain why the opposition groups - NLD and ethnic parties - decided to work with the military-dominated government with which they fought for several decades. Thus, the study seeks to explain the change that came about over the past two decades paving the way for the establishment of democratic political institutions in Myanmar. In doing so, the thesis examines the role of civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions.

1. 2. Debates on Democratic Transition

The ontology of democracy can generally be studied under three different stages: democratization, democratic transition, and democratic consolidation. Usually, some form of democratization process has often begun before the actual transition takes place. Democratic transition is the stage at which a state transforms or changes from its previous regime (such as authoritarianism) to a democratic government. At this stage, the state practices and implements democratic values but still need improvement on different aspects. The third stage is at which a state consolidates its democratic institutions (such as free and fair elections, freedom of expression, religion, inclusive citizenship, etc.). This is the stage at which the people think democracy as the best form of government and extend their support and cooperation. Moreover, the people do not engage in activities that may threaten the stability of the government.

The concept of democracy is a widely debated subject and it is defined in slightly varying ways (Schumpeter 2003, Dahl 1998, Welzel 2009). For Joseph Schumpeter, a renowned democratic theorist of the first half of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, democracy is an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire

the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter 2003, 269). Similar to Schumpeter's definition, Robert Dahl, another renowned democratic theorist of the second half of the 20th century, defines democracy as an institution that provides opportunities for political participation, equality in voting, enlightened understanding and the exercise of people's power. Dahl suggests that in order to pursue these opportunities, the political institution requires elected officials, free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy, and inclusive citizenship (Dahl 1998, 38, 85). Another democratic theorist, Christian Welzel, defines it as the "institutionalization of people power" (Welzel 2009, 75). In this thesis, democracy is defined as an institutional arrangement where the ultimate decision power belongs to the people. On the other hand, authoritarian regime is an institution where state leaders "direct and regulate society without being accountable to citizens" (Potter 1997, 4).

1. 2. 1. Democratization

Democratization is a widely studied theoretical topic in comparative politics (Potter 1997, Grugel 2002, Welzel 2009, Huntington 1991, Nwabueze 1993, Rustow 1999, Sorensen 1993, Vanhanen 1992, 1990). While scholars such as Potter, Grugel and Welzel focus on the general theoretical approaches of democratization, others are emphasizing more or less on the explanatory variables of democratization, that is, the correlation. David Potter defines democratization as "political changes moving in a democratic direction" (Potter 1997, 10). Jean Grugel goes with the traditional definition, that is, the "transformation of a political system from non-democracy towards accountable and representative government" (Grugel 2002, 3). In somewhat a broader concept, Christian Welzel defines it as "the emergence, the deepening, and the survival of democracy" (Welzel 2009, 74).

David Potter's first theoretical approach is the *Modernization Theory,* which basically relates to socioeconomic development. The argument is that when people are more well-to-do in terms of wealth, industrialization, urbanization, and level of education, they would favor, achieve or maintain democratic government. However, all these correlations may not always hold true across different geographical regions of the

world. It can also be that democratization process happens at a rapid rate at a certain period of time in some regions than the others.

The second approach is *Transition Theory,* which focusses on the role of elites. Potter's argument is that certain actions and strategies of political elites are conducive for democratic transition. It argues that democratization is largely dependent upon the decisions of political elites on what, how and where they take. The path to liberal democracy is fundamentally contingent upon the initiatives and actions of the elites (Potter 1997, 11-18).

The third approach is *Structural Theory,* which argues that democratization does not depend on the actions of political elites but by changing the structures of power. There are many structures of power that constrain the behavior and thinking of elites, such as economic, social and political. Every individual is born and grown up with certain structures and practices them though he may later be influenced by the surrounding environments. The existing structures can become a hindrance or constraint to liberal democracy. Certain structural patterns can be conducive to democracy and others to authoritarianism. Elites may take decisions, but such choices can only be explained with reference to the structural constraints and opportunities of the time. Potter's argument is that there are certain interrelated factors that explain why democratization takes place in some places and not in others. The six common factors in all the three democratization theoretical approaches are economic development, social divisions, state and political institutions, civil society, political culture and ideas, and transnational and international engagements including war (Potter 1997, 18-24).

Jean Grugel takes a slightly different approach from Potter by identifying the mechanisms that lead to democratization. She makes a distinction between democratic transition and democratic consolidation. Transition is the beginning stage at which politics is fluid and there is no guarantee of democracy. Consolidation is a stage at which democracy becomes the "only game in town." As democratization continues, some countries successfully transition and others collapse; some others remain in the category of "problematic democracies" (Grugel 2002, 3). Grugel links modernity to democracy, capitalism and globalization and argues that democracy emerges under capitalism.

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Structuralism recognizes class conflicts within the capitalist societies and suggests that conflict is part of democracy. Structuralism helps to identify global structures and conditions under which democratization takes place. Along similar line of Potter's argument, Grugel emphasizes on three variables as the explanatory factors for understanding the process of democratic transition and democratic consolidation: the state, civil society, and globalization or global order (Grugel 2002, 65).

Christian Welzel attempts to explain the interplay between societal conditions such as modernization or social divisions, and collective actions such as elite groups or mass mobilization. Instead of focusing on one explanatory variable, Welzel studies the varying roles of modernization theory, social divisions, international regime alliances, elite groups, social movements and mass beliefs, and institutions (Welzel 2009, 88).

Welzel discusses four different types of democratization processes: *Responsive democratization*: For this type of democratization to succeed, the people must have the necessary resources to enable them to initiate collective actions. More importantly, the people must strongly believe in democratic freedoms and be willing to take risks and costs, and the objective of the end-goal must motivate the people. This democratization is a result of the interplay between social conditions and people's collective actions. *Enlightened democratization:* It is the only type of democratization, other than responsive democratization, where the elites understand and respect democratic principles. This development is rare in history since elites' interests are often at odds with the idea of power decentralization. *Opportunistic democratization:* Such democratization happens when the elites see that they can corrupt the democratic practices and use democracy as a means to open up to the international community, especially to donor organizations. *Imposed democratization:* The elites concede to democratization in the absence of mass pressure. This occurs when the elites depend on external powers that push for democracy. This pattern of democratization happened typically in post-war democracies, such as Austria, Japan, Italy, and West Germany after World War II (Welzel 2009, 88-89).

Some scholars focus on the importance of favorable conditions for democratization (Huntington 1991, Vanhanen 1990, 1992, Nwabueze 1993, Sorensen 1993, Rustow 1999). Though there is no consensus on which condition(s) is more

favorable than the others, these scholars suggest that certain factors are generally conducive for democratization. Among these, Samuel P. Huntington, who categorizes democratization into three different waves - first wave (1828-1926), second wave (1943-62) and third wave (1974-1980s), attributes the third wave of democratization to conditions such as deepening problems of authoritarian regimes and the wide acceptance of democratic values and the authoritarian regimes' dependence on democratic states for their successful performance, the rapid growth of economy that raised living standards, better education and the emergence of urban middle class in many countries, the role of Catholic churches which changed from defending the status-quo to becoming opponents of authoritarian regimes; policies of global actors such as the European Community, the United States, and the Soviet Union, and the effects of earlier democratic transitions that motivated other countries to embark on democratic change (Huntington 1991, 45-46).

While acknowledging the variation of conditions in different countries, Tatu Vanhanen says that the chances of democratization in a country depend very much on its social conditions. Democratization is not equally possible under all kinds of social conditions. There cannot be a uniform strategy of democratization that is equally applicable to all countries because of the variation in social structures and environmental conditions from one country to another (Vanhanen 1992). Democratization takes place under conditions in which power resources are so widely distributed that no group can suppress its competitors or maintain hegemony. Democratic institution takes shape when a political system adapts to circumstances that are characterized by balance of power among the different competing groups. The variation of levels of democratization varies on how resources are distributed among the various sections of the society (Vanhanen 1990, 191-92).

On the other hand, Benjamin Obi Nwabueze says that certain conditions are necessary for democratization. There must be a multi-party system under a democratic constitution having the force of an overriding law; there must be a complete change of guards thereby excluding certain groups of people from participating in democratic politics and government; there must be a genuine and meaningful public participation in politics and in government; there must be a vibrant civil society; the state must be a

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democratic society; the state must be a free society; the state must be a just society; the state must treat all citizens equally; there must be rule of law; there must be order and stability in society; the society must be infused with the spirit of liberty, democracy, and justice; the society must be independent, self-reliant, and have a prosperous market economy. He also says that transition from one-party, either military regime or communist rule to multi-party democratic system can take three patterns - those that are voluntarily embarked upon by the incumbent regime; those that are constitutionally pursued but the process is forced through; and those that are achieved by means of revolution (Nwabueze 1993, 2-6).

Georg Sorensen is another scholar that discusses the necessity of conditions such as modernization and wealth, political culture, social structure and external factors for democratization. In his book *Democracy and Democratization*, he argues that modernization and wealth are the preconditions for democracy. Higher literacy rate and education, urbanization and development of mass media are conducive for democracy. Wealth provides the resources necessary to mitigate tensions arising out of political conflict. Political culture, that is, the system of values and beliefs that defines the context and meaning of political action are necessary for democracy. The social structure of a society, that is, specific classes and groups making up the society, is an essential condition for democracy. External factors are another favorable condition for democracy. International factors could be pertaining to economy, politics, ideology, and or other elements that constitute the international context for the process that takes place in single countries (Sorensen 1993).

Another scholar who emphasizes on favorable conditions for democratization is Dankwart A. Rustow. He says that for a democratization process to start, it requires four essential stages - "background condition," "preparatory phase," "decision phase," "habituation phase." As a background condition, there must be a sense of national unity among the people. As a preparatory phase, there must be an entrenched and serious conflict that is inconclusive struggle and requires continual engagement. As a decision phase, political leaders and the electorates must be open for compromise and prepare for conscious adoption of democratic rules in the interest of the people. As a habituation

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phase, political leaders should recognize the existence of unity in diversity and institutionalize some important aspects of democratic procedures. And politicians and the electorates must be habituated to these rules (Rustow 1999, 35).

1. 2. 2. Democratic Transition

The nature of transition from an authoritarian regime (such as one-party rule, communist regime, military regime, etc.) can be preceded by conditions that vary from one country to another. Because of the differing circumstances, the period following transition can also vary. The nature of such transitions has generated significant interests in political science (Share 1987, Wesolowski 1990, Schmitter 1994, Feng and Zak 1999, Hawkins 2001, Croissant 2004). Among these scholars, Share discusses different types of transition; Feng and Zak and Hawkins focus on the determinant factors of transition and non-transition; and Wesolowski, Schmitter and Croissant stress on the dangers after transition.

Donald Share discusses four major types of transition from authoritarian regime to democracy: incremental transition or gradual democratization; transition through rupture, which means transition without consent or cooperation from authoritarian rulers, such as revolution, coup, collapse, and extrication; transition through protracted revolutionary struggle; and transition through transaction with the consent or participation of authoritarian rulers (Share 1987, 530-531). "Consensual transition" may manifest in two different ways. The first situation is that authoritarian leaders may simply tolerate democratic change by refraining from active involvement. And the second situation is when authoritarian leaders may actively participate in the process of change by controlling or limiting the change. Consensual transition entails some degree of political continuity between authoritarianism and democratic regime. Such transitions avoid open confrontation between supporters of authoritarian regime and democratic rule (Share 1987, 29).

Yi Feng and Paul J. Zak analyze the variation of transitions in 75 developing countries from 1962 to 1992. The study finds that the primary determinants for democratization are level of per capita income, education, the distribution of wealth, and

the strength of preferences for political rights and civil liberties. They argue that democratic transition is more likely to take place in countries where gross domestic product per capita is relatively high, income equality is relatively low, people are better educated, and have a history of democratic experience or democratic heritage. They also find that the general assumption of economic development leading to democratic transition does not always hold true and there are variations across countries. For example, South Korea became a democratic country in 1988 with its $5,607 per capita income. At the same time, Taiwan's per capita income of $7,169 in 1988 did not yield democratic transition. Taiwan's transition only happened in 1991. They conclude that lack of economic development was the major obstacle for democratic transition in Africa, while it was lack of strong middle class that hindered democratic transition in Latin America (Feng and Zak, 1999, 162-163).

Taking a different approach from some political scientists on transition, Darren Hawkins finds that the three factors widely associated with democratic transition - socioeconomic development, economic crisis, and favorable international structure are all present in Cuba but they fail to democratize the country. He finds that the collective pressure of the three factors is not sufficient to bring about regime change. For example, Fidel Castro effectively manipulated the three factors to help establish his legitimacy, justify repression and rally political support. Hawkins argues that leadership skills, effective repression and some degree of political legitimacy facilitate authoritarianism in Cuba. The absence of democratizing agents such as independent social groups and moderate factions within the authoritarian regime are essential to Cuba's non-transition. Leadership and legitimacy are two key factors that prevent democratizing agents from developing. Effective leadership is often associated with smooth democratic transition but it can also facilitate authoritarian rule. Culture and history play important role in constraining the elites' choice. Castro's historic role as leader of the revolution provided his regime a degree of legitimacy. Castro's decision to eliminate moderates within the regime at its early stage also helped him maintain his authoritarian regime (Hawkins 2001, 441, 455-56).

Scholars such as Wesolowski (1990), Croissant (2004), and Schmitter (1994) focus the dangers of post-transition. Wlodzimierz Wesolowski argues that the danger in transition from authoritarianism to democracy is that changes at the top of the state structure could come before the formation of a stable sociopolitical infrastructure for democracy, such as weak interest groups, fluidity of political culture, and obscure relationship between trade unions and political parties. Another danger is the survival of some elements of authoritarianism within the political domain and the state power structure. This can be media censorship, the military, and the presidency or the executive power. All these could hinder the development of a democratic society and polity. The withdrawal of authoritarianism is not necessarily a definite loss of strength. For a democratic transition to be effective, the authoritarian regime must have a basis other than complete inability to act. Such basis could come from moral and political attractiveness of the alternative solution, that is, democracy (Wesolowski 1990, 454-457).

Aurel Croissant systematically analyzes why and how "defective democracy" develops after transition. Defective democracy is a "diminished subtype" of democracy, such as exclusive, illiberal, semi-liberal, or delegative. It has formal procedures of electoral democracy but combine them with characteristics of autocracy or authoritarianism. Defective democracies can be caused by the gradual weakening of democracy by people who are elected to lead it, rebels or separatists unwilling to compromise, disloyal soldiers, and bad socio-economic conditions. Croissant argues that there is no single primary cause for democratic development, but rather it is a combination of different factors. He says that there are two types of democratization trends in Asia. The first trend is that the institutionalization of political rights exists alongside with the stagnation or decline in the rule of law and civil liberties. Another trend is the quality of democracy that grows in varying speed (Croissant 2004, 157-165).

Philippe C. Schmitter argues that nascent democratic regimes can be in danger for two reasons. The first is that the current ideological hegemony of democracy could fade as disillusionment with the performance of "neodemocracies" encouraging the disaffected actors to revive the old authoritarian regime or form new ones. The second possibility is that democracies may stumble as a consequence of not being able to provide

the aspirations of the people and its inability to consolidate democratic institutions for political competition and cooperation. He calls the first scenario as "sudden death" usually by military coup, while the second scenario is "lingering demise" usually by gradually forming a new form of government (Schmitter 1994, 58-59).

1. 2. 3. Democratic Consolidation

Though democratization and democratic transition may have taken its root, there is no guarantee that all democratizing countries will sustain or consolidate democracy. The democratizing countries need certain socioeconomic and political conditions for consolidation. Some of the scholars who engage in studying democratic consolidation focus on different aspects (Leftwich 1997, Linz and Stepan 1996, Huntington 1991, Diamond 1999, Montero 1998, Suttner 2004). Scholars like Leftwich and Huntington talk about the conditions conducive or necessary for democratic consolidation. Diamond focuses on the different levels of consolidation; Linz and Stepan, and Montero on the different forms; and Suttner on the importance of participatory politics for consolidation.

Adrian Leftwich defines democratic consolidation as an institution "where people, political parties and groups pursue their interests according to peaceful, rule-based competition, negotiation and co-operation…" (Leftwich 1997, 524). He suggests that democratic consolidation is "conceptually distinct" from transition to democracy though there is a "continuity" between the two processes. He argues that democracy can sustain when the polity has geographical, constitutional, and political legitimacy; when there is agreement on rules of politics and people follow them; where there can be policy restraint from opposing groups; where the levels of poverty is low; and where cleavages on ethnicity, culture, and religious are not serious and can be compromised (Leftwich 1997, 532).

Geographical legitimacy: Legitimacy here means acceptability. Geographical legitimacy means that people accept the territorial definition including geographical boundaries where they live, or at least do not oppose to the existing definition, except by constitutional means. *Constitutional legitimacy:* The acceptance of constitution by the people as the formal structure of political system where people compete for power.

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Political legitimacy: The electorates, political parties or institutions accept the existence or legitimacy of the government and the people who are in power. *Consensus:* The people, especially political parties, accept the political rule of the game and stay loyal to the democratic process (Leftwich 1997, 525-527).

Policy restraint: While losers must accept defeat, the winners must equally understand that there are limits to what they can do in the government. This means that winning parties should restraint from hasty implementation of radical changes that could threaten the interests of other parties. *Poverty:* Though there is no guarantee that wealthy countries will automatically consolidate democracies, modernization theory has suggested that the more economic development there is the more likely democracy will sustain. *Ethnic, cultural and religious cleavages*: Though they are not impossible to overcome, deep rooted differences along the lines of ethnicity, culture, and religion when combined with income inequalities makes it difficult for democratic transition as well as its consolidation. Some countries that overcame such cleavages are Canada, Mauritius, Switzerland, and Trinidad. These cleavages can be resolved by a constitution that accommodates different groups into the government or through agreements of elites from different groups (Leftwich 1997, 528-531).

Another scholar who discusses conditions for democratic consolidation is Samuel P. Huntington. In his book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Huntington argues that prior democratic experience is conducive for the stabilization of democracy. The longer and the more recent experience with democracy is the more conducive to democratic consolidation than is the shorter and the more distant one. The more industrialized, modern economy and educated the populace is the more conducive to democracy. The industrially advanced societies are more conducive for the consolidation of new democratic regimes. The international environment and foreign agencies play significant role in the emergence of third wave democracies. When there is an external environment (such as foreign government or other international actors supportive of democracy), it is more conducive for consolidation. The prevalence of indigenous causes, present in earlier transitions, is more conducive for democratic consolidation. A consensual and less violent transition provides better basis for

consolidation of democracy than transitions that gone through conflict and violence. Democratic consolidation is about how political elites and the public collectively respond to contextual problems when the new democratic government is unable to solve those problems (Huntington 1991, 270-76).

Larry Diamond is another scholar who argues that democratic consolidation requires more than just a commitment to democracy as the best form of government. For a democracy to be consolidated, elites, organizations, and the general public must all believe that the political system they have are worth obeying and defending. He says that there are three levels of consolidation. The first level is the elites. Because of their disproportionate power and influence, elites matter most in the stability and consolidation of democracy, not only in their behaviors but also in their beliefs as well. Even beyond their direct power and influence, the elites play a crucial role in shaping political culture. When the elites are contemptuous about rules and culture in society, their followers tend to follow suit. The second level is organizations and movements that have their own beliefs, norms and patterns of behavior. Though they may have differing opinions or ideologies, they tend to share a collective perspective towards democracy. Though parties or organizations may be led by elites, its members do not necessarily always agree to everything what their leaders have to say. Democracy can be consolidated when no significant collective actors challenge the democratic institutions, or regularly violate its constitutional norms, procedures, and laws (Diamond 1999, 66-67).

The third level is the public. Democracy is consolidated when the overwhelming majority of the population believes that democracy is the best form of government in principle and the most suitable form of government for their country. Diamond says that at least two-thirds of people's support is a compelling indicator of democratic consolidation. Democracy is consolidated at the mass level when two thirds of support is sustained over a certain period of time and those opposing groups are less than 15 percent of the total population. Consolidation at the mass level requires rejection of violence, fraud, and lawlessness as routine methods of political action. Democracy can still be consolidated when voter turnout is low, but cannot be consolidated when supporters of rival parties kill and terrorize each other in the struggle for power (Diamond 1999, 68).

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Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan discuss that consolidation can be behavioral, attitudinal, or constitutional. Behaviorally, democracy is said to be consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors utilize significant resources to achieve their objectives by creating a non-democratic regime, or resort to violence or seek foreign intervention to secede from the country. Attitudinally, democratic consolidation is possible when the majority opinion holds the belief that democratic principles and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern the collective interest of the society and the degree of support for other alternatives of government is very small. Constitutionally, democratic consolidation is possible when both government and non-government actors are subjected or are content with the laws, procedures and institutions of the new democratic process (Linz and Stepan 1996, 6).

In line with Linz and Stepan's argument, Alfred P. Montero argues that there is no one single path to sufficiently explain the process of democratic consolidation. Elections alone cannot guarantee the survival of democracy. Consolidation of democracy includes "behavioral, attitudinal, and institutional dimensions" (Montero 1998, 119). Deepening rule of law and cohesive institutions are insufficient for democratic consolidation, and often counterproductive in efforts to expand the accountability of elites (*Ibid.,* 131). Raymond Suttner in his article *Democratic Transition and Consolidation in South Africa* argues that consolidation of democracy is dependent upon the "extension and deepening of democracy" by involving people in politics during and between elections. The presence of participatory democracy and existence of autonomous civil society organizations encourage plurality of democracy. Participatory politics beyond periodic voting, socioeconomic development, and addressing the concerns of the "excluded and marginalized" groups of people in the society are some of the important steps necessary for the consolidation of democracy (Suttner 2004, 769-70).

1. 2. 4. Civil Society and Transition

The epistemological concept of civil society first began in Europe in the eighteenth century in the context of the development of commercial relations and modern state. The Scottish enlightenment thinkers and Georg Friedrich Hegel saw civil society as a positive

factor in market development but pose a problem for state order that needs to be overcome by appealing to the moral sentiments of society or state assistance. And Karl Marx saw civil society as an arena of alienation and exploitation that needs to be overcome with revolution. Contrastingly, Alexis de Tocqueville views civil society as a positive force to sustain democracy when there is social equality and a weak central government. The idea of civil society then spread to the United States, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. Civil society remained a Western philosophical concept until the early 1980s when the third-wave of democratization began, especially after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the emergence of public sphere in the eastern and central Europe (Alagappa 2004, 26).

The term civil society is defined in somewhat different ways. For example, Jean Grugel sees it as the "arena of associations" of individual and community agency. This involves socio-political associations and voluntary organizations where people can debate and exchange ideas without coercion. Civil society is important for democracy since it provides space between private and public spheres where activism takes place. The most democratic function of civil society is its engagement with the state for a democratic change (Grugel 2002, 93). Civil society is also viewed as a "realm of power, inequality, struggle, and conflict among competing interests" and "populated by diverse formal and informal groups and organizations, and although these may choose to cooperate on certain issues or reach accommodation of their conflicting interests, there is no necessary consensus among them" (Alagappa 2004, 33). Civil society organizations should enjoy some fundamental freedoms, such as freedom to assemble, freedom to express their opinions and freedom of movement. Such basic rights should be protected by the law of the land, which should be independent judiciary.

Civil society organizations can help generate opposition to authoritarian regime, and also help connect the opposition to the international community. A crisis in authoritarian regime can generate space for civil society groups, and in turn, the activism of civil groups can deepen the crisis within the regime, which can become a catalyst for transition. The weakening or dissolution of authoritarian regime provides space for the emergence of autonomy for civil society. Civil organizations are generally more visible

under authoritarian regime than after transition. After transition, they tend to diminish or fade away gradually, or sometimes take a different role. They usually become less visible by cooperating with the new government. Some are also confused whether continued activism under the new government would destabilize the nascent democracy (Grugel 2002, 114-115). Once democracy is achieved, a vibrant civil society is necessary for consolidation (Linz and Stepan 1996, 7).

Civil society is one explanatory variable scholars study to understand democratic transition and consolidation (Diamond 1999, Bernhard 1993, Friedman and Hochstetler 2002, Graham-Yooll 1985, Linz and Stepan 1996). Diamond suggests some features of civil society that are important for transition and consolidation; Bernhard and Friedman and Hochstetler discuss civil society as a necessary condition; and Graham-Yooll underscores the significance of exile groups. Larry Diamond suggests that the first important feature of civil society is self-government. How an organization formally governs its internal affairs and what extent does it practice democratic principles of constitutionalism, transparency, accountability, participation, deliberation, representation, and rotation of leaders in the way it makes decisions and allocates its own power and resources. An organization may be able to represent group's interests, check the power of the state, or perform other democratic functions even if it is not internally democratic. However, if the organization does not tolerate dissent and adorn leaders over the group's interest, a democratic culture cannot be developed (Diamond 1999, 228).

The second feature of civil society is its goals and methods. The chances of building a democratic society significantly improve if civil society organizations do not confine its goals to some uncompromising interest groups, or groups with undemocratic methods and goals. Even within civil groups, there are some groups that are more willing to cooperate and compromise than the others. The third feature is organizational institutionalization. Institutionalization of civil society groups contribute to stability, predictability, and governability of a democratic regime. If the civil society is organized and believed to operate for a long period of time, its leaders are more likely to be accountable and responsive to their constituents for long-term goals rather than short-

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term benefits. Institutionalized civil society may prevent personalized, arbitrary, and unpredictable modes of operation (Diamond 1999, 228-29).

The fourth feature of civil society is pluralism. Some form of pluralism is necessary for civil organizations. No single civil society can claim to represent all the varied interests of all its members. In a pluralist civil society, the resignation or demise of a leader does not mean the end of the group. Moreover, individual leaders who abuse power or monopolize the organization can be replaced without affecting the organization. The fifth feature is density. The greater the density of associational life is the greater the chance of more membership from average citizens. When the density of voluntary associational life is greater, it is likely that its members will develop trust, confidence and the necessary skills to form new associations as and when necessary. The greater the density of the association is the more likely that the political culture can be more democratic in terms of political knowledge, interest, efficacy, trust, and tolerance. Greater density within civil society groups may also increase tolerance as a result of multiple members reflecting and participating in deliberation and addressing cleavages (Diamond 1999, 231-33).

Michael Bernhard is another political scientist who argues that civil society is an "absolute necessity" but not sufficient for democratic transition. Bernhard comparatively analyzes the democratic transition processes in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia and finds that the role civil society plays in democratic transition varies. In Poland, civil society began with the development of a public space by the opposition party in the mid-1970s. The civil society coexisted with the authoritarian regime. When the government was unable to suppress the civil society, it acceded to the demand for democratization in the political system. In Hungary, the opposition was unable to institutionalize the civil society but the government initiated actions to avoid confrontation with the opposition. Civil society emerged when the government intervened to create a framework to overcome economic and political crisis. In East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the political suppression effectively prevented any opposition movement but the transitions in Poland and Hungry had significant impact on these two countries (Bernhard 1993, 325).

Elisabeth Jay Friedman and Kathryn Hochstetler examine the linkage between civil society and the process of democratization and economic liberalization in Brazil and Argentina and argue that democratic transitions were triggered by the substantial changes in civil society. Democratization and economic reform, as well as international financial institutions and foundations provided incentives for the transformation of social movements into non-governmental organizations. Both state actors and civil society organizations worked together to create spaces for deliberation and opportunities for civil organizations to strengthen themselves (Friedman and Hochstetler 2002, 36-37)

Andrew Graham-Yooll examines the state of democratic transition in Argentina from 1983 to 1985 in which the exile community played a significant role. Many Argentinians were forced into exile by the violence of civilian government of 1973-1976 and the military rule of 1976-1983. The exile community contributed to collecting records of history, and information and intelligence sharing. People who were left behind in the country could not keep files for fear of raids; could not write books for fear of censorship; could not record incidents more than one day at a time, seldom for more than a week, and never for a month long. The exile community could keep records for as long as they needed without fear in different foreign countries (Graham-Yooll 1985, 578).

1. 2. 5. Elites and Transition

The role of elites is one other explanatory variable that is widely associated with democratic transition and consolidation (Lijphart 1969, Lijphart 1977, Hagopian 1990, Diamond 1999, Roberts 2002). Lijphart examines the role of elites in segmented societies; Diamond stresses the power and influence of elites; Hagopian analyzes the limitations of elite power; and Roberts focusses on the relationship between a dominant party and weaker groups. Christian Welzel discusses regime elite and regime opposition. According to him, regime elite is a "coalition of forces that can split under certain circumstances into an orthodox status quo camp and a liberal reform camp (Welzel 2009, 83). Similarly, regime opposition can be of two groups: one group forming a moderate camp and the other a revolutionary group. The argument is that democratization occurs when there is a split within the regime elite, which may be caused by economic crisis, a

lost war or other critical events that undermine the legitimacy of the government. Under such circumstance, the regime opposition is led by a moderate camp that is willing to enter dialogue with the elite group that wants a liberal reform towards democracy. Another argument is that non-violent mass movement is crucial in toppling authoritarian regime and for establishing a democratic government. Democracy can be achieved by the collective action of ordinary people against the regime elite when such movements are ubiquitous thereby becoming difficult or impossible for the regime elite to suppress (Welzel 2009, 83).

According to Arend Lijphart, elites attempt to form a stable democratic government by accommodating the diverse views and interests of people belonging to different cultural groups. A successful democracy requires that the elites have the "ability to accommodate the divergent interests and demands of the subcultures" and also have the "ability to transcend cleavages and to join in a common effort with the elites of rival subcultures." The possibility of such cooperation between rival elites would depend on their "commitment to the maintenance of the system and to the improvement of its cohesion and stability" provided that the elites understand the "perils of political fragmentation" (Lijphart 1969, 216). For a democracy to sustain, it requires the leaders to commit for the unity of the country as well as towards democratic practices. Segmental leaders also must be willing to engage in cooperative efforts with leaders of other groups in the spirit of moderation and compromise. In doing so, the elites should retain the support and loyalty of their own constituents. The elites must also continually engage in difficult balancing act with their own members and also with leaders of other groups (Lijphart 1977, 53).

Larry Diamond argues that because of their disproportionate power and influence, elites matter most in the stability and consolidation of democracy, not only in their behaviors but in their beliefs as well. Even beyond their direct power and influence, the elites play a crucial role in shaping political culture. When elites are contemptuous about rules and culture in society, their followers tend to follow suit (Diamond 1999, 66). Frances Hagopian, while examining the role of political pacts in political transition in Brazil, argues that political pacts bargained by elites that made regime transition possible

in the 1980s limited democratic consolidation despite widespread opposition to authoritarianism and support for civilian rule. By restoring old regime elites in the new political set up in return for their support for democratic transition, political pacts allowed the military to retain certain formal and informal powers. Political pacts also preserved clientelism and undermined political parties to transform themselves into genuine non-elite interest parties (Hagopian 1990, 147). The case of Brazil suggests that fragile democracies cannot be consolidated by political pacts alone. In other words, political pacts neither deepen democracy nor create strong democratic institutions (*Ibid.,* 166).

David Roberts in his article *Democratization, Elite Transition, and Violence in Cambodia, 1991-1999* argues that stability in transition from authoritarian single-party state to pluralist society is most reliable when the weaker challengers accept the conditions set by the dominant elites. However, it is also important for the dominant party to accommodate the demands of elites in the opposition party and their supporters through networks of patronage and clienteles. The dominant party needs to create the necessary institutions to address such concerns. When a challenger party's support is threatened by its inadequacies or actions of the dominant party, conflicts are likely to happen (Roberts 2002, 533).

1. 2. 6. External Agencies and Transition

The influence of external agencies is one other important factor associated with democratic transition, especially in third world countries. The impact of external agencies is mostly economic (Pinkney 2004, Potter 1997, Huntington 1991, Grugel 2002). Robert Pinkney says that with globalization comes the growth in free global market policies. The impact of global market means the manipulation of global economy by the most powerful countries and the institutions they dominate, especially on third world countries that heavily depend on foreign trade (Pinkney 2004). The socio-economic development in the 1960s and 1970s promoted the opening up of societies to foreign trade, investment, technology, tourism and communication. The pro-democratic influence of international entities such as World Bank and the United States began to promote liberal democracy in

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Asia in the 1980s by putting pressure on authoritarian regimes which depended on external agencies for loans, aid and trade (Potter 1997).

Similarly, Samuel P. Huntington asserts that policies of global actors such as the United States and the European Union caused democratization during the third wave in the 1970s and 1980s. The pressures generated by global political economy are influential in promoting democracy because they can penetrate societies dependent on external assistance. Nevertheless, external intervention can fail if there is no significant support from domestic groups. Similarly, external assistance will only serve a supporting role if democratization is generated by internal social pressures (Grugel 2002).

Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse in their article *Democratization and International Organizations* take a different approach on the impact of globalization by arguing that democratization is an important impetus to international organization (IO) membership. States undergoing democratic transitions have a strong incentive to join IOs because it sends credible signal to domestic and international audiences that the reform process is sincere. Joining IO can help leaders credibly commit to reforms since the IOs convey information, ameliorate problems, and improve the reputation of new member states, especially if the organization is composed primarily of democratic members. Democratizing states tend to join organizations composed of democratic nations. Joining IOs composed of relatively democratic members can help reduce the prospect of reversion to authoritarianism (Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006).

1. 2. 7. Institutions and Transition

Institution is another explanatory variable that is associated with democratic transition. Scholars study the different aspects of institutional changes or conditions necessary for democratic transition and consolidation (Dahl 2005, Vanhanen 1992, Hirst 1994, Schedler 2002). Dahl discusses the institutions necessary for democracy; Vanhanen and Hirst propose alternative institutional arrangements; and Schedler examine political changes without institutional reforms. Institution can be of different types. Jean Grugel discusses the existence of two types of state institutions: visible and invisible. Those visible institutions (such as the executive, electoral system, etc.) are easier to reform as

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they can be subjected to legal and constitutional reforms. However, they are not a substitute for full democratization. Grugel argues that if head of the government is unelected, or elected through unfair means or with serious corrupt practices, such as when political parties are not independent of the state, it cannot be said that democracy has even begun. Some of the most important institutional changes necessary for democratic transition involve holding elections, developing party system, and the nature of relationship between the executive and the legislature (Grugel 2002, 70).

Elections matter as they provide the first sign of democratic transition. Sometimes, elections can be the beginning for the creation of democracy. But holding of elections per se cannot be simply taken as democratization. Sometimes, elections are held to sustain non-democratic regimes. Elections are more likely to be manipulated where parties are weak or are controlled by the incumbent regime. Therefore, it is important to pay great attention to the nature of political parties whether there can be a genuine competition for democratic change or not. There must also be proper checks and balances in the government. The constitution must detail the functions and powers of the newly elected leaders so that there is no abuse of power by the different branches of government – legislature, executive and judiciary (Grugel 2002).

Once there is democratic transition, there can be problems of democratic consolidation for several reasons. This can be due to difficulties of institutional reform, prevalence of non-democratic cultures, and or elite opposition to the reform. It can also be due to nationality problems, diminished sovereignty, poor state capacity, authoritarian legacies, and problems arising out of economic reform. The role of cultures, its practices and embedded authoritarian legacies are important in understanding why so often new democracies fail to live up to the initial promising changes despite strong domestic and international support (Grugel 2002, 71-75).

Robert Dahl says that democracy requires certain institutional arrangements such as elected officials, free, fair, and frequent elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy, and inclusive citizenship. In democracy, government decisions are constitutionally carried out by officials elected by citizens. Elected officials are chosen in free and frequent elections. Therefore, citizens should have

the right to express themselves freely without fear of punishment on political matters, including criticism of elected officials. Citizens have the right to seek information from other sources independent of the government's control, and also have the right to form independent associations and groups, including political parties and interest groups. Moreover, no citizen residing in the country and subject to its laws should be denied their basic democratic rights (Dahl 2005, 188).

Tatu Vanhanen proposes two institutional frameworks that can be used to create and consolidate democracy: federalism and proportional representation. Both forms are institutional means of distributing power among competing and conflicting groups. Federalism is an institutional arrangement under which power is distributed territorially. This institutional arrangement makes it difficult for all powers to concentrate in the hands of the national government or any single group. This institutional arrangement is especially suitable for countries whose populations are ethnically divided into territorial groups. It decreases the scope and intensity of conflicts between different ethnic groups by allowing territorial ethnic groups to manage their own affairs and participate in the federal government through their own political units. On the other hand, proportional representation provides a framework for sharing power among different competing groups. Like federalism, proportional representation is an effective institutional arrangement in ethnically divided societies. Federalism provides separate representation for territorial ethnic groups, but not for geographically overlapping conflict groups. In this regard, proportional representation provides extremely flexible institutional arrangement for all important political groups based on ethnicity, ideology, class, or interest groups. Vanhanen argues that proportional representation would serve the cause of democratization better than the majority/plurality system (Vanhanen 1992, 8).

Paul Hirst proposes "associative democracy" to replace existing systems of representative democracy and centralized bureaucratic state administration. Associative democracy is a government in which associations are protected by public power that can enforce the rule of law, and funded by the public taxation where necessary. Associative democracy suggests that power should be distributed to distinct domains of authority as much as possible, whether territorial or functional. Administration should be devolved to

the lowest level consistent with effective governance under pluralism and federalism. It also asserts that democratic governance does not consist just in the powers of election or majority decision but in the continuous flow of information between the rulers and the ruled (Hirst 1994, 20).

Andreas Schedler in his article *The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections* argues that manipulation of elections lead to stable regime equilibrium. It tends to lead to a two-level game in which electoral competition and the struggle for electoral reform simultaneously develop. Opposition parties usually do not accept flawed elections as the endpoint of democratization, but rather as a step towards genuine democracy. Manipulated elections usually tend to trigger cycles of conflict on issues surrounding electoral governance. Transitions through manipulated elections do not institutionalize democratic institutions but set countries to the path of democratization (Schedler 2002, 104). The third-wave democracies across the world from Brazil to Mexico, from Poland to Armenia, from Senegal to Kenya, from Malaysia to Taiwan went through democratization process by elections (*Ibid.,* 119).

1. 3. Studies on Democratic Transition in Myanmar

The overarching question sought to be answered through this research has been grounding in the literature available on democratic transition, which provides a theoretical and comparative perspective to locate the transitional issues in Myanmar. Studies that exist on Myanmar's political transition have also been reviewed (Bünte 2011, Lidauer 2012, McCarthy 2012, Hlaing 2012). However, studies on Myanmar either focus on certain democratizing agent(s) or aspect of the transition. For example, Bunte focusses on the role of military; Lidauer and McCarthy on civil society; and Hlaing on leadership, economic problems and the role of Western democracies. These works center around either the 2010 general election or the 2012 by-election. There has not been a comprehensive study of different possible democratizing factors between the 1990 and 2010 election that may have changed the dynamics of politics. This research attempts to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge on democratic transition in Myanmar.

Marco Bünte, a political scientist and a senior researcher at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies, in his work *Burma's Transition to "Disciplined Democracy": Abdication or Institutionalization of Military Rule?* primarily focusses on how the military discreetly orchestrated the transition process. His argument is that the transition was merely a change of role for the military in politics rather than a genuine transition to democracy. His analysis is that the role of military in Myanmar politics is so entrenched that democratic changes are difficult. The transition further institutionalizes the role of military in politics by protecting the military's interests through electoral process. He makes three main observations. Firstly, the transition is only a retreat from direct military rule to a military controlled politics, and therefore, there is only a slight improvement since the last two decades. Secondly, the transition to "disciplined democracy" solves changes of leadership problem in the military hierarchy. With the continued dominant role for military in politics, the senior leaders can resign from their posts without having to fear prosecution against their human rights violations. Thirdly, neither the sanctions policy of the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) nor the engagement policy of the United Nations (UN) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) produced the desired result of democratic transition. In brief, the author acknowledges the occurrence of political change in the aftermath of the 2010 election but describes it as a military retreat rather than a genuine democratic transition.

Michael Lidauer, a social anthropologist and research associate at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, in his work *Democratic Dawn? Civil Society and Elections in Myanmar 2010–2012* examines the pattern of political transition in the aftermath of 2010 and 2012 elections, with particular emphasis on the role of civil society in the transition process. Lidauer argues that political change was orchestrated by the government in which civil society engaged in the electoral process. Civil society engagement, and not the boycott, opened up a growing space in the political process. Civil society groups gradually developed during the last few years of the authoritarian regime, which were triggered by the government's roadmap towards democracy, including a referendum on the 2008 constitution and the subsequent election. The government's call for participation in the electoral process of the 2010 general election and the 2012 by-election helped trigger civil society activism and its maneuvers.

Individuals, the media fraternity, and both formal and informal Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) started engaging in civic and voter education prior to the 2010 general election. The by-election marked an increasing evidence of open society and transparency in the transition process. The political progress was manifested in the government's permission to allow foreign media to cover the process and international observers to monitor the election. The political openness and increasing trust on the government helped the voters to approach the election more freely. The electoral victory of the opposition NLD party was crucial in the easing of Western sanctions.

Stephen McCarthy, a senior lecturer in the Department of International Business and Asian Studies at Griffith University, in his work *Civil Society in Burma: From Military Rule to "Disciplined Democracy"* analyzes the role of civil society in political transition. Though they both deal with the role of civil society in political transition, McCarthy's area of focus is different from that of Lidauer's. McCarthy distinguishes civil society into two groups – traditional and modern. Traditional civil society refers to the informal groups such as religious and ethnic organizations that can be relatively strong and can threaten or jeopardize the state. On the other hand, modern civil society refers to secular and formally organized groups such as community-based organizations, NGOs, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). McCarthy's argument is that though the military either coopted or severely suppressed the traditional civil society groups for decades, modern civil society groups gradually emerged with the government's announcement of a roadmap towards "disciplined democracy" in 2003. The two civil society groups had varying degrees of space. Modern civil society organizations had less space in government-controlled areas than the territories controlled by ethnic minorities which maintained ceasefire agreement with the government. McCarthy observes that because of the military's manipulated and controlled transition, the political change in Myanmar after the 2010 and 2012 elections is a transition from direct military rule to disciplined democracy or indirect military rule, which goes along similar line of Bünte's argument. McCarthy concludes that until the 2008 constitution is amended to remove the dominant role of military in politics, it will continue to protect the interests of those who are in power, that is, the military.

Among the four researchers whom I have reviewed their works, only Kyaw Yin Hlaing is a native scholar from Myanmar. Hlaing, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong (during his research work), argues that the political transition in the aftermath of the 2010 general election, particularly with the transfer of power from the SPDC to the military-backed USDP on March 30, 2011, was due to a number of factors: the absence of a "rigid paramount leader" in the military who was opposed to reconciliation with the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi; the challenges posed by severe economic problems; and positive responses to the government-initiated gradual political reforms by Western democracies and Myanmar's pro-democracy leaders that provided the necessary space for working together with liberals in the government for further liberalization of the political system. While he is cautious, Hlaing appears to be the most optimistic among the four scholars about the prospect of democratic transition. Hlaing, however, admits that the transition is not at the stage of a "full-fledged" democracy yet. There are hardliners both in the government and the pro-democracy groups who are not content with the pace of political change. While the military hardliners say the pace is too fast, the pro-democracy hardliners say that the reform process is too slow. The clash of such differing views can potentially lead to political instability and entail another military coup. Hlaing also observes that the country is at its "crossroads" and for a stable democratic society to emerge, the cooperation of all sections of the society is necessary.

1. 4. Research Question

When do non-democratic regimes relent and yield to pressures for transition to democracy?

This thesis proceeds with a surmise that a non-democratic political regime (military in the case of Myanmar) is more inclined to relinquish absolute political control when institutional arrangements are worked out in such a way to ensure a place for military/authoritarian elements in alternative democratic set up. Transition to democracy is possible when contending parties (non-democratic regime and those who advocate for

democracy) realize their respective limitations, willing to compromise and work towards a negotiated transition for gradual change.

1. 5. Methodology and Sources of Data

The thesis adopts qualitative descriptive research method. Descriptive research aims at a comprehensive summary of events to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon we are interested (McNabb 2009, 101). It allows the researcher stay close to the primary data and to the accounts of events that are relevant to the study (Sandelowski 2000, 334). Primary data has been collected by conducting elite interviews. The importance of elite interviews in social science research is well-recognized (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, Dexter 2006, Tansey 2007). As part of the research, leaders of political parties, civil society groups, officials, diplomats, academics and representatives of ethnic minorities were interviewed. Besides making use of the information gathered from elite interviews, the research draws upon government documents, official reports, newspapers and periodicals.

1. 6. Chapterization

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The introduction chapter analyzes theoretical debates in political science literature on democratization, democratic transition, and democratic consolidation. It focusses on some of the widely studied democratizing agents such as civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions which are considered having relevance to Myanmar. By analyzing these theoretical debates, an attempt is made in the following chapters to identify the factor(s) that trigger democratic transition in Myanmar. It also discusses the statement of the problem, significance and objectives of the study, and the gaps in existing literature on democratic transition with regards to Myanmar. It presents the research question and outlines the methodology of the research, the sources of data, and the structure of the thesis.

The objective of the second chapter is to understand the history of Myanmar that would provide the necessary background information to understand the pattern of political change from democracy to military rule. It looks at the formation of the Union of

Burma, how the country gained independence from the British in 1948 and the subsequent years of parliamentary democracy under Prime Minister U Nu and his Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). It examines the insurgency problems and the tensions within AFPFL which entailed the resignation of Prime Minister U Nu; the dissolution of parliament; and the installation of military caretaker government. It analyzes the results of general elections before and after the split of AFPFL, the only dominant political party during the civilian government. It examines the circumstances which led to military coup in 1962 and how the country was militarized and institutionalized under the authoritarian rule of General Ne Win. It also attempts to understand the circumstances which may entail military intervention in politics.

The third chapter examines the role of civil society in democratic transition. It first briefly discusses the historical and theoretical concept of civil society. Then, it chronologically examines the status and role of civil society since the country's independence: civil society under the AFPFL government; the state of civil society under Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP); the state of civil society under State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC); the state of civil society under State Peace and Development Council (SPDC); and civil society under Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It looks at the activities of civil society groups inside the country as well as civil society across the borders. Civil society across the borders refer to the networks and organizations formed by Myanmar expatriates or people who had been forced to leave the country during the years of military rule. It also examines the role of students and media as civil society groups.

The fourth chapter analyzes the role of elites before 1990 and 2010 elections and beyond. It examines the role of elites during the AFPFL government, BSPP government, SLORC government, SPDC government, and the role of NLD and ethnic minority elites in the process of democratic transition. It analyses how the military elites, as a dominant group, systematically implemented the transition process. It also examines the circumstances under which the government and the NLD reached understanding, and how the government reached out to ethnic armed groups.

The fifth chapter analyzes the role of external agencies (foreign governments, international organizations, etc.) in democratic transition. It examines the debates surrounding the effectiveness of sanctions versus engagement policies pursued by the international community with respect to democratic transition. It specifically looks at the politics of sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union, the involvement of the United Nations, and the engagement of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the People's Republic of China, and the policy shift of India.

The sixth chapter examines the role of institutions in democratic transition. It analyzes the convening of National Convention in the aftermath of the 1990 election, the military's seven-step roadmap towards democracy introduced in 2003, the role of *Sangha* (Buddhist monks), the 1990 election and the entrenchment of military role, the 2010 general election and the first steps towards restoration of democracy, and the 2012 by-election and the emergence of parliamentary democracy. It also examines why and how the military-backed SPDC government and the NLD reached understanding after the 2010 general election.

The last chapter presents summary of the work and its conclusion. An attempt is made to theorize on democratic transition based on Myanmar's case study. It also discusses the future prospect of democratic transition.

CHAPTER - 2

Political Developments since Independence

2. 1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to understand the history of Myanmar that would provide the necessary background information to understand the pattern of political change from democracy to military rule. The chapter looks at the formation of the Union of Burma, how the country gained independence from the British in 1948 and the subsequent years of parliamentary democracy under Prime Minister U Nu and his Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). It examines the insurgency problems and the tensions within AFPFL which entailed the resignation of Prime Minister U Nu; the dissolution of parliament; and the installation of military caretaker government. The chapter analyzes the results of general elections before and after the split of AFPFL, the only dominant political party during the civilian government. It examines the circumstances which led to military coup in 1962 and how the country was militarized and institutionalized under the authoritarian rule of General Ne Win. The chapter also attempts to understand the circumstances which may entail military intervention in politics.

The history of post-independence Burma (now Myanmar) is largely shaped by the legacies of the colonial rule. The British invaded Burma as many as three times before it finally defeated in January 1886 (Donnison 1953, 28). Before the annexation, Burma proper was inhabited by ethnic Burman or Bama group and the frontier areas were inhabited by different ethnic nationalities. Burma proper and the frontier areas were administered separately. For example, the Burman or Bama were ruled by their king; the Shan were internally ruled by their own sawbwas (princes); and groups such as the Chin and Kachin were ruled by their own chiefs. The British conquest of the Burmese kingdom had also led to the annexation of the frontier areas (*Ibid.,*32). For a brief period during World War II, Burma was ruled by Japan. The Japanese army provided military training to 30 Burmese youths, who were called Burma Independence Army (BIA) led by its leader Aung San. Burma was placed under Japanese military rule till August 1, 1943,

when the country was granted independence under Japanese protection. A year later on March 27, 1945, the BIA switched side to the British army and fought against its former ally Japan (National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma 2003, 8).

2. 2. Panglong Agreement and Formation of the Union of Burma

Before Burma was granted independence by the British on January 4, 1948, the country had to resolve its internal differences along ethnic lines. The unity of the people was necessary for independence as well as the formation of a Union government. In an attempt to achieve that goal, a conference was held in Panglong in the Shan states in March 1946, which was attended by leaders from Burma proper and the frontier areas (Fink 2001, 23). This was the first major conference held in Panglong in preparation for the country's independence from colonial administration. At the meeting, the Burman leaders assured that the frontier areas would be granted autonomy if they agree to join the Union of Burma. The frontier leaders were, however, considering remaining a separate entity by forming a federation of the frontier areas (Sadan 2008, 389). In support of the frontier people, H. N. C. Stevenson, the British director of the frontier areas, made a proposal for the establishment of a United Frontier Union. The proposal was welcomed by the frontier people but strongly opposed by the AFPFL leaders. Stevenson was one of the British officials working to ensure that the concerns of the frontier people were addressed by both the British government and the AFPFL (Walton 2008, 895).

In order to discuss the details for Burma's independence, it was first necessary to earn the trust of the British government. To pursue that goal, a delegation led by General Aung San left for London in the beginning of 1947 (Smith 1999, 77). Clement Attlee was the British Prime Minister at that time. The British government advised the delegation that they should not force the frontier people to join the Union government against their will. General Aung San, who led the negotiation team, responded that it was the British government's policy which separated the people of Burma proper and the frontier areas. Aung San was quoted in the *The London Times* newspaper on January 14, 1947 as saying:

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We can confidently assert here that so far as our knowledge of our country goes, there should be no insuperable difficulties in the way of a unified Burma provided all races are given full freedom and the opportunity to meet together and to work without the interference of outside interests. So far as we are concerned, we stand for full freedom of all races of our country, including those so-called Karenni states, and we hold strongly the view that no such race and no regime in our country should now be denied the fruits of the freedom that must shortly be achieved by our country and our people (Smith 1999, 78).

To allay the fears of discrimination against the frontier people in post-independence, Aung San made a historic statement: "If Burma receives one kyat, you will also receive one kyat." Kyat is a Burmese currency, which meant that people from Burma proper and the frontier areas would be treated equally. Such assurance from Aung San, who was the de facto leader from Burma proper, convinced some leaders from the frontier areas. Subsequently, 22 representatives from the frontier areas (three from the Chin hills, six from the Kachin hills, 13 from the Shan states) and Burma proper represented by Aung San signed an agreement at a conference on February 12, 1947. The historic event was called Panglong agreement, named after the venue of the conference. Since then, the day has been celebrated as Union Day. The primary objective of the agreement was to establish a Union government where each ethnic group would enjoy autonomy within their own territories. The signing of Panglong agreement was, by no means, an attempt to abolish the traditional self-rule of the frontier people. One major failure of the conference was the nonparticipation of ethnic groups other than the aforementioned signatories (Smith 1999, 79).

By cooperating with the Burmese interim government, the Chin, Kachin, and Shan leaders anticipated a speedy process of independence from the British. The Panglong agreement adopted certain principles for the formation of the Union of Burma. First, a representative of the hill peoples shall be appointed a counselor to the governor to deal with matters concerning the frontier areas. Second, the counselor shall be assisted by two deputy counselors of respective races who will attend the governor's executive

council meeting when issues pertaining to the frontier areas are discussed. Third, the council will not operate in any way that would deprive any portion of the frontier areas by granting them full autonomy in internal administration. Fourth, the frontier areas shall enjoy the fundamental democratic rights and privileges similar to any other democratic countries. Fifth, the executive council, in consultation with the counselor and deputy counselors of the frontier areas, shall examine the possibility of adopting financial arrangements for Chin and Kachin hills similar to those of Burma proper and the federated Shan states (Universities Historical Research Centre and Innwa Publishing House 1999, 270-271).

One fundamental principle of Panglong agreement was granting autonomy to the frontier people. In other words, the frontier leaders agreed to join the Union of Burma in return for self-government in their own territories and for equal share of the country's wealth. The Karen, who sent four observers to the conference, believed that they would be granted independence by the British. The 1947 constitution was drafted which granted the Shan and Karenni states the right of secession after 10 years of independence should they choose to leave the Union. The Arakan and Mon were not granted statehood. The future of Karen people was set aside for further deliberation after independence. Before the Panglong agreement was reached, different organizations of the Karen people met from February 5 to 7 and decided to form a conglomerate organization called the Karen National Union (Kipgen 2010, 166). The Karen National Union (KNU) went underground on January 31, 1949. Due to alleged mistreatment by the Burmese army, ethnic groups such as Arakan, Karenni, Mon and Shan resorted to armed movement against the Burman-led central government (Fink 2001, 24). There were also ideological differences within Burma proper. Even before the 1947 constitution came into effect, there were people who advocated for adopting the socialist model of Eastern Europe, while some others favored the model of Chinese communist regime. The constitution guaranteed religious freedom but there were some who tried to introduce Buddhism as state religion (Silverstein 1998, 22).

2. 3. Years of Parliamentary Democracy (1948-1958)

After Burma was granted independence, U Nu became its first Prime Minister. During the first few years of parliamentary democracy, U Nu government made certain efforts to accede autonomy in the internal affairs of the frontier people. The union government allowed the frontier people to teach their local languages up to the fourth grade in schools. The privilege of learning both local language and that of the Burmese language provided the minorities a chance to promote and preserve their own cultures. Moreover, during the country's Independence Day and Union Day celebrations in the capital Rangoon, officials from local governments were invited to attend at the expense of the union government. Different ethnic groups, dressed in their traditional costumes, performed dances. Occasionally, Union leaders would visit the rural areas and took part in local functions. During such visits, the central government leaders wore traditional attires of the local people. The local autonomy was threatened when the army took control of Shan state from 1952 to 1954 (Silverstein 1959: 101).

The relations between the people of Burma proper and the frontier areas were further strained by the divisive policies of the central government. The Karens, who formed a major group in the frontier areas and the largest ethnic minority in Burma proper, thought that the territory allotted to them was too small with relative to their population of approximately 3 to 4 million. The Burmans were reluctant to give up the territories they jointly occupied with the Karens. The Burmese language, spoken by the Bama/Burmans, was made compulsory in all educational institutions and government offices. Students were required to learn the Burmese language in schools and colleges, and it was made the only official language for raising formal agenda in the parliament. And the costumes of the Burmans used in Rangoon and Mandalay were informally adopted as national dress. People who wore traditional dresses of other ethnic groups, except on holidays, were considered "rustics." The more sensitive issue was the official introduction of Buddhism as state religion (Silverstein 1959: 102-103).

Ethnic groups, other than the majority Burmans, were apprehensive about the gradual changes in the government's policies for a number of reasons. First, the changes were against the principle of Panglong agreement on local autonomy. For the non-

Burman groups, the implementation of new policies was tantamount to imposition of the Burman culture and religion. The non-Burmans construed the changes as a mischievous Burmanization policy to promote Burman chauvinism. Moreover, for the non-Buddhists, the introduction of Buddhism as state religion was seen as a threat to the survival of their own religions (Kipgen 2011, 51). Tension between the government and the Karens was simmering. The Karen armed movement was so influential that the Karen troops in the government army began to desert their military outposts in January-February 1949 (Ball 1998, 130).

The Burmese politics during the years of parliamentary democracy (1948-58) cannot be fully understood without mentioning the role of AFPFL because it was the dominant political party from 1947 till the military coup in 1962. Initially, it was a political platform formed by the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) led by Thakin Soe, the Burma National Army (BNA) led by Aung San, and the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). It later evolved into a Socialist Party led by U Nu at a meeting in Pegu[1] in August 1944 to resist the Japanese occupation. AFPFL was formerly called the Anti-Fascist Organization (AFO) but was renamed after the defeat of Japan to fight for independence from the British rule.

Between 1947 and 1960, there were four elections. The 1947 election was held to form the basis of a constituent assembly that would draft a constitution once the country achieves independence from the British. It was the first election in Burma since the country was separated from British India in 1937. Holding election and drafting a constitution was part of the "Aung San-Attlee Agreement" for granting independence to Burma. Election for 255 assembly seats was held across the country representing various political parties. The elected representatives drafted the 1947 constitution for a multiparty, bicameral and parliamentary democracy (Diller 1993, 395).

Multi-party elections were also held in 1951-1952, 1956 and 1960. In the first three elections, the AFPFL won overwhelmingly as a single unified party (Callahan

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[1] Pegu (now known as Bago) is a city and the capital of Bago Region in Myanmar. It is located about 50 miles (80 kilometers) away from Yangon.

1998: 51). Holding the 1947 election was an important step for Burma to prepare for a parliamentary democracy. In the election, the AFPFL won 173 out of the 210 seats. Due to insurgency-related problems, the next election took several months from June 1951 to April 1952. In the election, the AFPFL won 147 seats out of 250 seats. The 1956 election was held on April 27, 1956 for 202 out of 250 seats for the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House); the remaining 48 seats were decided automatically as no opposition candidates filed against candidates of the ruling AFPFL. The second part of the election for the Chamber of Nationalities (Upper House) was held after a few weeks on May 22 (Silverstein 1956, 177).

Table 1: 1956 General Election Result (Chamber of Deputies)

Political Parties	Popular Vote	Percent of Vote	Seats
AFPFL	1,844,614	47.7	147
National United Front (NUF)	1,170,073	30.4	48
Independents	239,166	6.2	13
United Hill People's Congress (UHPC)	163,283	4.2	14
Burma Democratic Party (BDP)	113,091	2.9	0
Burma Nationalist Bloc (BNB)	77,364	2.0	1
People's Economic Cultural Development Organization (PECDO)	49, 203	1.3	4
All Shan State Organization (ASSO)	41,940	1.1	4
Other Parties (10)	40,405	1.0	0
Arakan National United Organization (ANUO)	38,939	1.0	5
Shan States Peasants Organization (SSPO)	31,112	.8	2
Kachin National Congress (KNC)	30,837	.8	2
United National Pa-O Organization (UNPO)	22,185	.6	1
Undecided Seats			9

Source: Silverstein 1956, 182

2. 3. 1. Split in AFPFL and Formation of Caretaker Government

In April 1958, the AFPFL split into two factions - *Clean* faction led by U Nu and Thakin Tin (also known as Nu-Tin faction) and the *Stable* faction led by Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein (also known as Swe-Nyein faction). Differences within the AFPFL led to Prime Minister U Nu's narrow escape of a no-confidence vote in the parliament (Chamber of

Deputies) by just 8 votes on June 9, 1958 with the support of NUF. A total of 127 members voted against the motion and 119 supported it. The split was a consequence of personal and organizational rivalries rather than political values. AFPFL was originally formed by different political parties and ethnic-based organizations under the leadership of General Aung San who was assassinated in July 1947. The party was then led by U Nu, under whose leadership disagreements began to emerge within the founding leaders of the party (Trager 1958, 145).

The hardliners in the military were alarmed by the presence of communist linked-NUF in mainstream politics, whose support U Nu needed for his political survivor. The deterioration of law and order was another concern. The military leaders became increasingly convinced that the civilian government was incapable of maintaining a stable government. Amidst the political uncertainty, Prime Minister U Nu on September 26, 1958 announced that he had invited the military leader General Ne Win to form a caretaker government as interim Prime Minister and to restore law and order before a new election can be held. Transfer of power to the military took place on October 28 which would allow the military to rule for a period of six months. However, a constitutional amendment was made in February 1959 to allow for a non-parliamentarian to hold office for longer period (Butwell and Mehden 1960, 145).

There were some observers who doubted whether the military leader would hand-over power voluntarily after the expiry of the interim government. To the surprise of many, General Ne Win on August 13, 1959 announced the date for holding a general election. During the brief caretaker government, the military was able to reduce insurgency-related violence to its lowest point since the country's independence; the standards of government efficiency and integrity were improved; crime rate and the living cost of ordinary people were also reduced. The military government, however, resorted to some rigid measures to achieve its objectives. One example was the relocation of some 164,000 squatters and hutments inside the capital Rangoon to nearby towns before the rainy season in 1959 (Butwell and Mehden 1960, 145-46).

As announced earlier, a general election was held under General Ne Win's interim administration on February 6, 1960. It was the third election since the country's

independence to decide which faction of the AFPFL should form the next government. In the election, the Clean faction won overwhelmingly, including a defeat of two key leaders of the Stable faction, U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein. The NUF, a communist-linked party which performed well in the 1956 election, did not win a single seat. Moreover, independents and ethnic-based parties did not do well, except in areas dominated by ethnic minority groups. The election result was a surprise to many who had hoped to see competitive election between the two AFPFL factions. The Clean faction won with even greater margin than before the party split in 1956 election. U Nu played an important role in the Clean faction's overwhelming victory. He had promised that if elected to power he would make Buddhism as state religion. As Prime Minister and leader of the AFPFL for the past decade, U Nu managed to establish himself as a charismatic figure among many voters. He had the support of Buddhist monks who played a vital role in the daily lives of the common people (Bigelow 1960, 70-71).

Table 2: Distribution of Seats after 1960 Election (Chamber of Deputies)

Clean AFPFL and Allies	Seats
'Clean' AFPFL	158
Shan States United Hill People's Organization (SSUHPO)	6
Peoples Educational and Cultural Development Organization (PECDO/Kachin)	2
Chin National Organization (CNO)	1
Kayah National United League (KNUL)	1
Sub-total	**168**
Stable AFPFL and Allies	
'Stable' AFPFL	41
Kachin National Congress (KNC)	3
Kayah Democratic League (KDL)	1
Sub-total	**45**
Arakan National United Organization (ANUO)	6
Other parties and independents	16
To be decided (elections still to be held or official returns not announced)	15

Source: Butwell and Mehden 1960, 151

As the above table shows, the Stable faction won fewer votes than many had expected. During the election campaign, leaders of the Stable faction attempted to convince the people that they were as religious as leaders of their rival faction but wanted to avoid politicizing religion. But such campaign did not seem to yield success. The close association with the army did not benefit the Stable faction either. Though the situation of law and order was significantly improved and many of the reforms were beneficial for national welfare during the interim government, many voters were concerned with the strategies the army used to achieve its objectives. The average voters seemed to have believed that the benefits of military government's policies were much smaller than the disadvantages they faced. The cooperation between the Stable faction and the army was initiated mostly by the former (Bigelow 1960, 71).

The support for the two AFPFL factions in the frontier areas was mixed. The table below shows that while there was support for both factions, majority of them were uncertain about which faction to support. As the data shows, 18 parliamentarians supported the Clean faction and 13 of them opposed. The data also shows that majority people in the frontier areas were reluctant to put their trust on either of the AFPFL factions, both of which were dominated by ethnic Burmans.

Table 3: Clean Faction-led Government in Ethnic Areas after 1960 Election (Chamber of Deputies)

	Support	Opposition	Uncertain
Karens	1	6	0
Kachins	4	3	0
Chins	3	3	0
Kayahs	1	0	1
Shans	6	0	14
Arakans	3	1	8
Total	**18**	**13**	**23**

Source: Bigelow 1960, 73

Despite the overwhelming electoral victory, the U Nu government was unable to win the loyalty of the frontier people. The government was unable to guarantee equal distribution of national resources between ethnic minorities and the Burmans (Callahan 1998: 59). The existence of such inequality among the diverse groups of people was interpreted by some as incompetence on the part of the authorities, while others construed it as social injustice that could potentially lead to social unrest and political instability (Lambert 1967, 111-13). Moreover, not long after the electoral victory, internal conflicts erupted within the Clean faction, renamed as Union party, on the issue of membership in the executive committee. Leaders of the constituent members such as the All Burma Peasant Organization, Federation of Trade Organization, and Union Labor Organization were excluded from the executive committee. The party's internal crisis led to the emergence of "Thakins" and "U-Bos" - the former were leaders of the constituent members of the Union party and the latter were individuals who supported U Nu's party-based individual membership.

Subsequently, U Nu announced in December 1960 that he was stepping down from party leadership but would remain as Prime Minister. The tension between members of the Union party was similar to the situation before the breakdown of AFPFL in 1958. Meanwhile, Prime Minister U Nu took certain initiatives that were apparently against the interests of the military. For example, he was not supportive of the continuance of the National Defense College that was established during General Ne Win-led military caretaker government. He was also against the creation of central intelligence organization. Both these programs were supported by the military. The Prime Minister had also separated the police from the army's control and authorized the police to have autonomy on conducting training for its personnel (Trager 1963, 312-13).

Some argue that in order for a government to function responsibly, there needs to be a system in place for effective communication between leaders and the general public. Certain norms and regulations are necessary for the bureaucrats to follow while performing their official duties. A communication channel should be open in such a way that the voices of the people are heard by public officials and vice-versa. The efficiency of public leaders can also depend on prior experiences and skills (Ricci and Fitch 1990,

56). During the years of parliamentary democracy, the central government was unable to establish a strong bond with people across the country, especially with ethnic minorities. The problem was not only seen in the border areas where transport and communication infrastructures were poor or inaccessible but also in areas where such facilities were available. In many instances, the Rangoon government was unable to exercise its influence beyond the capital city. Insurgency problems constantly worried the government. In addition, there were limited skilled administrators and the necessary resources for U Nu-led civilian government to efficiently govern the entire country (Callahan 1998: 59).

2. 4. Militarization of Burmese Society

Since the days of independence movement, the military has played an important role in Myanmar politics. Before the country's independence, the army's primary role was to free the country from the occupation of Britain and Japan. After independence, its priority shifted to quelling insurgent movements and restoring law and order. Because of the vital role it played in defending the country from external forces and internal armed conflicts, the military was an integral part of the political institution in Burmese politics despite its insignificant strength and size compared to other national armies. The need to strengthen the military was evident from the remarks of General Aung San which he made a year before the country's independence.

Look at the national defence, our military is just enough for suppression of internal unrest. For national defence [against external threat], it is not sufficient. Army [infantry] is not enough. There are no armour[ed] battalions. [The] Navy is just for show. In reality, there is no way to defend this country. [The] Air force is just in the formative stage. In [the] air force, for this country, there should be at least 500 combat aircrafts [sic] for [the] first line of defence. That is not sufficient. While these 500 aircrafts [sic] are in frontline combat action, each aircraft should have three or four aircrafts [sic] in [the] rear for [sic] reserve. At least another 500 combat aircrafts [sic] is [sic] needed. Overall, this country needs at least one million soldiers at the time war begins. It is better to have an army of [a] million soldiers. Right now, we have just 20,000 soldiers (Myoe 2009, 193).

The U Nu-led civilian government was in the midst of a volatile political environment. The central government was unable to exercise complete authority over the non-Burman territories, many of whom were not interested in joining the Union. Even the frontier people who agreed to cooperate with the interim Burmese government by signing the Panglong agreement had ingrained suspicion towards the sincerity of the Burman people (Scherrer 1997, 11). Internal problems came along with the country's independence. Insurgent groups such as the CPB (White Flag), CPB (Red Flag), People's Volunteer Organization (PVO), Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), Mon national Defense Organization (MNDO), and the Mujahids were all fighting against the central government. While the communist groups demanded a replacement of the democratic government with a communist regime, others fought for either independence or autonomy. The central government was so weak that the insurgents controlled most of the countryside by spring 1949. And even some parts of the capital Rangoon[2] were in the hands of rebel groups (Liang 1990, 19). Insurgency problem was exacerbated by the Burman nationalists who wanted to establish a unitary state (Rajah 1998, 135).

Over the years since independence, the armed forces (known as Tatmadaw in Myanmar) gradually increased its number of military battalions but still lacked many important infrastructures. Until 1953, the Tatmadaw neither had military directorate nor training manual in place. Military officers were sent overseas for training in countries such as the United Kingdom, India and Pakistan. Though they managed to join junior officer course trainings, the military officers were unable to secure admission in staff colleges and artillery schools. The inefficiency of military infrastructure was largely due to the country's nascent democracy and the civilian government not paying priority to its improvement. The state of military institution was a concern to the military leaders. During the Tatmadaw conference on August 24, 1953, the armed forces commander-in-chief, Ne Win, said:

> …the most serious weakness of the General Staff Office is the training area. Because of the weakness in training programmes, operational drawbacks become more and more common in battles. Difficulties in training programmes are lack of time and shortage of

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[2] Along with other names given by the British government, Rangoon was renamed *Yangon* by the SLORC government in 1989.

training materials – both manuals and equipment…Because of the lack of skills in battlecraft and operation of weapons, fire power does not match enemy casualties. The war office has been trying hard to get materials for training. As we do not think the existing training facilities and schools are sufficient or of international standard, we plan to establish a combat forces school and a military academy in the near future. The training programmes of these schools will determine the future course of the Tatmadaw. In order to run these training schools on our own, we have sent out trainees not only to England, India and Pakistan, as happened in the past, but also to the United States, Australia and Yugoslavia (Myoe 2009, 136).

It was evident from the speech that the military leader was determined to improve both military infrastructures and personnel with the ultimate goal of establishing a robust military institution. Upon their return from the respective trainings, the officers were expected to run the military institution more efficiently.

2. 4. 1. Military Coup of 1962

In previous few paragraphs, I discussed how the military played an important role in the country's independence movement and in the maintenance of law and order amidst insurgency problems and the political infighting within political parties. I also briefly mentioned the role of the '30 comrades' of the Burmese army led by General (called Bogyoke in Myanmar) Aung San. After his death in 1947, the Tatmadaw was led by General Ne Win, who was one of the 30 comrades. It is important to understand how Ne Win managed to rally the support of his subordinates to carry out the coup in March 1962. In this regard, David Steinberg, an expert on the political history of Myanmar, describes the influence of Ne Win in Burmese politics as:

Ne Win has been in the limelight since the early 1940s, when he was trained by the Japanese for anti-British activities as one of the "30 comrades" along with Aung San – the father of Burmese independence, who was assassinated in 1947 and whose memory is perpetuated through portraits in every government office and on some of the currency, and through carefully selected reprints of his writings. Ne Win's close

association with Aung San and the latter's continuing legacy have been themes of government propaganda since 1962; Ne Win has been portrayed as having been handed the mantle of leadership from Bogyoke Aung San, which gave him popular legitimacy (Steinberg 1990, 9).

From the above passage, it is clear that Ne Win had been an integral part of the military institution since the early days of the Burmese army. His close association with Aung San later helped him to assume the role of the Tatmadaw's supreme leadership. Under Ne Win's command, the military staged a coup just a little over two years from the 1960 election. What were the circumstances that triggered military intervention in politics? Since the country's independence, the fledgling democracy was plagued by insurgency problems, either from the communists or the frontier people. The civilian government was incapable of asserting its authority throughout the country, especially in the rural areas. The insurgency problems were exacerbated by the internal conflicts within AFPFL, the only dominant political party. The political crisis deteriorated to the point that Prime Minister U Nu had to invite the army to form a caretaker government and hold a new election. Under the Ne Win-led interim government, a new election was held in 1960 and the Clean faction of the AFPFL won overwhelmingly. The election was more or less a referendum to the U Nu government. After returning to power, the Prime Minister realized that solving the problems of ethnic minorities was essential for peace and stability in the country. Subsequently, U Nu convened a meeting to discuss their grievances. Before recommendations for peace initiatives could be announced, the army seized power on March 2, 2013 (Human Rights Documentation Unit 2000, 8).

There had been simmering tensions between ethnic minorities and the Burmans before the military coup d'état. For example, the Burmans accused the Shans of conspiring to disintegrate the Union of Burma with the help of "imperialists and capitalists." On the other hand, ethnic minorities, who demanded federal government, labeled the Burmans as "chauvinists and colonialists" and accused them of attempting to establish a unitary state against the Panglong agreement and the

1947 constitution. After the country's Union Day celebration in Rangoon in February 1962, leaders of ethnic minorities (Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karenni, Karen, and Mon) gathered to finalize the constitution for the proposed federal Union of Burma, based on the principles of the 1947 constitution. As leaders of the federal movement were in the same city, it was convenient for the military to carry out the coup (Maung 1989, 39).

The military leaders felt that the country had not only become factionalized and an ultranationalist state but also veered away from the path of socialism which the late General Aung San had always stood for. As a patriotic soldier, Ne Win felt that it was his bounden duty to intervene in the nation's interest. The military coup was by and large a bloodless one, except the death of the son of the country's President Sao Shwe Thaike, who belonged to Shan ethnic group. Following the coup, Prime Minister U Nu, his entire cabinet, and leading members of the opposition were taken into custody. President Sao Shwe Thaike died in prison in November 1962. Maha Devi, the widow of the late president, and her family members left Rangoon for Shan state and soon after started the Shan revolutionary movement against the military government (Maung 1989, 40).

A new political era began with the militarization of Burmese society. The political transition marked the end of parliamentary democracy and the beginning of military rule led by the Burmans. The military dissolved the parliament and banned all political parties and related activities. A new military government called 'Revolutionary Council' (RC) was formed with Ne Win as the chair. Under the military leadership, Burma was made a one-party state with the formation of BSPP in July 1962. Several policy changes were implemented. For example, all banks were nationalized and the government demonetized/devalued 50-kyat and 100-kyat currency notes, which immensely affected the savings of many people across the country (Fink 2001: 29-32).

Ne Win's past administrative experience and his political achievements during the caretaker government helped him earned the trust of many people. His past records convinced many that he was not only a good soldier but also a good

administrator. Among others, Ne Win accomplished two important tasks. His caretaker government reached an agreement with the Shan Sawbwas and Karenni (now Kayah) Saophalongs to abandon their traditional feudal rights on April 21, 1959. Ne Win-led military government also successfully signed boundary agreement with China in January 1960, which pleased many people in Burma proper. On the other hand, the boundary agreement gave away some of the Wa territories in Shan state. The people of Shan state, especially the Sawbwas, were unhappy with the Ne Win government for giving away parts of their territory to China. The discontentment among the Shan Sawbwas accelerated the demand for federalism, which was rejected by the Rangoon government. The Shan Sawbwas then threatened to secede from the Union of Burma (Maung 1989, 37-38).

A renowned Myanmar expert and political scientist, Josef Silverstein, in his book *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* argues that the failure of parliamentary democracy was due to the civilian government's inability to resolve the country's minority problems, exacerbated by the deep distrust and simmering tension between the Burmans and ethnic minorities (Silverstein 1997, 31). According to the 1947 constitution, states had the right of secession unless otherwise stated. However, the Kachin and Karen states were denied such right. The Shan and Karenni were required to wait for 10 years until January 4, 1958. Right of secession did not apply to the Chin Special Division since it was not a full-fledged state (*Ibid.,* 59).

2. 4. 2. When Does Military Intervene?

The 1962 military coup sent mixed feelings. While the military saw the prevailing political situation a necessary point to intervene, others, especially ethnic minorities, considered Ne Win as ultranationalist who wanted to suppress their demand for autonomy under a federal government. For the Burman nationalists or ultranationalists, federalism was tantamount to disintegration of the Union (Kipgen 2011, 54). Some see ethnic armed struggle was inevitable. Harn Yawnghwe, a Shan national who spent over 48 years in exile and is the Executive Director of the Euro-

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Burma Office based in Belgium, wrote in the Norway-based *Democratic Voice of Burma* (DVB) news website on August 16, 2013 that:

> In the 1960s, there was no choice but to take up arms. Without the armed struggle, many ethnic identities would have been lost. My brother and mother were part of that armed struggle…Ne Win was astute enough to realise that he could not gain power and dominate as long as the political system was democratic and the ethnic nationalities sought a political solution. He had to subvert both the system and send the ethnic nationalities into the jungle to gain the upper hand (Yawnghwe, 2013).

The military justified its coup d'état as a necessary step to suppress insurgency problems and prevent the country from disintegration (Rajah 1998, 135; Butwell 1972, 901). The deterioration of law and order was a good opportunity to say that the civilian government was incapable of maintaining political stability. Evidently, military dictatorship was perceived to be best suited for Burma. Such observation is, however, not something unheard of in the history of other countries. For example, the military's perception in Burma has some resemblance to that of the military in Mexico. Like General Ne Win, General Jose Maria Tornel saw that the Mexican politicians were incapable of providing political stability since the country's independence. Tornel held the view that a robust centralized government or dictatorial regime was necessary to maintain law and order in Mexico (Fowler 1996, 20-21).

However, such claim of civilian government incompetence as the reason for military coup has been challenged. Chuka Onwumechili, in his book *African Democratisation and Military Coups*, argues that military coups are not necessarily selfless acts but are used as a means to acquire power by leaders who are not confident about winning if they run for free and fair elections. The coup leaders often use "incompetence" as a case for justifying their actions. Once they are in power, like any other leaders, they seek for legitimacy and international support. Once the military is in power, it is often difficult to replace with a civilian administration as

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long as there is a cohesive structure within the military hierarchy (Onwumechili 1998, 40). Similar observation is made by John F. Guilmartin Jr in his work *Light Troops in Classical Armies: An Overview of Roles, Functions, and Factors Affecting Combat Effectiveness* in which he argues that a cohesive institution brings together the military personnel for a common cause which they would not do individually. Loyalty to military institution takes precedence to personal choice and preferences even in the face of violence or threats of deaths. In a cohesive institution, individuals become responsible partners of a group which can overcome the challenge or dangers of factionalism (Guilmartin 1997, 23-24).

2. 5. Institutionalization of Military Rule (1962-1989)

After the military coup, the Revolutionary Council government became "disillusioned not only with the party system but with democracy itself as it has functioned in Burma." The government introduced the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' as its domestic policy guiding principle. The government's priority was to entrench military rule. Subsequently, Security Councils, made up of the army, police, and civilian representatives, were formed across the country at division, district, township, and village levels. The primary objective of the councils was to provide better flexibility to the needs of the local people, and to ensure that there was a direct chain-of-command to carry out the priorities of the central government. Businesses were nationalized. Through the councils, the government implemented programs such as helping the farmers with loans, improving the conditions of roads and irrigation systems, and providing the necessary resources to increase agricultural productivity with high yielding quality. The government purchased rice throughout the country at a controlled price (lower than the market rate) and sold them to foreign buyers at a higher price. The agriculture sector became the most profitable business for the new government (Badgley 1962, 25-26).

Similar to the time of military caretaker government from 1958-60, the personality of Ne Win was crucial in the successful transition from civilian government to military rule. He was a man of determination and persistence in pursuing his political objectives. He was a leader who enjoyed "playing the role of strategist, employing his

excellent sense of timing and making crucial decisions more or less behind the scenes. Here is the strong, silent type of leader. He has confidence in few men, but those who do enjoy his respect are playing key roles in the present government." General Ne Win received immense respect within the army, especially the younger officers. Some of the senior officers who may have disagreed or challenged his power in the past have been either sent abroad as ambassadors or have retired from service. Though there were some other important personalities within the Revolutionary Council government, the supreme authority rested on Ne Win, who was chairman of the Council (Badgley 1962, 30-31).

After a decade of military rule, Ne Win and 20 other top military elites resigned from the military leadership on April 20, 1972. Ne Win changed his role from military leader to civilian prime minister. As a result, the prefix of his official name also changed from "General" to "U." A couple of days later on April 22, the government announced a draft constitution which changed the country's name from the Union of Burma to a Socialist Republic of Burma, with a single political party in a chamber of 600-member People's Congress. The changes were part of the military government's long-term policy that had been gradually implemented since it came to power in 1962. The judicial powers of Supreme Court and High Courts were terminated. Only the government-backed BSPP was allowed to function. All local administrations which were introduced during the British era and continued during the U Nu government were also abolished and replaced with the centrally controlled administrations. As a result, the privileges guaranteed by the 1947 constitution to the country's minorities were abolished (Butwell 1972, 901-902).

The BSPP policy of 'Burmese Way to Socialism' was intended to improve the economic situation of the country, though that did not happen. Instead, by mid 1980s, the country's imports were at substantially low level and the exchange resources were dwindling. Prices of the country's main export items such as rice, teak, and minerals remained low at the international market. In October 1986, the country's export earning target of US$555 million for 1985-86 was fallen short by US$230 million and another US$230 million short for 1986-87 fiscal year. Burma estimated debt ranged from US$3 to US$5 billion. Crude oil production declined to 27,679 barrels a day in 1986-87, far short of 35,312 barrels a day target. The annual per capita income plummeted from

US$670 in 1960 to $190 in 1987. By 1987, the Gross Domestic Product growth dropped to its lowest since the beginning of the 1980s at 3.7 percent compared to 4.3 and 5.6 percent in the preceding two years. Because of the continued deterioration of the country's economy, Burma was designated as a least developed country by the United Nations on December 11, 1987. The Ne Win government admitted the failure of the BSPP economic policy at its meeting on August 10, 1987 meeting (Naidu 1988, 2101).

The economic crisis was exacerbated by the government's demonetization of all currency notes of kyats 25 and above. There was high inflation and shortage of fuel to transport rice to some cities, which resulted in shortage of food. Students protested the government policies and demanded an end to one-party rule. In April 1988, the government responded by closing all universities and students were sent home. On June 21, 1988, despite the closure of educational institutions, thousands of students, joined by the general public, came out on the streets of Rangoon to protest the deteriorating state of economy and the excessive use of force by the police on protesters earlier in March. Riots broke up in different district towns and the authorities imposed curfews to control them. Amidst the deepening economic crisis and the political chaos, the BSPP leader U Ne Win announced his retirement from politics at a Party Congress on July 23, 1988, citing his old age and accepting that he was indirectly responsible for the political crisis. Ne Win suggested that a referendum be held to decide whether the people want a multi-party or single-party system. Despite Ne Win's resignation, mass demonstration resumed in August and the people demanded democracy. Students-led demonstrations were joined by thousands of government employees and even members of the police and the army (Guyot 1989, 119-20).

The BSPP appointed U Sein Lwin as its party Chairman and President of the Republic. Sein Lwin was the Joint General of the party under U Ne Win chairmanship who resigned from his post along with Ne Win and four other leading party members. The new BSPP leadership rejected U Ne Win's suggestion of holding a meeting in September to consider the possibility of a multi-party system. Students protested the appointment of Sein Lwin as the new BSPP chief. Students accused Sein Lwin as the military leader responsible for directing the riot police during the spring protests and the

U Thant uprising of 1974. As protests continued and riots spiraled, the authorities imposed martial law on August 3. The army, who replaced the riot police, shot personnel of the Rangoon General Hospital who were calling for an end to the bloodshed. The US Senate passed a *Moynihan* resolution to condemn the killing and called for an end to one-party rule. Subsequently, Sein Lwin resigned on August 12, just after seventeen days in office. He was replaced by Maung Maung, former chief judge and recently appointed as Attorney General. Maung Maung was one of the two civilians in a leading position in the military-dominated government. He initiated some reform measures, including lifting of martial law and released opposition leaders from jail. The BSPP executive committee hurriedly endorsed multi-party election, which was opposed by the opposition groups that demanded an interim government to supervise the election (Guyot 1989, 120).

The government severed ties with the BSPP and required civil and military officials to resign from the party. As the political chaos continued, government employees began to resign. They demanded the formation of an interim government. The political simmering intensified as protesters were joined by uniformed members of the civil, police and even the army. There was law and order problems and some protesters captured the soldiers who had shot them and they had to be rescued by the monks. Subsequently, General Saw Maung, the Defense Minister, staged military takeover on September 18, 1988. The military intervention ended a brief period of a government led by civilian leader. The military re-imposed curfew and restricted movement of the people. The authorities also issued an order for all government employees to return to work or face suspension (Guyot 1989, 121). Though some scholars call the September 18 military takeover as a military coup, former military leaders, including former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) Vice-President Htay Oo said it was an intervention at the invitation of the BSPP government.

A 14-year period of constitutional military rule under BSPP was replaced by a 19-member of SLORC which placed Burma once again under direct military control (McCarthy 2000, 233). On May 3, 1989, Saw Maung, head of the SLORC, announced that election for the Constituent Assembly will be held on May 27, 1990. A total of 2,392

nominations were filed for the 491 seats in the new parliament. While the SLORC was preparing for election, students who fled to neighboring countries during the pro-democracy uprising were arming themselves to fight back the Burmese army. Some students were considering forming their own army, while many others joined the established armed groups of Karen, Kachin, Shan, and Mon. The military junta's policy was to attack and destroy those bases. By year end, the Burmese army destroyed most key bases along the Thai-Burma border (Badgley 1990, 230). During my interview with former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, he said he invited the fleeing students to return home. He said he personally went to Yangon airport to receive the returning students and handed them over to their families.

2. 6. Conclusion

From 1941 to 1988, the military, with the participation of General Ne Win, had made a number of major interventions. The BIA and the Japanese army liberated Burma from British occupation in 1941-42; the BIA and the British army liberated the country from Japanese occupation in 1944-45; the army forced back the Karen forces in defense of Rangoon in 1958; formed a caretaker government in 1958 at the invitation of the civilian government; staged a coup in 1962 and formed a Revolutionary Council government; and brutally suppressed the pro-democracy uprising in 1988 and installed a new military government called SLORC. During the four decades of Burmese history (1948-88), the army successfully paved the way for a democratic election in 1958. Political transition from one form of government to another also led to a change in the national economic policy. From 1948 to 1988, there were four stages of political changes in the government as given below.

Table 4: Burma's Reform and Revolution Cycles

Nature of Change	Year	Politics	Economics
Revolution	1948	Independence	Buddhist Socialism (economic nationalism)
Revolution	1962	Military coup (Revolutionary Government)	Burmese Way to Socialism (command economy)
Reform	1974	Socialist Republic (Expansion of the BSPP)	Internal rice price raised (loans from World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and foreign countries)
Reform or Revolution?	1988	Ne Win's abdication (Popular revolt, Military coup)	Free trade in grains (opening of economy to private domestic and foreign firms)

Source: Guyot 1989, 107

Two major patterns of political transition can be observed. The first is liberation from foreign domination to an independent democratic country. The second pattern is transition from parliamentary democracy to military rule. In both cases of the transition, leadership and personality were crucial. Firstly, it was General Aung San, along with his delegation, which convinced the British government to finally grant independence to Burma. Secondly, it was an agreement between the Burman leader General Aung San from Burma proper and leaders of the frontier areas which led to the formation of the Union of Burma and the adoption of the first constitution in independent Burma. During the years of parliamentary democracy, it was the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu which managed to govern the AFPFL-led civilian government. And during the two years of a caretaker government (1958-60) and the following years of military rule, it was Ne Win who successfully reigned.

Before the military coup in 1962, the country was constantly threatened by insurgency problems and the political infighting within AFPFL. The rise of insurgency problems was triggered by two distinct political objectives - demand for

autonomy under a federal government and a desire to install a communist regime. The frontier people, especially those who signed the Panglong agreement, felt that they were cheated on the question of autonomy. The Karens, particularly, wanted to remain independent from the Union of Burma. The perception of federalism as tantamount to disintegration of the Union by the Burman nationalists and ultranationalists, especially the military, was a major hindrance to the implementation of the Panglong agreement and the 1947 constitution. The frontier people insistence on autonomy and the opposition to it was a major triggering factor for the military coup in 1962. The communist insurgents fought for total replacement of democratic rule with communist regime. The breakdown of BSPP government and the subsequent consolidation of direct military rule in 1988 were mainly due to the country's economic crisis and the government's inability to address it. The people's desire for replacing a one-party rule with multi-party democratic government was also a significant factor behind the mass pro-democracy uprising.

Despite immense opposition from the people, the institutionalization of the armed forces as a cohesive body was crucial for the sustenance of military rule for decades. Institutional cohesion can be of coercive or voluntary in nature. Although there were internal grievances, especially within the low-ranking officers, there was an established coercive cohesion within the military hierarchy. The cohesion stemmed mainly from an entrenched repressive leadership with stringent command and structural system in place, which made it difficult or even dangerous for disgruntled officers to openly voice their grievances. Moreover, under the military rule, there was little or no space for civil society groups or other democratically established organizations to freely operate that could have challenged the military leadership. The government was run by military leaders of guarded hierarchical institution. Similar to Onwumechili's (1998, 40) argument in the case of military coups in Africa, the Burmese military usurped power illegitimately and sought legitimacy and support from international institutions, including the United Nations.

CHAPTER - 3

Civil Society and Democratic Transition

3. 1. Introduction

Some scholars (Bernhard 1993, Diamond 1999, Friedman and Hochstetler 2002, Graham-Yooll 1985, Linz and Stepan 1996) say that civil society is either conducive or essential for democratic transition and consolidation. This chapter first briefly discusses the historical concept of civil society. Then, it chronologically examines the status and role of civil society since Myanmar's independence: civil society under the AFPFL government; the state of civil society under BSPP; the state of civil society under SLORC; the state of civil society under SPDC; and civil society under USDP. It looks at civil society inside the country as well as civil society across the borders. Civil society across the borders refers to the organizations formed by Myanmar expatriates or people who had been forced to leave the country during the years of military rule. By civil society, I mean associations or organizations formed by groups of individuals. In other words, civil society is the arena of association between individual and the state. Civil society can be of social, religious or political in nature.

Whatever the nature of civil society it may be, they should have some fundamental characteristics such as freedom of thought, opinion, expression, association and movement. The rights of civil society groups should be protected by independent judiciary. Since the country's independence on January 4, 1948, there has been little or no space for civil society groups to operate independently. Scholarship on the studies of different aspects of Myanmar has also been limited for decades. Field research works have been hampered either by insurgency problems or by government restrictions.

3. 2. Civil Society under AFPFL Government

During the years of AFPFL government, professional and social organizations were formed mostly in urban areas where considerable space existed between state and society, except for religious groups which had their presence in the rural areas as well. However,

the emergence of civil society was ephemeral. There was close link between the civil society groups and the state. This was in part due to the small number of elites and their extended connections either in the government or in the opposition groups. Within the political sphere itself, there were familial relations between members of the insurgent groups and leaders in the government. Public and private spheres were often closely linked together in one way or another.

The AFPFL party and its allies dominated the government. There was no formidable rival political party that could threaten the government until internal crisis erupted within AFPFL. The AFPFL government mobilized civil society groups such as the All Burma Peasants' Organization (ABPO) and All Burma Workers' Organization (ABWO) to advance their own political interests, primarily to sustain the government. The U Nu government initiated the necessary steps to ensure the support of mass organizations. Therefore, despite the development of professional and non-political social organizations, there was indirect link between them and the government. The authorities mobilized the citizenry through the leadership of mass organizations, free education, and the *sangha*, the religious institution. Because of their connections with the state, mass organizations became extensions of the state power, rather than autonomous civil society. Why was it difficult for independent civil society groups to develop in a democratic society? It can be broadly attributed to two factors. Firstly, it was due to the dominant role of the AFPFL government which influenced or co-opted professional and non-political mass organizations. Secondly, law and order problem as a result of armed insurgencies, tensions between the communists and the government, and the internal crisis within AFPFL party made it difficult for a civil society to sustain. Moreover, there was deep distrust between the frontier people and the Burman group. The rural areas were also not conducive for a stable and independent civil society because of the prevalence of different armed groups.

3. 3. The State of Civil Society under BSPP

With the coup on March 2, 1962, the military took absolute control of all spheres of the society. The BSPP was established on July 4, 1962 after the declaration of the 'Burmese

Way to Socialism' by the Revolutionary Council government on April 30, 1962. The government, headed by General Ne Win, introduced a one-party rule of rigid socialist system. All private sectors and educational institutions were placed under direct control of the government. The government then closed the space necessary for the functioning of civil society groups. Individual rights were terminated. The government prohibited anyone from leaving the country without prior approval from the authorities and visas for foreign visitors were reduced to 24 hours. Foreign missionaries who left the country temporarily on leave were not allowed back into the country. Similarly, domestic travels were also severely restricted. Both foreign and domestic media outlets were subjected to complete censorship. Collaboration with international organizations and receiving assistance from foreign donors were prohibited. In that way, the government created a xenophobic environment. The BSPP and its subsidiary youth organizations virtually controlled the entire society, including the Buddhists religious institution, *sangha*, and all economic activities of the state. The modest autonomy enjoyed under the previous government was curtailed; all professional organizations were either abolished or restructured under the military's control (Steinberg 1997, 9-10).

The government abolished the 1947 constitution and replaced it with a new constitution in 1974. Consequently, the government established a unitary state and divided the country into seven states and seven divisions. The states were organized along ethnic lines and all the seven divisions were allocated to the majority Bama/Burman group. Peasants and workers' councils were formed to mobilize the people. The society was militarized so much so that there was an atmosphere of fear among the people. As much as the common people were in constant fear of the military authorities, low-ranking military officers and even cabinet members were in fear of their supreme leader Ne Win. A few private organizations that were allowed to continue were ordered to stay away from politics. Except for groups and organizations that explicitly or implicitly supported the policies of the state, the political environment was extremely difficult for independent advocacy groups. Anyone who disagreed with the government's policies either stayed silent or went underground. Any dissension was effectively suppressed, and therefore, there was no space for civil society (Steinberg 1997, 10-11).

The military maintained a firm ideology of being the protector of a unitary state. The government's Burmanization policy was aimed at establishing a homogenous national identity in spite of the country's ethnic diversity. Pluralistic society was suppressed and replaced by a "state-sponsored nationalism" (South 2004, 244). The absence of civil society during the BSPP era was primarily as a result of the military's strict adherence to one-party system which dictated the norms and practices of the society. The political environment made it impossible for the people to organize themselves into an autonomous body that could compete or threaten the established system. A sense of fear and anxiety among the people was pervasive. The absence of civil society groups and the difficulty to establish them was evident from Min Ko Naing's[3] short article *The Opening in Burma: Strengthening Civil Society* published by Journal of Democracy.

> Since birth, all we ever heard from authorities were commands - do's and don'ts. They even told us when we could cook and when we could not. If we did not cook exactly at the time we were told, they would threaten to act according to the "existing laws." Since there were no laws, the authorities could do what they pleased. The authorities threatened citizens every single day. But there was no one to tell us what our rights were. There were no opportunities, only punishments. As a result, people rarely asked questions. People followed directions from authorities, with as little effort as was needed to complete the task. The point was to "get it done." People did not have the time, money, or other resources to challenge the authorities. For instance, people were asked to take preventive measures to control fires during the summer. They were asked to keep sand, water, and a long rod in case of a fire emergency. As they were required, people kept those things on display in front of their houses, but everyone knew that they were there only for show. A small amount of water, sand in two separate bags, and a makeshift rod could be found in every house in every township, yet both the authorities and the people knew that those things would be of no use against a real fire (Naing 2012, 136).

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[3] Min Ko Naing is described by the *New York Times* as Myanmar's "most influential opposition figure" after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. He was the chairman of the All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU) and a leader of the pro-democracy uprising in 1988 that was brutally suppressed by the authorities. He was imprisoned much of the last two decades until his release on January 13, 2012.

3. 4. The State of Civil Society under SLORC

The resignation of Ne Win as head of BSPP on July 23, 1988 and the subsequent military takeover on September 18, 1988 changed the official name of the military government from BSPP to SLORC. The political transition, which was largely a cosmetic change, did not bring any change in the dominant role of military in politics. The government implemented several policy changes, including regularization of border trade, opening of private sectors in the field of economics, and the introduction of multi-party system. Some of these policy changes had earlier been suggested by Ne Win's BSPP government. Despite the military's continued dominant role in politics, these policy changes were the most significant positive developments since the first military coup in 1962. The policy changes were welcomed by many though they knew well that the military continued to remain the ultimate authority in all spheres of the society. The private sectors were carefully established in a way not to undermine the military power.

During the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, student unions, professional organizations, civil servants, and Buddhist monks took active part that eventually led to the resignation of U Ne Win and the collapse of his BSPP government. With the military temporarily retreating to the barracks, there were initial signs of the emergence of civil society. Civil servants resigned and the government of U Maung Maung dissociated itself from the BSPP. The Rangoon Bar Council (RBC) publicly condemned the army for its earlier killing of civilian protesters saying that it was unconstitutional and against the international law. Similarly, the Burma Medical Association (BMA) condemned the killing of civilians, particularly in Rangoon. During the brief period of power vacuum, student unions and monk organizations were assuming administrative responsibilities in many towns and cities across the country, including Mandalay for about six weeks. However, the hope of further freedom and autonomy was abruptly shattered by the re-imposition of direct army rule. Subsequently, the SLORC government outlawed protest centers and prohibited the gathering of more than five persons on the streets. Such strict measures of the army dashed the hopes of establishing a free society.

At the beginning of the SLORC government, political parties were allowed to form and election was held in 1990 after a gap of three decades since 1960. Despite the

NLD's overwhelming electoral victory, democracy failed to flourish. Politicians were either forced to resign or arrested and imprisoned. Several political parties were derecognized and others were made dysfunctional because of severe restrictions from the authorities. Despite the difficulties and challenges, civil society began to emerge gradually. The state of civil society during the SLORC government can be studied under two different areas: civil society inside the country and civil society across the borders.

3. 4. 1. The State of Civil Society inside the Country

Society as a whole remained under the control of military, particularly in urban areas which were predominantly inhabited by ethnic Bama/Burman. There were no autonomous bodies that could have been described as a vibrant civil society. The government's policy towards non-governmental organizations remained more or less unchanged. For a civil society to develop, it requires freedom of expression and association. These fundamental principles were severely restricted. The opening up of economy to the international community since 1988 led to the proliferation of private magazines and the rise of access to affordable video and satellite equipment, which helped people to afford television sets and video parlors across the country. Despite the rapid advancement of media services, there was no independent news coverage or reporting. All domestic media outlets were subjected to strict censorship. Every news article had to pass through the censorship board for approval prior to publication. All the non-local media outlets such as the Burmese language services of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), and DVB were closely monitored and controlled. The international news agencies such as the CNN and BBC were screened for sensitive information and the sound were either jammed or loosened. The authorities also restricted the use of internet service by regularly screening electronic messages (Liddell 1997, 1).

Freedom of association, another characteristic of civil society, was also severely restricted. No independent trade unions existed. Civil servants, who formed the bulk of professional population, both in blue and white collar jobs, were coerced in a variety of ways by the government-supported mass organization called the Union Solidarity and

Development Association (USDA). As the SLORC government permitted the formation of political parties after years of one-party system, over 200 political parties initially registered for the 1990 election. But only seven of them remained legal by 1993. Many of the banned political parties were formed by ethnic minorities, some of which were former ethnic armed groups that signed ceasefire agreement with the government between 1989 and 1993. Significant number of ethnic-based political parties that were first de-registered had some elements of federalism in their party manifestos. All NGOs and professional organizations were required to register with the government. The political environment did not provide a congenial atmosphere for independent civil society (Liddell 1997, 2).

Though they eventually did not materialize, there were some initial signs of a liberalized society under the SLORC government. For example, the establishment of Yangon Municipality Act (YMA) was seen by many as a liberal step. Under the act, the Yangon local authority could accept foreign assistance without prior approval from the central government, something which had not existed before. One other policy change from the previous BSPP government was the mass mobilization of youths outside the military-backed political party. The formation of USDA, a subsidiary organization for the government, was intended to support and advocate the government's policies. During the BSPP era, the government mandated all military personnel and civil servants to register with the government-backed political party. This was evident during the 1990 election in which the people affiliated to the government, either civilian or military were required to support the military-backed National Unity Party (Steinberg 1997, 13).

The formation of USDA on September 15, 1993, just about two weeks from the announcement of holding a national convention to write a new constitution, did not change the prospect of the government opening up space for civil society organizations. Unlike the National Unity Party (NUP), the USDA was a non-political organization registered under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The SLORC chairman acted as a patron member of the organization. The USDA and its members worked to promote the policies of the government. In return, the organization received both direct and indirect support from the government. The organization also engaged in developmental and educational activities to attract membership. It claimed to have a membership of over five million

which was roughly about 12 percent of the country's total population. The NLD alleged that one important objective of the USDA was to disrupt NLD party activities and to challenge Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership. The state-controlled media was used to carry out such activities. In October-November 1997, Aung San Suu Kyi was prevented from visiting NLD party local offices to mobilize the youths. The SLORC government denied the allegation of having coerced USDA membership and stressed that it was an informal organization though there were incentives to join it (Steinberg 1997, 14).

Among others, the formation of USDA was similar to Golkar, the military-supported social group in Indonesia which later transformed into a political party. General Ne Win ruled Burma for over 26 years. Similarly, General Suharto ruled Indonesia for over 30 years. Like Golkar, the objective of USDA was to support the initiatives of the government, including holding of national convention to write a new constitution which would ultimately lead to general election. Both leaders also took similar economic initiatives as well. The Ne Win government pursued the *Burmese Way to Socialism*, while the Suharto government introduced the *New Order.* Private organizations established during the SLORC government were not independent of the state's control. For example, the Maternal and Child Welfare Association was headed by the wife of General Khin Nyunt. Similarly, other organizations were also under direct or indirect control of the government (Steinberg 1997, 15). The basic concept of *Burmese Way to Socialism* was later continued with a political objective of establishing a "disciplined democracy" under the SPDC government.

The state of society in rural areas, predominantly occupied by ethnic minorities, was different from the urban areas. In the ceasefire territories, space slowly opened up for civil society groups after ceasefire agreements were reached between armed groups and the government. For example, after a ceasefire agreement was signed between the Kachin Independence Army/Kachin Independence organization (KIA/KIO) and the government in 1994, various community networks began to emerge within the Kachin territory. These civil society groups engaged in different developmental and educational activities. Similarly, after a ceasefire agreement was signed between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the SLORC government, the Mon Women's Organization (MWO)

successfully engaged in community development, literacy skills training, and income generation activities across the NMSP-controlled areas in Mon state and even in the areas beyond the Mon communities in lower Myanmar. The key players of civil society in ceasefire areas were mostly religious and social welfare networks (South 2004, 247).

3. 4. 2. The State of Civil Society across the Borders

Though the political environment inside the country, particularly in urban areas, remained largely not conducive for civil society, things began to change among the Myanmar people in exile. With a declining support from its pre-cold war patrons - China and Thailand - in the 1980s and 1990s, the military strength of ethnic armed groups gradually weakened and thus the political significance. The weakening of armed movement opened up space for the emergence of different social and political organizations among ethnic nationalities. Local NGOs and socio-political organizations were formed along ethnic lines by different ethnic groups, including Arakan (Rakhine), Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni (Kayah), Kuki, Lahu, Mon, PaO, Shan in the border areas. Besides these ethnic-based organizations, umbrella organizations such as student groups, human rights groups, women groups, environmental groups, trade unions, lawyers association were also formed. These organizations filled the political space created by the weakening of armed groups. By engaging in various social and political activities within their own ethnic groups and also with other organizations, civil society organizations practically realized the importance of individual rights and responsibilities as an integral part of a democratic process. With the presence of NGOs and INGOs, the situation of refugees along the Myanmar-Thailand border was gradually internationalized (South 2004, 245).

Different civil society groups, in the form of social, humanitarian or developmental groups, did not confine their relief and developmental activities within the exile community. From the early 1990s, civil society groups from Karen, Chin, Shan, Karenni and Mon began to extend their activities inside Myanmar in their efforts to help the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Since activities were carried out through unofficial channel, the groups had to implement their works discreetly. Among others,

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the Karens, who formed the largest Myanmar population in exile in Thailand, established schools for refugee children. With the help of local NGOs and INGOs, the Karen civil society groups entered inside Myanmar to help support the education of IDPs, who had to move often from one place to another because of the ongoing armed clashes between the KNU and the Myanmar army. The role of civil society organizations was primarily to provide continuity education to the IDP children. Besides the IDP schools, there were a network of about 400 schools in Karen villages which were supervised by the KNU. Though the IDP assistance groups were operating independently on their own, they needed security from the KNU. By engaging with the IDPs and local communities, civil society networks played a crucial role in social mobilization (South 2004, 246).

Because of the involvement of NGOs and INGOs in assisting the refugee population in countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh, India, the refugee situation received greater attention from the international community. Unlike during the BSPP era when the country was cut off from the outside world, the SLORC government became a subject of criticism by the international media. Because of her role as a leading figure in the pro-democracy movement and the sympathy she received from the international community, the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi attracted greater attention from the international media. Moreover, tens of thousands of the Myanmar people who left the country during the 1962 and 1988 military coups effectively used the modern technology to organize among themselves as well as for lobbying the support of the international community (Steinberg 1997, 12). Though there still remained challenges in getting out information from the country, the situation inside the country received greater attention by foreign media, including the ones established by the Myanmar people in exile. Media attention was useful in making the international community better understand the situation inside the country, which was helpful for the pro-democracy movement.

3. 5. The State of Civil Society under SPDC

The SLORC was abolished on November 15, 1997 and reconstituted as SPDC with General Saw Maung as its chairman. Most leaders in the SLORC government continued in the SPDC government. The successive military governments made the socio-political

environment difficult for independent civil society groups to emerge, particularly those that pertain to politics. Attempts to mobilize the public for socio-political reforms were met with punitive measures from the authorities. Despite the challenges and constraints, civil society-oriented self-help groups gradually developed in areas where the government was weak or unable to provide basic welfare services to the people. One such area of government's weakness or deficiency was in the field of education (Lorch 2007, 60-62).

How did the government fail or was weak in education sector? Firstly, some places in the rural areas did not have schools at all. Because of the poor funding to ministry of education, even those functioning schools lacked basic infrastructures such as benches and tables. Though education was supposed to be free and compulsory, parents had to pay fees for enrollment, maintenance of school building, purchase of uniforms and books. Poor parents, especially with multiple children, could not afford to pay the fees. As a result, many children had to drop out of school before they even completed their primary education. Students in universities also faced similar problems. Moreover, the government was unable to pay a decent salary that would attract qualified teachers. Besides the low standard of formal education in government-run institutions, there was dearth of vocational skill trainings that could provide alternative lifeline for the general public. Because of inefficiency in government educational institutions, more private schools and vocational training centers began to develop in the late 1990s and the 2000s. Most wealthy parents sent their children to those private institutions, which were registered under ministry of commerce rather than ministry of education. Apart from private commercial schools, NGOs, monastic schools and church-based organizations also began to engage in educational sector (Lorch 2007, 61-64).

In government controlled urban areas, monastic schools or monastic education centers played a vital role as civil society actors. In fact, monasteries were the centers of basic learning for many children, especially in places where there were no government schools. Even in places where there were government schools, students, especially the poor, went to monasteries for their education. There were three types of monastic institutions. The first type of monastic schools engaged in imparting Buddhist teachings.

The second type not only engaged in Buddhist teachings, but also taught literacy skills to the children. They did not, however, hold exams and their certificates were not recognized by the government. The third type of schools adopted government school curriculum and provided formal education to the students. If the monastic school was recognized by the government, the students had the option to either appear at their monastic school or at a government school. However, grading and issuing certificates were done by the concerned government ministry. Students from recognized monastic schools could transfer to government schools. For example, a pupil who completed primary education in monastic school could join a government middle school (Lorch 2007, 64-65).

Monastic schools were recognized at different levels - primary, middle level and even at high school level. Apart from formal education, monastic learning centers also provided vocational and computer trainings. Unlike government schools, the monastic schools provided free education, free food and free accommodation. Many of these learning centers also served as orphanages, and some of them had their own medical and income-generating facilities such as tailor shops and carpentries. Some of them even had established libraries of their own. Most of their sources of funding were donations from local communities. In some cases, they also received assistance from international donor organizations and friends. With their activities, the monastic schools managed to fill some of the gaps in the state-run education system by reaching out to the poor and needy sections of the society, particularly among the majority-Buddhist population who would otherwise had no access to education at all. Teachers or volunteers who taught at monastic schools were not necessarily always Buddhist monks. Sometimes, the monasteries provided spaces and infrastructures and invited professional teachers to volunteer. In some ways, the mission of monastic schools was also to counter the charity works of Christian churches and to prevent the Buddhists from converting to Christianity. Though monastic schools were not exclusively for Buddhists, some of the schools which were also orphanages required every student to wear a Buddhist novice rope. The non-Buddhist children were sometimes encouraged to convert to Buddhism (Lorch 2007, 67).

Somewhat similar to monastic schools, community-based schools were also important in bridging the void left by government schools. Even though there were government schools, in many instances they could not provide sufficient infrastructures. In such situation, the contribution of community members was often necessary. Broadly, there were two types of community-based schools based on how they were established and organized. The first type was those which the government provided school building but could not hire a teacher. Professional teachers were usually reluctant to transfer to these schools because of its meager salary. In such situation, the local communities would have to form informal groups and collect money to recruit a teacher. The second type was remote villages where there were no schools and parents had to send their children to a nearby village or town. In such situation, the local communities sometimes had to construct their own school building and either share government teachers from nearly schools or hire teachers and pay the salaries on their own. Officially, such schools were treated as extensions of government schools but practically the expenses were borne by the local people (Lorch 2007, 68-69).

Besides monastic and community-based schools in government controlled areas, secular and religious-based local NGOs also engaged in education sector in different ways. Early child development was one focused area. The primary goal of such initiatives was to prepare the children for their primary education. In most cases, the NGOs worked in collaboration with local communities. The non-formal education was one other area where local NGOs engaged in. The objective was to help street children and school drop-outs in providing basic literacy and vocational skills so that they could stand on their own feet to make a living. Because of the high sensitive nature of some of the programs, some NGOs had to discontinue their activities. They would then engage in less sensitive areas such as providing financial assistance to the poor parents who sent their children to government schools. Another area of local NGOs engagement was providing free extra tuition to students of government schools who were unable to pay themselves. The local NGOs also engaged in providing different vocational training programs such as nursing, medical, tailoring, computer, agriculture and accounting. One other area of local NGOs' involvement was in capacity building. The NGOs helped community members in activities such as project management, proposal writing, leadership skills, community

organizing, conflict management and English language training, among others (Lorch 2007, 69-71).

In ceasefire territories or the non-government controlled areas, ethnic minorities were able to enjoy a degree of autonomy, including the establishment of their own educational programs, though not recognized by the government. For example, the KIO were able to run Teachers Training School. In Northern Shan state, the government schools existed alongside with privately-run Chinese schools and self-reliance schools. Christianity also played an important role in providing education. As majority Christians belong to ethnic minorities, they were active in ceasefire areas. Like other local NGOs, the Christian churches worked together with community-based schools in different ways, including free extra tuition and in maintaining free hostels. Christian colleges and seminaries also immensely helped in education sector. These institutions mostly taught theology, but as most of the curriculums were in English, the courses tremendously helped students both in their writing and spoken skills. Like monastic schools, some Christian institutions had their own hostels and medical facilities on campus. One reputed Christian institution is the Myanmar Institute of Technology (MIT), which offers both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Moreover, Christian churches across the country formed national bodies such as the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC), Catholic Bishops' Conference (CBC) and Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC). Through these Church-based organizations, the Christian community initiated several educational activities, such as scholarships for outstanding students to study abroad, and providing different vocational training courses (Lorch 2007, 74-78).

Like the Christians, improving education system in ethnic minority areas was an important agenda for the Buddhists as well. Most works of local NGOs or community-based organizations were focused on welfare and development-oriented projects. Few indigenous organizations were also allowed to register with local authorities, such as the Metta Development Foundation in 1998 and the Shalom Foundation in 2001. The Shalom Foundation, which played a key role in the KIA/KIO ceasefire process, worked in areas like mediation, conflict resolution, and capacity building. In 2003, the Metta Development Foundation had a budget of over US$500,000. With its huge budget, the

foundation was able to extend its operational areas in the Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan states, as well as the Irrawaddy Delta. The foundation created community-based organizations to help the community in training programs such as healthcare, water and sanitation, income generation, and in successfully implementing rural development schemes. Despite their extensive projects in different areas, new organizations such as the Shalom and Metta did not have a nationwide presence in terms of institution as well as membership (South 2004, 247-248).

3. 5. 1. Cyclone Nargis and the Role of Civil Society

Cyclone Nargis was believed to be the worst natural disaster the country has ever experienced in its history. It occurred in early May 2008 and swept through the Southeastern part of the country. Though the precise number of casualties remains unclear, the catastrophic destruction is believed to have caused the death of at least 138,000 people and an estimated damage worth over US$10 billion. While the magnitude of the damage was enormous, the disaster also brought together the people of Myanmar who were otherwise historically divided on the basis of ethnicity, religion, and geographical region. The disaster was also an opportunity for the people to organize civil society groups to respond to the situation. The necessity for massive response provided the people the chance to build relations within and outside of their communities, by even working together with the authorities. Civil society actors such as NGOs, business communities, religious institutions, and community organizations of both highly and loosely organized groups worked together to help rebuild the Nargis-affected communities. Collaborating with different actors provided organizations the opportunity to form alliances or expand their networks in areas such as environmental issues, community participation, and peace building, among others (Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2009, viii).

Cyclone Nargis was a disastrous tragedy but it was also a triggering factor for the emergence of various civil society groups in many ways. The devastation was so huge that it required assistance and support on a massive scale. Since the entry and assistance of international organizations and governments were restricted, the engagement of local

organizations was crucial and there was an urgent need for mobilizing civil society groups. It provided an opportunity for local organizations and the international community, including the United Nations, to build strong collaborative efforts in relief works. As different organizations already had established basic networks before the disaster, it was easier to coordinate the relief efforts. Volunteering for relief works provided experience and employment opportunity to the young people to become socially active. Though restrictions existed, civil society groups learnt how to operate under a difficult political environment. Civil society groups expanded their networks after the cyclone and they were essential in creating socio-political space. Some of these organizations had no problem performing their activities even without official registration. Some of the civil society groups had greater influence on local communities than the authorities because of their financial strength.[4]

Among the many relief organizations helping the victims of cyclone Nargis was the Phnom Penh-based Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS). While many in the international community still held the opinion that there was very little or no space for civil society groups to play a role inside Myanmar, the CPCS and its affiliated networks found it otherwise. Through experiences and by interviewing people from the affected 61 villages, the CPCS in its report said,

> Whilst there are a lot of government restrictions, we find that we are able to work freely and we have room to work. Even in the most difficult situations, we can still find a space to work. Not only in the Nargis hit area but in other parts of the country also. We need to still inform the authorities of our work but there is still a space to work in a silent way. Yes, we can co-operate with local authorities, but even in such organisations we can work by ourselves without the local authorities and trying to know them. In Myanmar there is a lot of space where we can work. We have the space but what we are trying to do now is to say ok, may be the government know what we are doing but we don't let them see. The government is restrictive but they are trying to decide if we are good or bad, are trouble or not. Their intelligence systems are good and sometimes they tolerate us. They don't give us much trouble when we are working for the community.

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[4] Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF) in Brussels held a discussion on "The Emerging Role of Civil Society in Burma and Challenges and Opportunities of the 2010 Elections" on October 3, 2010 and released a report. For more about AEPF, see its website at http://www.aepf.info/.

We don't tend to ask permission and we just do by ourselves. Many more NGOs emerged after Cyclone Nargis. We are all better networked and more visible. We have over 100 civil society groups in Myanmar from different places all over the country but mainly from Yangon (Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2009, 99-100).

3. 6. The State of Civil Society Pre-1990 and Pre-2010 Elections

Prior to the 1990 election, there were initial signs of hope for the role of civil society in political transition. Students and Buddhist monks formed independent organizations in support of a multi-party democracy. For the first time in many years, local television and radio stations were established; newspapers, journals, and magazines were published. Perhaps, the most significant development was the formation of political parties, including the NLD, NUP and Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS). Ethnic minorities were also allowed to form ethnic-based political parties. Though there seemed to be hope of civil society actors playing important role in the electoral process, the authorities had a preplanned objective. By allowing the formation of numerous political parties, the authorities had hoped that votes of the pro-democracy forces will split among different parties that would give the military-backed NUP a greater chance to win. To contain the influence of pro-democracy leaders, the authorities arrested NLD leaders Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Tin, and also most of DPNS top leadership. The authorities prohibited a gathering of more than five people, marching, chanting slogans and giving speeches. Party speeches on television and radio programs were censored. The authorities successfully silenced the voice of civil society actors (ICG 2001, 5-6).

There had been some positive developments during the past two decades (1990-2010). In the run up to the 2010 general election, Myanmar had about 64 NGOs and 455 officially recognized community-based organizations. Besides these groups, there were many other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that were not officially registered but helped the people in different capacities. Besides the cyclone Nargis, one important reason for the rise of CSOs was the 2008 constitution which recognized the role of civil society in political process. The main task of CSOs during the pre-election campaign was providing training to potential candidates of different political parties in Yangon, central Myanmar and even in the territories of ethnic minorities. Activities of CSOs included

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meeting leaders of the newly formed political parties, reviewing the 2008 constitution and relevant election laws, discussing party regulations and democratic functioning, and the relations between political parties and civil society groups. One of the major CSOs was Myanmar Egress, which was formed in 2006 by a magazine publisher Nay Win Maung. Other CSOs in the field of education, agriculture, health, environment and gender were also engaged in spreading democracy to the people (Macan-Markar, 2010).

3. 7. Students as Civil Society

Students have been engaging in political activism throughout Myanmar's history in different capacities. Student unions have played important role as civil society actor at different time points. Generally, students have a tendency to believe that there is a historical legacy they will have to fulfill in the larger interest of the country. The freedom from family responsibilities and the general preference of parents for their children to engage in student activism rather than involving in active politics encouraged students to play the role of civil society actors. For example, the All Burma Federation of Students' Union (ABFSU) was a leading student union during the first parliamentary democracy. The union was banned when Ne Win seized power in 1962 but emerged again to spearhead the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. One significant historical involvement of students in protest against the military government before the 1988 uprising was U Thant's[5] uprising in 1974. When Ne Win government refused to build a memorial tomb in remembrance of the late diplomat, students of Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) and Rangoon Arts and Science University (RASU) demanded that the late leader be given due honor and respect by the Burmese people, including leaders in the government. Though the students were successful in bringing back U Thant's coffin to Rangoon University campus, the protesting students were brutally murdered by the army weeks later. Hundreds of students were believed to have been killed inside the university campus and thousands were arrested and imprisoned (Oo, 2008).

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[5] U Thant was the third Secretary General of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971. He first served as Acting Secretary General before he was unanimously appointed as Secretary General by the UN General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. From 1957 to 1961, he was Burma's permanent representative to the United Nations.

One most pivotal moment of student activism was in 1988. After years of military dictatorship, tens of thousands of students across the country, most notably in Rangoon and Mandalay cities, protested the BSPP one-party rule and demanded its replacement with a multi-party democratic government. The government closed universities to prevent the widespread of student movement, but failed to stop it. The initiatives of students were well received by people from different walks of life, including government employees, the Buddhist monks, and people in uniform. The protesters were successful in forcing Ne Win to resign and in bringing down his BSPP government. The triumph of students brought great delight and relief to the people after many years of living under dictatorial government. However, the jubilation was ephemeral as the military used brute force to suppress the people. Despite the re-imposition of military rule, the student movement brought a degree of political transition. Political parties were allowed to register and the government announced a date for election. Thousands fled the country and student activism continued across the borders (Kipgen, 2013).

The government continued to impose several restrictions to prevent another student-led uprising. Despite the restrictions, students organized protests, though in lesser scale and intensity, in downtown Yangon and university campuses around the capital in 1996. Subsequently, government closed universities and briefly reopened in 1998. As demonstrations broke out again, universities were closed and reopened only in July 2000. In 1999, though most student leaders from the past uprisings were either in prison or in exile, some students coordinated with activists in exile in their attempt to trigger a massive demonstration in commemoration of the 1988 uprising. However, the students were unsuccessful as the authorities knew their plan in advance and arrested the organizing leaders and warned the people to stay away from the streets on the anniversary day. In 2000, besides the frequent closure of universities, many campuses from the capital were relocated to satellite towns. Students were restricted to having access to only their own campuses and parents were required to sign that their children will not involve in political activities. Campus learning was minimized and distance education was promoted. Lecturers and professors were expected to advise their students not to involve in political activities, and if necessary monitor their activities outside classrooms. Both

parents and teachers were told that they could be held responsible for the students' actions (ICG 2001, 16).

Student political activism inside the country had been immensely affected by the government's restrictive measures. Apart from the aforementioned restrictions, it was impossible to organize student unions that could challenge or threaten the authorities. Taking advantage of the freedom they enjoyed, students continued their political activism outside the country by forming organizations along ethnic lines, and also by forming alliances. The Students and Youth Congress of Burma (SYCB) was one such alliance of different students and youth organizations, consisting: All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AKSYC), All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU), Arakan League for Democracy - Youth Wing-Exile (ALD Youth Wing-Exile), Democratic Party for New Society – Youth (DPNS-Youth), Karen Youth Organization (KYO), Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY), Kuki Students Democratic Front (KSDF), Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), National League for Democracy-Liberated Area, Youth (NLD-LA, Youth), Naga National League for Democracy – Youth (NNLD-Youth), Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO), Tavoyan Youth Organization (TYO), Zomi Students and Youth Organization (ZSYO), Ta'ang Students & Youth Organization (TSYO). The organization's aims were to achieve democracy, restore human rights and establish a federal union of Burma.[6]

3. 8. Media as Agent of Change

Yaraslau Kryvoi in his article *The Achilles' Heel of Autocracies: The Role of Media in Transition to Democracy* discusses that in autocratic regimes such as Belarus and Myanmar, the authorities use the state-controlled media to promote the government's agenda and present itself as strong and invulnerable institution to the people. But once such perception is gone, the power of the government tends to disappear as well. He

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[6] SYCB is an umbrella organization consisting of 15 students and youth organizations of various ethnic backgrounds. It was formed on January 8, 1996 in New Delhi, India. The organization's aims are to promote and increase the growth in understanding and cooperation among various ethnic nationalities of Myanmar, and among its member organizations. For more details, see the organization's website at http://www.sycbyouth.org/.

argues that free media is the "Achilles' heel" of autocracies and that the best way to help democratic transition in such society is to use the media in spreading independent and reliable news and information. One such way to facilitate the flow of "uncensored information" by the nationals of such authoritarian regime is through radio and television programs broadcasted from democratic countries abroad. Access to independent source of information would make people to understand, among others, the support and solidarity they receive from the international community, which could in turn boost the democratic movement (Kryvoi 2009, 76). In a non-democratic regime, the elites want to ensure that there is no open challenge or revolt against the authorities. It is, therefore, important for the authorities to control radio and television news outlets to prevent public dissent. When the source of information for the majority people in a country is through the state-controlled mass media, there is a tendency to believe that the government still enjoys the support of the people (*Ibid.* 91).

Though there was absolute media censorship inside the country during the years of authoritarian regime in Myanmar, foreign media, including the ones established by the Myanmar people in diaspora played important role in disseminating independent information to the international community as well as the people inside Myanmar. More importantly, the media outlets in Myanmar language were crucial in disseminating uncensored news and information to the people inside Myanmar. Radio programs in Myanmar language, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of America (VOA), and electronic media outlets such as the Irrawaddy, Mizzima, and other numerous online forums in languages and dialects of different ethnic groups of Myanmar were used, among others, to disseminate information and mobilize the people both inside and outside the country. The DVB, based in Oslo, and run by Myanmar expatriates, started its shortwave radio program in July 1992 and expanded its programing via satellite television broadcasts into Myanmar on May 28, 2005.

In attempts to provide the latest reliable news, the media used different techniques of collecting and disseminating information that were censored by the state-controlled media inside Myanmar. For example, the DVB secretly trained its volunteer reporters in

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Thailand, who came from different parts of Myanmar. The reporters then went back to their respective places and conduct radio and video interviews, besides gathering news and information. The journalists sent the information via internet, overland, or even through satellite phones to DVB studios in Thailand and Norway. The information were then edited at the studios and transmitted back into Myanmar. Similarly, other media outlets collected information through different sources and transmitted them to the people inside Myanmar, as well as the international community. Though media was strictly controlled inside Myanmar, the pro-democracy groups were able to enjoy relatively freedom in India, Norway, Thailand, USA, and elsewhere in foreign countries (Pidduck 2012, 541). During the 2007 Saffron Revolution and the 2010 general election, the DVB was not only reporting but also supplied photographs, video footages, and other reliable information to international news agencies, such as the Associated Press, Reuters, BBC, and CNN. Selling copyrighted materials and news information was a new source of income for the DVB (*Ibid.* 544). Amateur videos captured by ordinary citizens and even tourists, who were eyewitnesses on the ground, were also printed or shown in leading international media outlets (Chowdhury 2008, 9).

In the early 1990s, electronic mail was one important tool for Myanmar pro-democracy groups in exile in their attempt to foster a non-violent change. For grass-root pro-democracy campaign, the use of internet had several advantages. The use of internet was inexpensive than using other technologies such as, telephone, fax machines, especially when communication required members in long distances or remote areas along the Myanmar borders. Internet was also efficient and effective for campaign organizers in distributing materials such as posters, photographs, video footages. Internet was used as an organizational tool to coordinate events around the world. The use of internet allowed the pro-democracy campaigners to reach out to the international community by collecting and sharing the latest information available inside the country. By communicating via electronic mail, democracy advocates and lobbyists in foreign countries were able to stay on the same page with the pro-democracy movement inside the country. Internet also allowed the pro-democracy groups to browse various websites and subscribed to various news groups and other relevant online forums, which enabled them to share their views and also post comments (Danitz and Strobel 1999, 261-62).

3. 9. Conclusion

Scholars such as Diamond (1999), Bernhard (1993), Friedman and Hochstetler (2002), Graham-Yooll (1985), and Linz and Stepan (1996) say that civil society is either conducive or necessary for democratic transition and consolidation. Linz and Stepan in particular emphasize that civil society is necessary for consolidation once democracy is achieved. One other scholar, Niraja Gopal Jayal, though agrees that a vibrant civil society can be conducive for democratic transition but she is skeptical as to how it will sustain democracy by citing examples of transitions in the aftermath of the uprisings that shook the Arab world since 2011. These scholars, including Jayal, do not specifically study the case of Myanmar's transition. Scholars such as Lidauer (2012) and McCarthy (2012) study the role of civil society in Myanmar's recent political transition.

Lidauer's argument is that the political change in Myanmar was orchestrated by the military government in which civil society engaged in the electoral process. Civil society engagement opened up a growing space in the political process. Civil society groups, which gradually developed during the latter stage of authoritarian regime, were triggered by the government's roadmap towards democracy, including a referendum on the 2008 constitution and the subsequent general election. The government's call for participation in the referendum and the electoral process of 2010 general election helped trigger civil society activism. McCarthy's argument is that despite the suppressive military government, civil society groups gradually emerged with the government's announcement of the roadmap for "disciplined democracy" in 2003. Civil society groups had lesser space in government-controlled areas than the territories controlled by ethnic minorities which maintained ceasefire with the government. McCarthy's analysis is that there was a political transition in which civil society groups played a role. He is, however, skeptical about the real intention of the military. Because of the manipulated nature of the transition, McCarthy calls the political change as a transition from direct military rule to a disciplined democracy or indirect military rule.

Even among the scholars who are working on Myanmar, there are differences regarding the role of civil society in the transition process. One scholar, G V C Naidu, categorically states that civil society "played no role in the transition. The military

government did not allow space for civil society groups to operate." Along similar line, another scholar, Shankari Sundararaman, sees no significant role of civil society in Myanmar's transition and says that "during the decades of military rule in Myanmar since 1962, there had not been any vibrant civil society groups. Therefore, civil society organizations did not play any significant role in the democratic transition." Like these two scholars, another scholar on Myanmar, Sonu Trivedi, also does not see any significant role of civil society in the transition process and says that:

> Before 2010, civil society had a very limited space and therefore played a negligible role. There were some organizations but they were controlled by friends and relatives of the military. After 2010 election, some space opened up. For example, non-governmental organizations working on health and environmental issues began to function. Civil society groups are either still having links with the military or rely on foreign funding. It will still take time for a vibrant civil society to develop.

Most of the scholars I interviewed see either the absence or negligible role of civil society in Myanmar's transition. One exception is Khriezo Yhome, who disagrees with the analysis of other scholars. Yhome argues that "some people downplay the role of civil society organizations in the political change. In fact, civil society groups were active either covertly or overtly and they were bridging the movement inside the country with exile groups and the international community."

Sources from my field trip to Myanmar suggest that civil society groups played a role in the democratic transition process. In my interview, Harn Yanghwe, Director of Euro-Burma Organization (EBO), says his organization played a role in promoting democracy in four different areas. First, EBO worked to ensure that foreign governments have the right policy on Myanmar by conducting research and engaging in advocacy works. In the 1990s, the organization was involved in bringing sanctions to the country, but worked in favor of lifting them in the 2000s. Second, the organization involved in promoting and supporting a strong civil society. The organization initially engaged in promoting civil society groups in "black areas" and later inside Myanmar. Third, the organization involved in encouraging the formation of political parties and then to

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participate in the 2010 general election. Though many pro-democracy forces advocated for the boycott of election, EBO felt that it was good for democracy if there were election and people were able to represent their own people or ethnic groups. Fourth, the organization involved in facilitating dialogue between ethnic armed groups and the government. Subsequently, the meeting between the two sides started in November 2011. However, Yanghwe admits that the role of civil society inside the country was very limited prior to the 2008 cyclone Nargis. In the 1990s, the EBO activities, which were considered illegal, had to be carried out secretly from across the border by providing financial assistance.

In my interview with Ko Ko Gyi, a 88-generation student leader, he says the role of students has been important in democratic transition since the country's movement for independence. When the military seized power in 1962, students protested the one-party rule of BSPP under Ne Win leadership. Students led the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and in the run up to the 1990 election, students supported the NLD which won a landslide victory. When the authorities refused to honor the 1990 election result, students demanded the government to honor its pre-election promises and transfer power to the elected representatives. And as a result, almost all student leaders were arrested and imprisoned, while some fled to other countries. During the years of pro-democracy movement, exile students from around the world continued to work for the restoration of democracy in many ways: demanding the government to recognize the 1990 election result, to respect human rights, lobbying the international community to support the pro-democracy movement, and many students took up arms to fight against the Myanmar government. During the 2007 saffron revolution, students played a leading role alongside the *sangha*. In the run up to the 2010 general election, all leading 88-generation student leaders were imprisoned but student activities continued from across the borders. Students organized workshops and trainings along the Myanmar border, and also supported the works of civil society groups inside the country. During the 2012 by-election, the 88-generation student leaders played a supporting role to NLD. Ko Ko Gyi said he and his colleagues did not form a political party of their own to ensure the NLD's victory. After the election, student leaders and NLD issued a joint statement demanding

the amendment of 2008 constitution. However, the student leader calls the recent political changes as "military imposed transition."

On the role of media in democratic transition, Thomas Kean of *Myanmar Times* says until March 2010 when the first of five election laws was announced, there was no coverage on domestic politics, including the upcoming 2010 election. All the contents had to be pre-approved by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), the country's censorship board. Even after the election law was announced, the media was still tightly controlled by the authorities. The media began to give more coverage on the election news around June-July 2010, but it still could not criticize the 2008 constitution, the USDP, and even the election process or advocate election boycott. During the final six months in the run up to the 2010 general election, it was freer to report statements of different political parties, particularly the smaller and ethnic-based parties. However, the impact of private media was limited to metropolitan cities such as Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw. There are about a dozen private journals and newspapers, including *The Voice, Yangon Times,* and *Seven Days* in the country that have played an important role in informing the people about the significance of election through opinion pieces and commentaries from different authors. The 2008 cyclone Nargis was one isolated incident which provided an opportunity for wider media coverage on issues directly affecting the people.

Similarly, Yadana Pamelo of *Kyodo News Agency* says the role of media in democratic transition was insignificant. In the 1990s, there were only state-run newspapers that served as the mouthpiece of the military government. Some private journals and newspapers were launched around 2000. There was more media freedom toward the 2012 by-election than the 2010 general election. For example during the 2010 election, media persons were only allowed to go in group and they were prevented from entering polling stations. However, during the 2012 by-election, journalists were given more access to the polling areas. Pamelo agrees that the accusation of vote rigging such as absentee ballots and enlistment of underage and dead people on the ballot were true in some places. Both Kean and Pamelo are in agreement that the state-owned media did not play a role in promoting democracy during the elections; they only printed

announcements from the election commission. Lack of infrastructure, dearth of experienced journalists and the difficulty to reach remote areas of the country were some of the challenges faced by private journals and newspapers. Moreover, all private papers were not fully independent and objective; some were directly or indirectly influenced by businessmen who had connection with the authorities or cronies of the military generals.

Like other interviewees, faculty members of Mandalay University's International Relations Department agree that there were no fully independent civil society groups that were institutionalized. Different community-based organizations were formed in the aftermath of the 2008 cyclone Nargis but their activities were restricted by the authorities. The activities of 88-generation student group were also monitored and restricted by the authorities. The USDA, which also played the role of civil society, was an organization formed and run by the military government to promote their agenda. However, Sai Khaing Myo Tun of Yangon University says that the 88-generation student leaders played an important role in the political transition process, particularly with their advocacy works on the need to amend the 2008 constitution. On the role of media, he says it was very limited. After the 2008 cyclone Nargis, the media became a bit of rising force. For example, the *Voice Journal*, published by Myanmar Egress, advocated the need for having a third force for social change.

CHAPTER - 4

Elites and Democratic Transition

4. 1. Introduction

The role of elites is one important factor commonly associated with democratic transition. Some scholars (Lijphart 1969, 1977, Hagopian 1990, Diamond 1999, Roberts 2002) say that political elites are important for democratic transition and consolidation. Democratization is largely dependent upon the decisions of elites on what, how and where they take. Like civil society, elites can be of social, religious or political in nature. In elite politics, a small minority of population holds the most power that is independent of the state's democratic election process. Elitism can exist in organizations, associations, government or opposition groups, etc. This chapter analyzes the role of elites before the 1990 and 2010 elections and beyond. It examines the role of elites during the AFPFL government, BSPP government, SLORC government, SPDC government, and the role of NLD and ethnic minority elites in the process of democratic transition. It analyses how the military elites, as a dominant group, engineered the transition process. It also examines the circumstances under which the government and the NLD reached understanding, and how the government reached out to ethnic armed groups.

Politics in Myanmar has traditionally been dominated by the "personality and interests of the top leader..."(Pederson 2011, 57). In order to understand the significance of political elites, I analyze the role of leaders, starting with the U Nu-led AFPFL, Ne Win-led BSPP, Than Shwe-led SLORC and SPDC, Aung San Suu Kyi-led NLD, and the elite politics within ethnic minorities. The role of other elites has been relatively insignificant as compared to that of the military in Myanmar politics. Except the U Nu-led AFPFL government, military leaders had been in control of the country during the past several decades, especially in urban areas. The ceasefire territories in the rural areas were dominated by leaders of different armed groups. Like in any other military dictatorial regimes, Myanmar government had been controlled largely by one leader on

the top. Ne Win took charge of the supreme leadership role during the first decades of military rule.

After the military coup in 1962, Ne Win formed a Revolutionary Council government together with his 17 fellow military elites: Brigadier Aung Gyi, Commodore Than Pe (died 1962), Colonel Tin Pe (resigned 1970), Brigadier Thomas 'Tommy' Clift (resigned 1964), San Yu, Sein Win, Colonel Kyi Maung (resigned 1963), Colonel Maung Shwe (resigned 1972), Colonel Thaung Kyi, Colonel Than Sein, Colonel Tan Yu Sai (resigned 1968), Colonel Kyaw Soe (retired 1974), Colonel Khin Nyo (dismissed 1965), Colonel Saw Myint (sentenced 1964), Colonel Chit Myaing (dismissed 1964), Colonel Maung Shwe (retired and arrested 1972), Colonel Lun Tin (resigned 1971). Though the name of the government and its leadership was changed periodically, the role of military elites did not change in any significant way. Senior General Than Shwe was the last leader to lead the military government until the 2010 general election when the country saw democratic transition in nearly five decades. Analyzing the role of top leaders is crucial to understanding the nature of elite politics in Myanmar political history.

4. 2. Elite Politics under AFPFL Government

The death of pre-independence leader General Aung San along with six cabinet members and two officials on July 19, 1947 paved the way for U Nu's ascendency to power. U Nu led the country to independence from the British and became the first Prime Minister of independent Burma in accordance with the provisions of the 1947 constitution. Despite the many challenges he had to deal with during the years of his time in office, U Nu managed to keep the country undivided under the AFPFL-led government from January 4, 1948 to June 12, 1956, and from February 28, 1957 to October 28, 1958, and again from April 4, 1960 to March 2, 1962. U Nu, also known as Thakin Nu, was a Burmese nationalist leader long before the country's independence. His political career started during his university days in 1936. Not long after the expulsion of Aung San, U Nu was also expelled from the University of Rangoon for making provocative speeches pertaining to the Burmese national cause. The arrest of Aung San and U Nu sparked nationwide protest, which earned them political prominence across the country. U Nu

was then sent to prison in 1940, which made him even more a popular nationalist leader among the Burmese people (Walinsky 1965-66, 269).

During a brief period of Burma under Japanese occupation, U Nu held the posts of foreign minister and that of the information department under Ba Maw's government. He along with other nationalist leaders such as Aung San, Than Tun, Thakin Chit and Thakin Mya formed the core elite group in the Ba Maw government, which was a puppet of the Japanese authorities. In exchange for their support, the elite group had the power to veto political decisions made by the Ba Maw government. The elite politics of AFPFL started with the founding of AFO at a meeting in U Nu's residence in August 1944. U Nu played a pivotal role in keeping together the constituent members of AFO - the army, the socialists, and the communists - which earned him trust and respect. U Nu was part of the delegation led by Aung San in 1947 to negotiate Burma's independence from Britain within a year. When U Nu withdrew from politics to focus on literary works, he was called back by the AFO leaders to serve as vice-president of AFPFL (new name of AFO), and then in June 1947 as president of the constituent assembly that would draft a constitution to pave the way for parliamentary democracy. After the assassination of Aung San on July 19, 1947, U Nu was the party's choice to lead the country to independence and beyond (Walinsky 1965-66, 270).

The attainment of independence from Britain was a great relief for U Nu and his colleagues, but soon after internal crisis developed within the founding members of AFPFL. The split within AFPFL was ideological as well as personal rivalry between Aung San and Thakin Than Tun, chief of the communist (white flag group). Prime Minister U Nu attempted to include the communists, who had since left AFPFL camp, into his cabinet but the latter spurned the overtures. The government was formed largely by members of the socialists and the PVO, the paramilitary wing of AFPFL, and representatives from the Chin, Kachin, Shan, and the pro-AFPFL faction of Karen. The communists refused to accept U Nu's invitation for power sharing and instead called upon the people to overthrow the government. In his last attempt to reconcile the communists and the socialists, U Nu even offered to resign from his premiership. However, when the situation did not improve, U Nu ordered the arrest of communist

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leaders. The communist leaders escaped the attempted arrest and launched an all-out violent campaign against the government. The communist rebels were later joined by members of the PVO who resigned from the AFPFL coalition government. U Nu briefly stepped down from the post of prime minister on July 16, 1948 but returned to office 10 days later on July 26 following the frontier leaders' demand for his immediate return (Tinker 1957, 125-126).

Despite the insurgency problems, strikes by civil servants, cabinet resignations, and limitation of the government's power to the capital Rangoon, U Nu and his AFPFL elites managed to hang on to power. U Nu was then able to introduce a comprehensive socio-economic plan called *Pyidawtha,* a welfare program to improve the living standards of the people. He organized a massive Synod of the Theravada Buddhist faith in an attempt to reach out to the general population of a predominantly Buddhist society. He also bolstered his international image by establishing relations with neighboring countries such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. He was a pioneering member of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) during Cold War era. He also established diplomatic relations with the United States, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Europe and China. By establishing personal and professional relationship with world leaders, he availed financial assistance in the form of loans and credits from different sources, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). His successes abroad helped him win the trust and confidence of people at home. The AFPFL elite politics centered around a few people with U Nu as its top leader. Except for the insurgency problems, there was no formidable political challenger to the AFPFL government until the party split in 1958 (Walinsky 1965-66, 271).

Apart from U Nu, there were a few other leaders that played a role in the AFPFL government. However, U Nu was the key figure who had the trust of the AFPFL constituent units. He impressed his colleagues with his leadership qualities. He was energetic, sincere, and honest with his actions and had the ability to bring together people of conflicting ideas. His leadership skills as a cementing force of the AFPFL constituent partners was evident from the fact that he was twice urged to return when he decided to retire from politics - first to serve as vice president of the AFPFL and then to head the

constituent assembly to draft the 1947 constitution. Describing the importance of U Nu in the AFPFL elite politics, Louis Walinsky in his article *The Rise and Fall of U Nu* describes:

> … I have often seen U Nu in meetings with his ministers when issues both large and small were under consideration, and it was almost always he who stood out by virtue of these qualities; who would better envisage the shape of coming events; who would seek to view an issue from all sides; who would probe out, with keen questions, the related and sometimes reluctant facts; who would think who, other than those present, should be heard, before decision on the issue; whose thought processes were generally one or more steps ahead of those of his colleagues. They waited for, and deferred to, his judgments, because almost always they had no better proposals to offer. In the early i950s one often heard it said that U Nu held the Prime Ministership only by virtue of the consent of U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein, because they found it convenient for him to do so. But whatever differences they had, even in those days, they recognized that he was the best man among them. And, as often before, it was U Nu who made it possible for the rival personalities and conflicting interests of his fellow leaders-Kyaw Nyein versus Ba Swe, Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe versus Thakin Tin and Thakin Kyaw Tun, Burmans versus Hill Peoples, and so on-to hold to- gether and to work together (Walinsky 1965-66, 274).

Though he played a central role in the AFPFL government, U Nu had his own weaknesses which eventually contributed to the split of AFPFL and the subsequent military coup. His most serious weaknesses were lack of experiences in both administrative and executive tasks; failure to delegate powers to his colleagues, including cabinet members; inability to identify priorities or to follow up several vital projects; failure to appreciate democratic functioning in administration; leaving behind official duties for meditation or creative life; and corruption. Due to lack of practical experience, U Nu had little knowledge about how much staff and resources were necessary to run a government. Civil servants were understaffed and there were many colonial administrative legacies that needed to be sorted out (Walinsky 1965-66, 274-75). Because of the absence of a strong and responsible opposition, the AFPFL government largely

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functioned through executive decree. For example, U Nu government did not hold high regard for the parliament, which met twice during August-September and February-March. As a result, significant agendas were seldom debated in the parliament. Within the AFPFL party itself, democratic system was hardly followed. Though AFPFL had been formed before the country's independence, its first national congress was held only in early 1958 after internal conflict erupted within the party leadership (Walinsky 1965-66, 276).

The downfall of AFPFL government began in 1958 when the party split into the 'Clean' faction led by U Nu and Thakin Tin (also known as Nu-Tin faction) and the 'Stable' faction led by Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein (also known as Swe-Nyein faction). Subsequently, U Nu invited the army to form a caretaker government and hold a general election. Though U Nu faction won overwhelmingly in the 1960 general election, his government lasted only for over a year before the army staged a coup in March 1962. When U Nu's Union Party (the new name of Clean faction) returned to power, the prime minister announced that his government would focus on national unity and improving the economy. Contrary to the announcement, the U Nu government prioritized making Buddhism as state religion during the parliament session in 1961, which top military leaders wanted the bill to be limited to Burma proper. The military established the National Solidarity Association (NSA), a political vigilante organization, to check the performance of incoming politicians. The three most important issues that concerned the army was the deteriorating economy, its distrust of U Nu government's ability to revive the economy, and the threat posed by Shan and other ethnic minorities to the country's unified state structure. Many of the top military elites also felt that some of the civilian politicians were not worthy to be their bosses because of their low level of education (Butwell 1962, 4-5).

Ethnic minority elites also played a role in the downfall of U Nu government. In 1949, the Karen ethnic group started armed movement against the U Nu government. Ethnic groups such as the Shan and Karenni were given the right of secession after 10 years of independence should they choose to leave the union. The minorities were dissatisfied with ethnic Burman-dominated central government. One important reason for

political instability that led to military caretaker government in 1958 was due to ethnic minorities' demand for federalism. The Christian minorities, especially the Kachins, were also opposed to the introduction of Buddhism as state religion by the U Nu government. Besides the Karen armed group, the Shans and Kachins were also engaged in armed movement against the central government. Some of the Shan elites who were not directly associated with the rebel movement proposed a federal system of government during the ethnic minorities' conference held in Taunggyi in June 1961. As the federal movement gradually gained momentum, Prime Minister U Nu began to realize the necessity to consider the demand. But the military elites construed the demand for federalism as tantamount to disintegration of the Union of Burma. As the military elites became increasingly concerned that the U Nu government might grant greater rights to ethnic minorities, the military elites under the leadership of General Ne Win staged a coup on March 2, 1962. At the time of the military coup, ethnic minority elites were deliberating the issue of federalism in Rangoon (Butwell 1962, 4-5).

The lack of mutual trust exacerbated by ideological and political differences of different elite groups - the AFPFL, the military and the former frontier people or ethnic minorities culminated in military intervention. And with the arrest of U Nu and his cabinet members, the parliament was dissolved, and as a result, the first civilian government came to an end. In other words, the downfall of U Nu government was a consequence of competing political interests and demands among different elites. Years later, U Nu made unsuccessful attempts to regain his political status. After his release from prison, U Nu left Burma in 1969 and engaged in resistance movement against the Ne Win government. His attempt to overthrow the Ne Win government did not succeed and U Nu settled in India. At the invitation of Ne Win, U Nu returned to Burma in July 1980 and became a monk. During the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, U Nu unsuccessfully attempted to topple the Ne Win government. Without fulfilling the desire of another political prominence, U Nu died on February 14, 1995.

4. 3. Elite Politics under BSPP Government

The military elites, led by General Ne Win, staged a coup in 1962 for three important reasons: deteriorating economic situation in the country, political instability due to internal differences and division among the politicians, and the fear of ethnic minorities' demand for a federal government that would grant them autonomy. Soon after the military takeover, one priority of military elites was to analyze the cause of the country's myriad problems and to suggest solutions. The analysis of the military's "social theorists" concluded that the country's problems were due to the failure in economic system. The prevailing economy did not only bring hardships to individuals but also caused disunity and social unrest. The finding also noted that parliamentary democracy contributed to social disorders, political instability and abuse of power by politicians for personal benefits. The social theorists recommended the replacement of parliamentary democracy with a "socialist democracy" to tackle the country's problems, which led to the introduction of the *Burmese Way to Socialism,* aimed at establishing a socialist society in Burmese own way. The basic goals were to nationalize commerce and industry, to eliminate private enterprises, to modernize and increase agricultural products, and to unify different ethnic nationalities of the country. While the military elites were in control of the new program, peasants and workers played important role in implementing them (Silverstein 1964, 716-17).

The military elites seemed to have established a coherent and decisive hierarchical structure, but there were internal differences among themselves. There were perceived threats to the top leadership as well as tensions between staff members in the war office at the headquarters in Rangoon and regional military commanders. It was evident in 1961 when Brigadier General Maung Maung was sacked because of his alleged close ties with the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and being seen as a threat to General Ne Win. Many regional army commanders were also sacked because they were considered too independent and powerful which concerned Ne Win that they might launch a collective move against his authority. However, the official explanation was that the regional commanders interfered in the 1960 general election against Ne Win's order. Two regional commands were reconstituted into five divisional

commands and the war office was given greater control over them, which in turn gave Ne Win more direct control over them along with the Fourth Burma Rifles and the Northern Military Command. After the military coup in 1962, Brigadier General Aung Gyi, the second highest-ranking military officer and widely believed to be Ne Win's successor, was sacked. Though no official reason was given, Aung Gyi was known to have differing opinion about managing the country's economy from that of Ne Win's nationalizing policy. After sacking the second-tier military generals who were believed to have different policies, Ne Win then appointed his favorite General San Yu to be his chief of staff in 1972 (Min 2008, 1021-22).

Despite the appointment of the new chief of staff, supreme authority rested with Ne Win, who was the chairman of both BSPP and the State Council. The new chief of staff assumed his office at a cabinet ministerial level and was neither a member of the BSPP nor the Council. A few years later in 1976, Ne Win sacked Tin Oo, who was chief of army staff and defense minister, and his group of friends. The growing reputation of Tin Oo, as professional soldier within the army rank and file, was seen by Ne Win as a threat to his power. The young army officers regarded Tin Oo as someone different from Ne Win and his close associates who had ruined the country's economy. Tin Oo, who years later co-founded the NLD, was officially accused of withholding the knowledge of a plot to assassinate Ne Win by a group of young army officers. Consequently, Tin Oo was arrested and imprisoned. General Kyaw Htin, a favorite of Ne Win, was appointed as the new army commander-in-chief. Kyaw Htin had been a longtime follower of Ne Win since the days of serving under him in the Fourth Burma Rifles (Min 2008, 1022-23).

Ne Win was nervous and suspicious of anyone who gained popularity within the military leadership. He perceived such development as a threat to his own authority and survival. Another example was in 1983 when Ne Win sacked Brigadier General Tin Oo (not the same Tin Oo above) from the post of chief of military intelligence (MI) and the joint general secretary of the BSPP. Tin Oo was seen as becoming too powerful and independent. Many military officers thought he was in line to succeed Ne Win. For example, all messages intended for Ne Win had to pass through Tin Oo's office. Moreover, all intelligence units in the field reported directly to Tin Oo's office in

Rangoon, bypassing regional army commanders. This created tension between the MI and regional commanders. Consequently, all MI officers were arrested, purged or transferred to insignificant posts. The Ne Win government officially accused Tin Oo and his subordinates of misusing state funds and engaging in other corrupt practices. However, some believed that the downfall of Tin Oo was partly related to a family issue. When Tin Oo's son visited Thailand for his honeymoon, he was given a red carpet reception. But when Ne Win's favorite daughter visited the country, she was not given the same treatment. Subsequently, the entire intelligence department was restructured: A new MI chief was appointed but he was no longer head of the powerful National Intelligence Bureau, which coordinated both military and civilian intelligence agencies. The MI field units were required to report to regional army commanders, and not to the headquarters directly (Min 2008, 1023).

From the above instances, it is evident that there was internal strife within the military elites. There was even alleged attempt to assassinate Ne Win, who was head of the BSPP and the State Council. Nevertheless, Ne Win meticulously handled the perceived threats. After twenty six years in power, the era of Ne Win came to an end in 1988. He was neither forced to resign by colleagues nor by his subordinates and regional commanders. Because of the deepening economic crisis and political chaos, Ne Win decided that it was time for political transition. To the surprise of his colleagues and the entire country, Ne Win announced his retirement from politics during the BSPP congress on July 23, 1988, citing his old age and indirectly accepting responsibility for the economic and political crisis and the massacre of peaceful protesters earlier in the year. Ne Win recommended that a referendum be held to decide whether the people want a multi-party or single party system. With Ne Win's retirement, the unsuccessful era of Burmese Way to Socialism came to an end. It also led to the demise of BSPP and the Revolutionary Council which Ne Win and co-military elites formed in 1962.

In the aftermath of the collapse of BSPP government, there was a power vacuum as the army retreated to its barracks. There was leadership crisis within the pro-democracy groups. New civil society organizations and professional unions emerged at the local level but there was no organization that could step forward to lead the country.

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Students who led the protests were also not in a position to form a government on their own, and there were differences among veteran politicians who could not reach an agreement to form an interim government. Amidst the political uncertainties, former Prime Minister U Nu announced on September 9, 1988 that he had formed a government and asked the people to support. But most people no longer had faith in the leadership of former prime minister and they also disapproved of U Nu's cabinet appointees, most of whom were either his family members or old friends. In an attempt to form interim government, five politicians including U Nu and Aung San Suu Kyi, and the student community represented by Moe Thee Zun, was held where the student leader urged the veteran politicians to set aside their differences. While U Nu insisted that others should support his government, some other politicians wanted to wait and see if the military would hold a multi-party election and transfer power to elected representatives. Taking advantage of the differences among politicians and the unlikelihood of a civilian government formation, the military intervened to assert its power on September 18, 1988 (Kipgen 2012c, 756-57).

4. 4. Elite Politics under SLORC Government

After the downfall of BSPP government, the military reconstituted itself as State Law and Order Restoration Council. Amidst demonstrations, the formation of new military government was announced by General Saw Maung, military commander-in-chief, on September 18, 1988. The immediate goal of the council was to end all forms of dissent or rebellion. On September 19, a day after the formation of SLORC, General Saw Maung ordered the use of military force to end the unrest. And on the same day, the military officially asserted its power after weeks of inaction. The military elites were intent on consolidating the military power by strengthening the armed forces, procuring arms, and to enhance military intelligence capabilities.

With the emergence of SLORC, several structural changes were implemented, with Ne Win still having some influence on the government. Similar to the Revolutionary Council government, the SLORC was formed by a group of military elites. The leadership comprised of 10 officers from the Defense headquarters, also known as the

War office, and nine regional commanders. One major difference from the previous Ne Win military council was the purge of Senior General Saw Maung, who was the military commander-in-chief as well as the chairman of SLORC. It was a coordinated plan of three high-ranking military officers - Vice-Senior General Than Shwe (Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Vice-Chairman of SLORC), Major General Khin Nyunt (Secretary-1), and Major General Tin Oo (Secretary-2), together with the Rangoon regional commander. Than Shwe, Khin Nyunt, and Tin Oo held the second, third and fourth highest posts in the SLORC. They approached Ne Win, who still had influence, to order Saw Maung to retire. Subsequently, Saw Maung's pictures were removed from government offices. There were several allegations about this development. Though Saw Maung was relatively a professional soldier, he became "delusional" when the military-backed political party NUP was badly defeated in the 1990 election. One retired doctor said Saw Maung was drugged, but many military officers believed that his illness was because of stress. Some generals were said to have been unhappy with Saw Maung for assuring the foreign media that power would be transferred to the winning political party after election. Some other generals were frustrated with his plan to neutralize the KNU (Min 2008, 1024). However, Kyaw Yin Hlaing, a native scholar from Myanmar, writes that Saw Maung was replaced when he started criticizing Myanmar's independence hero Aung San (Hlaing 2007a, 369).

Saw Maung was replaced by Senior General Than Shwe, who was known for his divide and rule tactics to weaken the influence of other military elites. Than Shwe was inspired by former Myanmar kings who ruled the kingdom with absolute power. As a symbol of respect, Than Shwe erected three huge statues of the deceased kings after moving the country's capital from Yangon to Nay Pyi Taw in 2005. Soon after assuming the role of commander-in-chief as well as chairman of the SLORC, Than Shwe ordered the removal of pictures of Ne Win and Aung San from all government offices and buildings. Than Shwe was known for being xenophobic and a firm believer in astrology, which believed to have played a role in the government's decision to build a new capital[7].

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[7] During my interview, the Vice-Chairman of USDP Htay Oo (former cabinet minister in the military government) says the reason behind building a new capital was to have a separate national parliament. He

Like the former military leader Ne Win, Than Shwe wanted to consolidate his power and entrench the military role. He appointed General Maung Aye, a regional commander who was believed to be less ambitious than his colleagues, as the army chief in 1992. Maung Aye was then promoted to deputy commander-in-chief in 1993 and the SLORC vice-chairman in 1994. In 1993, Than Shwe and his like-minded military elites founded a mass organization called the Union Solidarity and Development Association to promote the policies of the military government (Min 2008, 1024-25).

Like Ne Win's BSPP era, tensions developed in the mid-1990s between regional army commanders and officers at the war office in Yangon. The opening up of the country's economy and the ceasefire agreements signed between the government and some of the ethnic armed groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s gave regional commanders significant economic and political power. Moreover, as regional commanders were contemporaries of Senior General Than Shwe and were also part of the founding members of SLORC, their seniority status in the military hierarchy often challenged officers at the war office. The lingering tensions coupled with the ambitious attitude of the three first-generation regional commanders of the SLORC - Lieutenant Generals Tun Kyi, Kyaw Ba, and Myint Aung - were perceived by officers at the war office as a challenge to their power. In their attempt to reassert control over the regional commanders, the war office (headquarters) promoted almost all first-generation regional commanders to cabinet ministers. Each generation of commanders consisted of military officers within three to six-year range. Though ministerial positions were considered to be higher ranks, they did not have any direct influence over the troops. The ministers were allowed to retain their positions in the SLORC, the highest policy making body, until when all first-generation commanders in their 60s were purged in 1997. The three former regional commanders Tun Kyi, Kyaw Ba, and Myint Aung were charged with corruption and placed under house arrest, which was a common tactics to deal with any perceived threats. The official name of the government was changed from SLORC to SPDC on November 15, 1997 (Min 2008, 1025-26).

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says moving the capital was not because Myanmar was afraid of Western attacks, as alleged by some observers.

4. 5. Elite Politics under SPDC Government

The purge of first-generation regional commanders was believed to be orchestrated by Than Shwe and Khin Nyunt, with some support from the former leader Ne Win. The second-generation officers who were in their 50s and the third-generation officers who were in their 40s were inducted into SPDC. In an attempt to prevent future tensions and to ensure that power does not concentrate only on a few army commanders, Than Shwe established two new regional and over a dozen divisional commands. The restructuring of military command structure was implemented partly to increase the efficiency of regional administrations. After the purge of first-generation military commanders, the second-generation commanders Lieutenant Generals Win Myint and Tin Hla, who were the secretary-3 (fourth highest ranking officer in the government) and deputy prime minister (also military affairs minister), were sacked in 2001. They were accused of corruption and placed under house arrest, the same fate as the deposed first-generation regional commanders. In a reshuffle in 2001, the third-generation commanders were given membership in SPDC with no troops under their direct control. The fourth-generation regional commanders were no longer given SPDC membership and were confined only to their respective regions. The reshuffle reduced SPDC to an elite group of 13 members, most of whom were associates or followers of Than Shwe and Maung Aye, and not necessarily their contemporaries (Min 2008, 1026-27).

In an attempt to consolidate the military power, particularly the role of Than Shwe, all perceived or potential threats were eliminated or neutralized gradually. After the 2001 reshuffling of military leadership, power of the SPDC government was primarily rested on the top three generals – Than Shwe, Maung Aye, and Khin Nyunt. While Than Shwe and Maung Aye were reluctant to hold dialogue with NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi[8], the Khin Nyunt-led MI group engaged in some talks. When there appeared to be a glimmer of hope for democratization process to begin, Khin Nyunt, Prime Minister and MI chief, was purged by the more conservative group led by Than Shwe and Maung Aye. Because of his growing personal and institutional power, Khin

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[8] Aung San Suu Kyi and Senior General Than Shwe met at least three times. The first meeting was on September 20, 1994, while Suu Kyi was under house arrest. Than Shwe was accompanied by General Khin Nyunt. The two leaders met again in 2000 and 2002.

Nyunt was perceived as a threat to Than Shwe and Muang Aye. Khin Nyunt, who held the third-highest ranking post in the SPDC, did not have any combat or divisional or regional commander experience. His promotion and survival was largely supported and influenced by Ne Win. When the health of Ne Win began to decline in 2001, so was his influence on the government. In 2002, Ne Win was arrested and placed under house arrest after his daughter and grandsons were accused of plotting to overthrow the government. Since the beginning of working together as the core military elites, both Than Shwe and Maung Aye did not completely trust Khin Nyunt, who was a close follower of Ne Win (Min 2008, 1028).

Tensions between the top three military elites developed gradually over the years. Though MI was technically under the army, it acted as a separate entity with tremendous power and influence. For example, local MI officers reported directly to the headquarters, bypassing regional commanders. Among others, Khin Nyunt reached ceasefire agreements with a number of ethnic armed groups, and was also successful in winning the support of China, ASEAN, India and Japan to counter the Western sanctions and political pressure. Khin Nyunt was also seen by many as a pragmatist who might be willing to engage in dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi-led opposition group. Both Than Shwe and Maung Aye were uncomfortable with the rising popularity of Khin Nyunt and the growing power of MI. As MI chief, Khin Nyunt's office maintained record of all military generals which were then used for justification of any purges. Than Shwe and Maung Aye were worried that those records might be used against them someday. Initially, Than Shwe asked Khin Nyunt to give up his post as MI chief and focus only on his role as prime minister, which Khin Nyunt refused on the ground that if he left the job, his fellow MI officials may be targeted. Maung Aye used his own network of secret intelligence to monitor Khin Nyunt and his MI colleagues (Min 2008, 1029).

After months of tensions among the top three military elites, MI chief Khin Nyunt, who was also the country's prime minister since August 25, 2003, was finally sacked on October 18, 2004. There were different theories surrounding Khin Nyunt's removal. Some local observers believed that it was a consequence of Khin Nyunt's refusal to obey Than Shwe's order to discipline the former's subordinates. As a supreme

leader of the military regime, it was difficult for Than Shwe to condone the behavior of his junior colleague, who was perceived as threateningly becoming too powerful. At first, the government announced that Khin Nyunt retired due to health problem. But later in his speech to the top government and military officials and some local business people, General Shwe Mann, who was the third highest leader in the SPDC government, charged Khin Nyunt with corruption, insubordination, and attempting to break up the armed forces. Khin Nyunt was accused of allocating a large amount of the financial assistance given by the Thailand government to Bagan Cyber Tech, a firm jointly run by MI and a company owned by his son Ye Naing Win (Hlaing 2008, 172). During my interview with him at his Yangon residence in March 1, 2014, Khin Nyunt said he was first charged with corruption but when the authorities had no proof he was charged with indirect involvement in corruption of his MI subordinates. The ex-prime minister said it was possible that some of his subordinates might have been involved in corruption.

The deposed Prime Minister Khin Nyunt was arrested in December 2004 and the next year he was sentenced to 44 years' imprisonment. His prison sentence was commuted to house arrest. Several cabinet ministers, including foreign minister, home minister, labor minister, and a number of ambassadors close to Khin Nyunt were also relieved from their posts. The vacant positions were filled by followers of Than Shwe and Maung Aye. Many of the MI officials were given prison sentences ranging from 20 to 200 years. Though the entire MI leadership was targeted, its Deputy Chief Kyaw Win escaped punishment because of his connection with Than Shwe. Khin Nyunt was replaced by Lieutenant General Soe Win, who was SPDC's Secretary-1 and a man loyal to Than Shwe. After the arrest of Khin Nyunt and his associates, MI was dismantled and the National Intelligence Bureau was dissolved. It was replaced by a new institution called Military Affairs Security (MAS), which was first headed by Than Shwe's protégé Lieutenant General Myint Swe and later by Maung Aye's protégé Lieutenant General Ye Myint. With the new institution in place, local MAS agents were required to submit their reports through regional commanders (Min 2008, 1030).

After the dismissal of Khin Nyunt, power struggled continued between the top two leaders – Than Shwe and Maung Aye. The two leaders attempted to appoint their

own followers in important positions in the government. During the days of power struggle between Khin Nyunt and Maung Aye, Than Shwe sometimes took advantage by removing some of Khin Nyunt's followers and replaced them with his own followers. For example, to check the power of Maung Aye, Than Shwe assigned Shwe Mann as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Regional and divisional commanders were also divided among themselves - showing their loyalty toward either Than Shwe or Maung Aye. Such inherent division within the military elites made it difficult or even dangerous for one group to purge another. Any attempt to sack one group by the other could go out of control or even lead to bloodshed within the military leadership. Therefore, instead of attempting to purge each other, the two groups recognize the importance of increasing the number of loyal supporters during reshuffles, which happened periodically. The internal struggle within the military elites caused uncertainty over promotion and retirement, which was a frustration for many mid-level officers who were waiting for promotion. The internal power struggle also compelled the mid-level officers to lean toward either one of the two groups for their own survival and promotion. To ensure that they do not become too powerful in their own regions, Than Shwe decided to rotate many regional commanders instead of promoting them (Min 2008, 1032).

Despite the internal struggle within the military elites, both Senior General Than Shwe and his deputy Maung Aye understood well that they needed each other for their own survival and for the military government. In 2004, after Khin Nyunt was deposed, Secretary-1 Lieutenant General Soe Win was promoted to prime minister and his deputy and Secretary-2 Thein Sein was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and Secretary-1. In April 2007, Thein Sein replaced the ailing Soe Win as interim prime minister, and after five months he was appointed the country's prime minister after the death of Soe Win on October 12, 2007. His military rank was also promoted from Lieutenant General to General. In April 2010, with a view to transferring power to elected representatives, several ministers of the SPDC government, including Prime Minister Thein Sein, resigned from their military posts to contest in the general election (*CNN* 2010). The retirement of Than Shwe from head of the SPDC government and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces on March 30, 2011 was a milestone in the democratic transition process, paving the way for President Thein Sein to head the new

government. Consequently, the title of Than Shwe was officially changed from 'Senior General' to 'U,' denoting his new civilian status (*Bangkok Post* 2011).

4. 6. Elite Politics within NLD

The NLD was formed on September 27, 1988 with Aung Gyi as chairman, Tin Oo as vice-chairman and Aung San Suu Kyi as general secretary. Until the day she took part in the peaceful rally against the military government on August 26, 1988, many in Myanmar did not know who Aung San Suu Kyi was and her political vision. However, as the daughter of Aung San, who was widely known and respected by many across the country, Suu Kyi was instantly at the center of the pro-democracy movement. Since the beginning of her political career in 1988, she has been described by many as a pragmatist, adapting to the necessity of the circumstances or condition. She strongly condemned the military for brutally suppressing the peaceful protests in 1988 and for violating human rights. She advocated for a free, fair and peaceful election. Despite the military government's intimidation and harassment of NLD members and supporters, Suu Kyi travelled across the country to rally public support for a democratic change. She increasingly disapproved the policies of the military government by accusing it as a hindrance to change. In June 1989, she openly accused Ne Win of being the military leader responsible for the people's hardships and for destroying the visions what her late father Aung San wished to achieve (Silverstein 1990a, 1012).

In her essay *In Quest of Democracy*, Aung San Suu Kyi describes the challenges of democratic movement in the face of a recalcitrant government.

> Opponents of the movement for democracy in Burma have sought to undermine it by on the one hand casting aspersions on the competence of the people to judge what was best for the nation, and on the other condemning the basic tenets of democracy as un-Burmese. There is nothing new in Third World governments seeking to justify and perpetuate authoritarian rule by denouncing liberal democratic principles as alien. By implication they claim for themselves the official and sole right to decide what does or does not conform to indigenous cultural norms. Such conventional propaganda aimed at consolidating the powers of the establishment has been studied, analyzed, and disproved by political scientists, jurists, and sociologists. But in Burma, distanced by

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several decades of isolationism from political and intellectual developments in the outside world, the people have had to draw on their own resources to explode the twin myths of their unfitness for political responsibility and the unsuitability of democracy for their society (Kyi 1992, 5).

The first internal problem erupted within the NLD leadership after a couple of months of its formation. Party Chairman Aung Gyi alleged that the party was infiltrated by communists and its sympathizers, including Win Tin, who was party deputy general secretary and the right-hand man of Aung San Suu Kyi. Aung Gyi lost the vote when NLD executive decided the matter in a secret ballot. Consequently, Aung Gyi was expelled from the party. Vice-Chairman U Tin Oo assumed the role of chairmanship. The military government used the same accusation that Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD party was manipulated by the Burma Communist Party (BCP). In June 1989, the government equated NLD with the outlawed BCP. On August 5, 1989, MI chief Brigadier Khin Nyunt held a press conference and continued the accusation that NLD was no different from the BCP, which the NLD denied. The authorities accused Suu Kyi of working for foreign governments and being anti-Buddhist. The government also warned the people to stay away from her political rallies. During her campaign in Danubyu on April 5, 1989, an army captain ordered six soldiers to shoot Suu Kyi, but an army major intervened to stop the assassination attempt (Silverstein 1990a, 1013-14).

NLD was one of the first political parties to register when the SLORC government announced to hold the 1990 multi-party election. As the popularity of NLD continued to grow, leaders of the SLORC government perceived it as a threat. Political crisis was simmering and the tension between Suu Kyi-led NLD and the government was increasingly tense. On June 21, 1989 when students and Aung San Suu Kyi were observing the anniversary of past army brutalities on students, the military opened fired and killed one student. Subsequently, another anniversary planned for July 7 was cancelled, but Suu Kyi vowed to observe the anniversary of her father's death on July 19 by visiting his tomb. As a large number of students were prepared to accompany her for the occasion, Suu Kyi decided to cancel the plan fearing that it might lead to more

bloodshed. Suu Kyi also refused to accept the authorities' invitation for a memorial service for her father. The next day on July 20, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest and all communications with her party members and the outside world was cut off. Similarly, NLD party chairman Tin Oo was first placed under house arrest on July 20, 1989, and on December 22, he was imprisoned for three years. Though Suu Kyi's name was initially included in the list of candidates for the 1990 election, it was later removed after her opponent from the NUP challenged her candidacy on the allegation that she had contacts with dissident groups fighting against the government (Silverstein 1990a, 1014-15).

As both party Chairman Tin Oo and its General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi had been either imprisoned or house arrested for most of the time until they were finally released in 2010, the NLD was by and large dysfunctional or ineffective for about two decades. In the absence of party high commands, the NLD was unable to take major political decisions. The government prevented Suu Kyi from meeting her party members and supporters and vice-versa. The announcement of the 2010 general election laws triggered a major confrontation between the SPDC government and the NLD. The laws banned anyone serving a prison term from belonging to a political party, and also barred from running or voting in the election. The laws automatically barred about 400 NLD members who were serving prison sentences. The election laws also required that no political party can have any member(s) with criminal conviction, which automatically ruled out many top NLD leaders who were jailed because of their political activities. Differences emerged among the NLD elites on the question of party registration. Before any official decision was taken by the party, a veteran NLD member Win Tin described the situation as a "life-or-death issue" and said "If we don't register, we will not have a party and we will be without legs and limbs." On the other hand, NLD Vice-Chairman (former Chairman) Tin Oo said, "There are many peaceful ways to continue our activities" without registering the party (*BBC* 2010).

The announcement of election laws was a heightened moment of political confrontation between NLD and the military government. The NLD countered the election laws by setting its own set of conditions to participate in the poll, including the

invitation of international observers to ensure a free and fair election, to reduce the role of military in politics, and to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Than Shwe, leader of the military government, pledged to release political prisoners in an amnesty before election. The NLD had no faith in such statement without any specific timeline. At its meeting of over 100 party members in Yangon in late March 2010, the party decided to boycott the upcoming general election due to its discriminatory and undemocratic laws, which forced the party to disband on May 6, 2010. In August 2009, Suu Kyi was again sentenced to three more years of imprisonment with hard labor on the charge that she violated the terms of her house arrest by providing shelter to John Yettaw, an American who illegally visited her residence. The court's verdict was reduced to 18-month house arrest by Than Shwe (Ghoshal 2013, 119).

One other important reason behind NLD's decision to boycott the 2010 general election was to send a message to the government that election was not all that matters to the NLD and the people of Myanmar. Win Tin, a co-founder of NLD, said, "We still have the support of the people, we cannot just put our hands up...We cannot work as a political party, so we cannot make mass meetings, and put out statements and so on, but we will work among the people" (Jones 2010). However, not all party elites were united behind such a major decision to boycott the election, which led to the formation of a splinter party, the National Democratic Front (NDF), by some NLD party leaders. The NDF registered with the Union Election Commission and participated in the general election (Turnell 2011, 149). The NDF senior party leader Khin Maung Swe, former spokesperson of NLD, said, "We [believe] that boycotting the elections would be meaningless as it will only create more space for candidates of undemocratic parties and eventually lead them to seats in the parliaments… If one ruins the polls, there will only be a prolonging of the military ruling system. No one will be able to boycott the polls successfully" (Htet 2010). In response to Aung San Suu Kyi's statement that it was undemocratic for some leaders to form a new political party after the NLD had decided not to register, Than Nyein, leader of the NDF, said, "We formed a new party only after the NLD officially ceased to exist. As individuals, we have the right to do so. As a democrat, she [Suu Kyi] should understand us." The NDF leaders believed that it was necessary to have a political party to continue the democratic movement (Kaung, 2010).

There had been periodical meetings between Suu Kyi and the SPDC's Labor Minister Aung Kyi while the former was still under house arrest. The release of Suu Kyi on November 13, 2010 was crucial for reconciliation. The meeting between President Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi on August 19, 2011 was a major turning point in improving relations between the government and the opposition groups led by the NLD. At the government's invitation, the NLD leadership "unanimously" decided to re-register its party with the election commission and take part in the by-election to be held in April 2012. The government reciprocally agreed to remove the clause in the election law which bans political prisoners from becoming a political party member and contesting in election. The understanding was reached after the government led by former army generals entrenched the role of military in politics. The government no longer saw significant threat from NLD after the government-backed USDP won a landslide majority in the 2010 general election. Re-registering the party also meant that the NLD abandoned its earlier position of denouncing the 2010 election result. The NLD's decision was greatly influenced by Suu Kyi who was in favor of re-registering the party and amending the constitution within the existing political framework (Kipgen 2012b, 528-29).

4. 7. Role of Ethnic Minorities in Transition

Unlike the successive military governments or the NLD, there has not been one top leader who has been widely recognized or has assumed the elite role in Myanmar's ethnic politics. Though it has not always been successful, the policy of successive military governments since the Ne Win era had been to assimilate ethnic minorities into the majority Bama or Burman population and or to marginalize group such as the Rohingya Muslims (Holliday 2010, 121). During the AFPFL and BSPP era, the elites of ethnic minorities were mostly engaged in armed movement against the central government. The fundamental objective of armed groups was to establish a federal government per the Panglong agreement. In the initial stages of their armed movement, they demanded secession from the union government. The demand was not achieved during the AFPFL and BSPP governments. During the SLORC and SPDC governments, the ethnic minorities' movement can broadly be classified under three groupings: political parties that contested the 1990 election; ceasefire groups working together under the banner of

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NDF that was formed in 1976; and the non-ceasefire groups along the border areas that were working together with groups such as the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) and other Burman dissident groups in exile. There were also community-based organizations and NGOs that did not necessarily engage in politics. Political parties and ceasefire groups worked together with the Myanmar government in the 1990 election, during the national convention and the signing of ceasefire agreements (Smith 2010, 215-16).

Though attempts had been made to speak out in one voice, the ethnic-based parties had not always been successful. For example, out of the remaining fifteen ethnic-based political parties that had contested the 1990 election, only six of them continued to attend the National Convention till its completion in 2008. The other parties allied themselves in 1998 and formed the Committee Representing People's Parliament (CRPP). In 2002, the CRPP and NLD formed an alliance called the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA). The CRPP members were not convinced that the 2008 constitution would either bring democracy or protect the rights of ethnic minorities. Similar to the demands put forward by NLD, the CRPP set three conditions to participate in the 2010 general election: release of all political prisoners including the SNLD leader Hkun Htun Oo, constitution amendment, and the presence of international observers that would guarantee inclusive, free and fair election. On the other hand, a veteran Shan politician Shwe Ohn invited political parties to join a Union Democratic Alliance Organization (UDAO) and participate in the election. Moreover, despite knowing the difficulty to amend the 2008 constitution, most ceasefire leaders pledged to support the SPDC's political roadmap and participate in the election, which they believed was the only way to resolve the country's decades-old conflicts. In 2009, taking advantage of the disunity among the ceasefire groups, the government convinced groups such as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) and Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) to transform themselves into Border Guard Force (BGF)[9] (Smith 2010, 216-19).

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[9] BGF was a policy designed by the Myanmar government in 2009 to put all ethnic ceasefire groups under the control of the Myanmar army. The plan was to have 326 soldiers, including eighteen officers and three commanders with the rank of a major in each battalion. Out of the three commanders, two would be from

On the other hand, some ethnic armed groups including the KIA refused to commit themselves to become a puppet of the Myanmar army. Because of the KIA's refusal to transform into BGF, coupled with the Myanmar army's interest to control the lucrative Chinese hydropower projects and other natural resources in Kachin state, the Myanmar army launched a "full-scale" attack on the KIA on June 9, 2011. This abruptly ended the seventeen-year-old ceasefire between the two sides. Armed conflict between the KIA and Myanmar army resumed since then, displacing tens of thousands of Kachins. The displaced Kachins fled to the China-Myanmar border and sought refuge in makeshift camps. The situation of refugees was worsened by the Myanmar government's blockage of international aid organizations (*KWAT* 2011).

In an attempt to resolve the decades-old ethnic minority problems, the Thein Sein government initiated dialogue with the armed groups, which is crucial for the success of democratic transition. After assuming the prime minister role in March 2011, the Thein Sein government signed ceasefire agreements with several ethnic armed groups - Arakan Liberation Army (ALA), Chin National Front (CNF), Klohtoobaw Karen Organization (KKO), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Karen National Union (KNU), KNU/KNLA Peace Council (PC), National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Khaplang (NSCN-K), Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLA), Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), and Shan State Army-North (SSA-N). Besides the MNDAA, NDA-K, and KNPLF, armed groups such as Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), Kachin Defense Army (KDA), Karenni National Defense Army (KNDA), Kayan National Guard (KNG), Karen Peace Force (KPF), Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group (LAWPG), Mon Army, Mergui District (MAMD), and Pa-O National Organization (PNO) had transformed themselves into BGF in 2009 (South 2012, 35-36).

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ethnic minority groups and another would be from the Myanmar army who would have the power and authority to command the battalion in its day-to-day operations. Several other important positions such as general staff officer and quartermaster officer would also come from the Myanmar army. The Myanmar army would fill the twenty-seven other ranking non-commissioned officers such as company sergeant majors, sergeants, clerks, and nurses.

4. 8. Conclusion

Scholars such as Diamond (1999), Lijphart (1969, 1977), Hagopian (1990), and Roberts (2002) discuss the importance of elites in democratic transition and for its consolidation. Diamond argues that because of their disproportionate power and influence, elites matter most in the consolidation of democracy, not only through their behaviors but through their beliefs as well. And for Lijphart, elites are essential for establishing a stable democracy in a segmented society. Hagopian observes that when old regime elites are included or allowed to continue in the new democratic government, they tend to retain certain formal and informal powers which do not help in either consolidating democracies or in strengthening democratic institutions. On the other hand, Roberts says that a democratic transition is most reliable when the weaker elites accept the conditions set by the dominant elites.

Hlaing (2012), who is a native scholar from Myanmar, argues that one of the reasons that led to democratic transition in the aftermath of the 2010 general election was due to the absence of a "rigid paramount leader" in the military who was opposed to reconciliation with the opposition group led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The other reason was due to the positive response by Myanmar's pro-democracy leaders to the government-initiated gradual political reforms that provided space for cooperation with liberals in the government for further liberalization of the political system. Hlaing's analysis suggests that political elites in both the government and the opposition were responsible for the emergence of democracy. Naidu, another scholar on Myanmar, agrees with the important role played by Suu Kyi in the transition process and says: "Aung San Suu Kyi became a democratic icon and a focal point for democratic transition. Since she was present inside the country, the international community put pressure on the military government through Suu Kyi."

Two other scholars who emphasize the role of Aung San Suu Kyi as the democratic opposition elite are Trivedi and Yhome. On the role of Suu Kyi in democratic transition, Trivedi says, "Aung San Suu Kyi played a significant role in the transition process. The fact that she was placed under house arrest and not allowed to assume power was a major force in driving public opinion both inside and outside the country. She was

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a democratic icon and the world listened to her." Along similar line, Yhome argues that: "The entire opposition movement was centered around Aung San Suu Kyi, and so was the military government's interaction with the international community. Though she was not an elected leader of the country, Suu Kyi was a talking point of various international meetings. Exile political groups and their activities also revolved around Suu Kyi." Yhome stresses that: "The movement of ethnic minorities, including armed groups, was a constant reminder to the military leadership that a representative system that addresses the problems of ethnic minorities was necessary."

All these scholars working on Myanmar stress the importance of elites - either in the government or the opposition - in helping or facilitating the democratization process. However, Sundararaman, another scholar on Myanmar, downplays the significance of opposition elites, including Suu Kyi, in the transition process and argues that: "Leadership and activities were successfully contained by the military government and its apparatuses. The leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Aung San Suu Kyi, has been an icon and charismatic leader, but such individual popularity made little impact to effect democratic change."

During my field trip, Htay Oo[10], Member of Parliament and Vice-Chairman of the ruling USDP, who was the Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation during the military-led SPDC government, says that the military elites have worked only in the larger interest of the country and the people. After the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, the military intervened at the request of the BSPP government to restore law and order and prepare the country for multi-party election. After the 1990 multi-party election, elites in the SLORC government wanted to have a constitution first before transferring power to a civilian government. According to Oo, in both occasions during the 1988 uprising and after the 1990 election, the pro-democratic forces insisted on immediate power transfer when the basic infrastructure for a multi-party democracy, i.e. constitution, was yet to be drafted. He says the objective of the 1990 election was to elect representatives to draft a

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[10] Htay Oo was also General Secretary of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and served as the first General Secretary of USDP when the party was formed.

constitution with the ultimate objective of establishing a multi-party democratic government.

Similarly, Khin Nyunt[11], during interview, says that the September 18, 1988 military takeover was not a coup but an intervention by the military to restore law and order in the country at the request of the BSPP government. Khin Nyunt says that he and Senior General Saw Maung went to meet the BSPP leader Ne Win. After the 1990 election, the military government asked the elected representatives to wait for the National Convention to convene and first draft the constitution before power can be transferred to a civilian government. When some NLD elected representatives in Mandalay, who demanded immediate power transfer, threatened to form a parallel government, the National Convention was stalled. Nyunt says that the actions of NLD leaders were a waste of time in the process of democratic transition. Had not the NLD boycotted the National Convention, democratic transition could have been sooner. The former prime minister says that the military commander-in-chief and SLORC/SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe knew quite well that the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi-led NLD cannot be abandoned or sidelined in Myanmar politics.

During interview, ethnic minority leader No Than Kap says that ethnic minorities have played an equally important role as the majority Bama/Burman group in the process of democratic transition and they remain key to its successful consolidation. The country's ethnic minorities have been very vocal about their demand for federalism during the successive Burman-led central government, and there cannot be peace in the country without resolving minority problems. However, the ethnic leader believes that regardless of what the ethnic minorities or the Burman-led democratic forces have contributed, the transition would not have been possible had it not been initiated and supported by the military elites, particularly Senior General Than Shwe. There had been pressure from ethnic minorities as well as the international community for democratic reforms, but political transition was systematically implemented by the military government as enshrined in the 2008 constitution. On the question of why the military

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[11] Khin Nyunt is former prime minister and the leader who introduced the military government's seven-step-roadmap towards democracy in 2003

did not transfer power to democratically elected representatives after the 1990 election, Kap says that the military government acted out of fear and desperation, which he partly blames the NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Though Suu Kyi did not specifically say that the military generals would be punished for their role in the 1988 massacre, she had said that justice should be done according to the will of the people, which the military generals felt threatened.

On the role of elites in the aftermath of 1990 and 2010 elections, Min Zaw Oo, a leader of Myanmar Peace Center, says that elites from the military government did not participate in the 1990 election but they did in the 2010 election. He says the objective of the 1990 election was largely to diffuse the popular sentiment in the aftermath of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, whereas the 2010 election was part of the military's seven-step roadmap. In 1990 election, the military backed NUP, but did not campaign for it. However in 2010 election, the entire process was systematically implemented by the military. Hla Maung Shwe, another leader of Myanmar Peace Center, agrees that the role of elites in 1990 and 2010 elections was different. After the NLD won a landslide victory in 1990 election, there was no consultation and dialogue between the NLD and the military elites. Shwe also thinks that there was lack of political experience on the part of Aung San Suu Kyi during the 1990 election. Since 2006, there have been more meetings and interaction between Suu Kyi and the military government, which has helped the military better understand the political problems of the country.

During a focused group meeting, faculty members of Mandalay University's International Relations Department agree that the role of military elites was important in the democratic transition. With the exception of U Nu's era of parliamentary democracy, political transition has been controlled by the military. The role of other elites, including NLD and ethnic-based parties, was insignificant during the years of military rule. The political transition after the 2010 general election was systematically implemented in accordance with the military's seven-step roadmap. Like many other interviewees, Sai Khaing Myo Tun, a faculty of Yangon University, also says that the role of military elites and Aung San Suu Kyi was crucial for political transition. On the role of ethnic minorities in democratic transition, Tun says they played a "very big role" by putting

continued pressure on the government to amend the 2008 constitution, and also on the issue of power decentralization.

CHAPTER - 5

External Agencies and Democratic Transition

5. 1. Introduction

The role of external agencies is one factor commonly associated with transition from authoritarian regime to democracy (Huntington 1991, Pinkney 2004, Potter 1997, and Grugel 2002). Democratic nations and their pro-democratic institutions tend to put pressure on authoritarian regimes which depend on external agencies for loans, aid and trade. External agency can be the foreign policy of one nation or a collective of nations. External agency can also be in the form of international organization, regional body or alliance. The pro-democratic agendas of global financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund or the diplomatic agendas of individual nations can influence the pattern of political transition in other countries. This chapter analyzes sanctions versus engagement policies pursued by the international community in their diplomatic relations with Myanmar. It specifically looks at the politics of sanctions imposed by the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), the involvement of the United Nations (UN), and the engagement of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the People's Republic of China, and India.

Western sanctions began after the Myanmar military government brutally suppressed the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and subsequently nullified the 1990 election result. The sanctions imposed by the US and EU were economic and political, as well as arms embargo. The Western powers not only put direct economic and political pressure on the Myanmar government, but also put pressure on the Western companies operating inside Myanmar that resulted in the withdrawal of several companies. Sanctions also targeted individual leaders and their assets. In the face of Western sanctions, Myanmar established diplomatic ties with countries that were willing to cooperate. There are two broad views about sanctions and engagement: one group believes that sanctions were an effective tool to pressurize the military government for a democratic change; and the other group says that sanctions only hardened the military regime and it was the

engagement policy that gradually influenced the government to initiate democratic reforms.

5. 2. US Sanctions

Initially, sanctions were in response to the suppression of 1988 pro-democracy uprising. Three days after the brutal crackdown of peaceful protest on August 8, 1988, the US Senate passed resolution 464 calling President Ronald Reagan administration to raise the issue of human rights and reconciliation with the Myanmar government. Subsequently on September 7, 1988, the House of Representatives passed resolution 529 condemning the massacre of unarmed protesters, paying respect to the people of Myanmar for their commitment towards democracy, and urging the Reagan administration to review the US government's financial assistance to Myanmar and take necessary actions. On September 23, 1988, the Reagan administration responded the resolutions of both houses of the US Congress by suspending all aid to Myanmar, including counter-narcotics programs and stoppage of arms sales. The Myanmar military government announced that it would return to parliamentary democracy by holding election. However, when the military-backed NUP lost the 1990 election, the military refused to transfer power to elected representatives. Instead, the authorities resorted to intimidation and arrest of NLD members; brutally suppressing the protests led by students and Buddhist monks, and declared martial law. In response, the US Congress unanimously passed a resolution to add the Customs and Trade Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-382) to the existing Narcotics Control Trade Act of 1986, which authorized the president to impose sanctions as deemed appropriate (Martin 2010a, 3-4).

The US sanctions were imposed through different measures, including laws and Presidential Executive Orders that were specifically designed to target Myanmar and other laws that are generally applied to countries for pursuing policies that are against the interests of the United States. The different forms of sanctions included restrictions, waivers, expiration and reporting requirements. The first of five federal laws was promulgated in Section 138 of the Customs and Trade Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-382), which required the US president to impose economic sanctions as deemed

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necessary unless certain conditions pertaining to human rights and counter-narcotics were met. The second law was Section 307 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (Public Law 87-195), and amended by the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 (Public Law 103-236), which withheld US contributions to certain institutions that had programs in Myanmar. The third law was Section 570 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1997 (Public Law 104-208), which imposed various specific sanctions unless certain standards of human rights and democracy were met. The fourth law was the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act (BFDA) of 2003 (Public Law 108-61), which required the president to ban import of products from Myanmar, froze assets of certain Myanmar officials and banned visas for certain officials, and blocked the US support for loans from international financial institutions. The fifth law was the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-286), which banned direct and indirect imports of jadeite and rubies from Myanmar, expanded the list of visa and financial restrictions of Myanmar officials, and restricted accounts that provided services to Myanmar officials (Martin 2011, 1-2).

The federal laws were supplemented by four Executive Orders (EOs): EO 13047, EO 13310, EO 13448, and EO 13464. EO 13047 was issued by President Bill Clinton on May 20, 1997 and the other three EOs were issued by President George W. Bush on July 28, 2003, October 18, 2007, and April 30, 2008 respectively. The EOs were issued with the authority vested in the president by the constitution and the two laws: the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1997 (Public Law 95-223; 50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and the National Emergencies Act (NEA) (P.L. 94-412; 50 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.). The IEEPA authorizes the president to impose certain financial sanctions if and when the situation becomes a threat to the US national security, foreign policy or its economy. And the NEA authorizes the president, under certain conditions, to declare national emergency. To execute the IEEPA, the president has to declare national emergency by invoking the NEA. And the ordinances under IEEPA require annual renewal (Martin 2011, 2).

Country-specific sanctions can be divided into different categories. The first type of sanctions was visa ban on government officials, their family members and business associates. The second type was restriction on the provision of financial services to government officials, family members and their business associates. The third type was the freezing of certain assets of certain individuals. The fourth type was a ban on the general import of goods of Myanmar origin. The fifth type was the prohibition of certain types of goods from certain companies. The sixth type was a ban on investments, including third country companies. The seventh type was the restriction of either bilateral or multilateral assistance (Martin 2010a, 6). In addition to targeted sanctions, the US government imposed sanctions on some functional issues such as child soldiers, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering and organized crime, religious freedom, workers' rights, world peace and for the security and foreign policy of the United States (*Ibid.,* 20-22).

Humanitarian intervention in the form of economic and trade sanctions has increasingly become an important tool of the US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era (Johansson 2000, 318). Sanctions carry political and economic penalties towards states or entities whose actions are unacceptable to the United States. Sanctions are imposed by the United States, more than any other country, to deal with issues such as non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, to promote human rights, to control drug trafficking, to fight terrorism, to discourage armed aggression, to protect environment, and to oust a government or to push for regime change. To achieve these objectives, different measures have been implemented, such as arms embargo, cutting foreign assistance, limiting imports and exports, asset freezes, tariff increases, travel bans, votes in international organizations, withdrawal or downgrading of diplomatic relations, revocation of most favored nation trade status, cancellation of air links, denial of credit and financial services, and restriction on investments (Haass 1997, 74).

Why did the United States resort to sanctions, rather than engagement, in its bilateral relations with Myanmar? The objective of sanctions can be broadly discussed in two ways. The first objective was to send a message of disapproval to the Myanmar

government's behavior, and to express a symbolic support to the pro-democracy movement. Thousands of unarmed protesters were killed during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and tens of thousands fled to neighboring countries. The 1988 massacre was soon followed by the SLORC government's refusal to honor the 1990 election result. More people, including elected representatives, fled the country to continue democracy movement from across the border. The second objective of sanctions was to put pressure on the military government to change its course. Advocates of sanctions believed that if the military government was pressurized through sanctions, it would lead to regime collapse either through popular uprising or a revolt by disgruntled or reformist army officers, or both. Proponents also believed that sanctions would bring economic hardship to the people who would then have nothing to lose except to rise up against the government (Seekins 2005a, 440).

Following the bloody suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 and the subsequent arrest of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi in 1989, the US government suspended Myanmar from the list of Generalized Systems of Preferences (GSP) until the Myanmar military regime conformed to the internationally accepted labor standards. The Bush administration also did not renew the bilateral textile agreement under the Customs and Trade Act of 1990, which expired on December 31, 2009. The textile imports accounted for US$9.2 million of the total US$22 million in trade between the two countries in 1990 (Johansson 2000, 328). During the 1990s, members of Congress considered a number of bills and resolutions for additional sanctions but only few of them were successfully passed. On April 30, 1994, the Congress passed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act (FRAA) for fiscal years 1994 and 1995 (Public Law 103-236), which amended the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961 and withheld the US government's contribution to international organizations helping Myanmar, including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were not included in the international organizations withheld list (Martin 2010a, 5).

The Omnibus Consolidated Appropriation Act (OCAA) of 1997 (Public Law 104-208) prohibited all aid to Myanmar except humanitarian assistance, counter-narcotics,

and assistance for the advancement of democracy and human rights. The Act required the United States to oppose multilateral loans, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It also prohibited visas to Myanmar officials, and encouraged the US president to pursue a multilateral strategy to advance democracy and humanitarian progress. Section 570(b) of the Act authorized the president to prohibit new investment if the Myanmar government physically harms, re-arrests, or forces Aung San Suu Kyi out of the country, and or if the government engages in a large-scale repression against the democratic opposition. Investment sanctions were intended to prevent the military from entrenching its power through US investors. Senators such as Republican Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York wanted complete withdrawal of investments. However, the Congress was unwilling to harm the existing US business interests and also did not like to risk future economic ties by completely withdrawing the US presence in the country. After the Senate reached a compromise on Section 570(b) of the OCAA of 1997, which was called Cohen-Feinstein Amendment, sanctions were imposed on future investments but did not mandate a complete withdrawal of existing US interests (Johansson 2000, 329-330). Subsequently, President Bill Clinton issued an EO 13047 on May 20, 1997, banning all new investments in Myanmar (Martin 2010a, 5).

Additional sanctions were introduced in the Congress since 2000. In October 2000, two identical bills were introduced in the House of Representatives (HR 5603) and in the Senate (S 3246) which were intended to ban all textile and apparel imports from Myanmar. In 2001, House of Representatives (HR 2211) and Senate (S 926) bills were introduced which intended to ban all articles produced, manufactured or developed in Myanmar. Then in the spring of 2003, the Congress passed the BFDA of 2003 (Public Law 108-61) in response to the authorities' crackdown on democratic opposition leaders, including the attacks on Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade on May 30 in Depeyin. And in 2008, the Congress passed the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act in response to the authorities' use of brutal force to suppress and disperse the demonstrations led by Buddhist monks in September 2007, known as the Saffron Revolution. During his two-term in office, President George W. Bush issued a number of EOs - 13310 on July 28, 2003, 13448 on October 18, 2007, and 13464 on April 30, 2008. When President Barack

Obama came to power in 2009, he renewed EOs 13047, 13310, 13448 and 13464 which were concerned with international emergency with respect to Myanmar (Martin 2011, 5-6).

On November 18, 2003, under Section 311 of the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (PATRIOT) Act of 2001, the US Secretary of Treasury applied a special measure and designated Myanmar as a country of engaging in money laundering. The special measure prohibited US financial institutions from establishing, maintaining, administering or managing "any correspondent or payable-through account"[12] in the United States or any foreign bank if the account was used by the foreign bank to provide financial services to a Myanmar banking institution. However, the restrictions did not include those financial activities that were exempted by Executive Order 13310[13] (Niksch and Weiss 2008a, 1-6).

5. 3. EU Sanctions

Similar to the United States, the relations between EU and Myanmar had gradually strained since the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and the Myanmar government's refusal to honor the 1990 election result. Sanctions were, however, formally imposed since the beginning of 1996 in response to the continued violation of human rights and lack of progress towards democracy. The EU sanctions on Myanmar included six major components: (i) arms embargo, (ii) ban on non-humanitarian aid, (iii) assets freeze of senior government officials and associates, (iv) expulsion of military attachés, (v) visa ban on senior government officials and associates, and (vi) limited investment ban. In 1997, the EU suspended the GSP status because of the Myanmar government's use of forced labor. However, EU sanctions were largely symbolic and had minimal impact until

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[12] A payable-through account is an account established in a US financial institution that has the privileges of writing a check to customers of foreign financial institutions.

[13] The Order was issued on July 28, 2003, which blocked property and property interests of senior officials of the Myanmar government and that of the USDA. The Order authorized the Treasury department to designate individuals or entities that were owned or controlled by, or acting on behalf of any of those officials or groups. Among others, it banned the import of Myanmar products into the United States and export of financial services by the Americans.

the EU's Common Position was adopted in November 2007. For example, despite the expulsion of attachés, the EU maintained full ambassadorial-level diplomatic relations with Myanmar. The arms embargo had minimal impact as the Myanmar government was supplied weapons and military equipment by its trading partners such as China, Russia and India (Howse and Genser 2008, 174-75).

There were also certain exceptions to the sanctions. For instance, the visa ban was exempted for intergovernmental meetings or international conferences, which meant that restriction was targeted to government officials for private visits. The ban on non-humanitarian aid was also exempted for programs such as health, education, environmental protection, and projects that supported the development of civil society. There was a minimal EU aid outside of these programs. Sanctions were applied only to certain state-sponsored enterprises which included brewery, pineapple juice company, steel companies, and a number of mills and mines. The sanctions did not include several of the biggest state-run companies, such as the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), the Myanmar Timber Enterprise, and the Myanmar Post and Telecommunications. The EU companies were not restricted from funding these major companies. The investment of France's Total Oil Company through MOGE alone provided the Myanmar military government around US$450 million a year. The shortcomings of sanctions were largely corrected by the EU's November 2007 Common Position (Howse and Genser 2008, 175-76).

When sanctions were imposed in 1996, restrictions included a ban on more than 800 companies associated with the Myanmar military government, and a visa ban and assets freeze of 491 military officials and associates. Since they were limited to certain state-sponsored enterprises, the sanctions did not stop EU's businesses in Myanmar. Interestingly, there was an increase in foreign and direct investment which rose from US$180 million in 1996 to US$400 million three years later before it dropped to the pre-sanctions level. Similarly, the EU exports also rose from about US$100 million in 1996 to four times higher in 2001, though it dropped again later. The loopholes in sanctions were evidenced from the fact that between 1995 and 2005, Europe was the largest investor with cumulative Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worth US$1.8 billion, during

which the total FDI from ASEAN member states was about half of this figure. The United Kingdom (UK) and France were the major investors during the 10-year period from 1995 to 2005. This was an indication that EU was able to impose only limited sanctions, and therefore, the impact was insignificant. Myanmar President Thein Sein insisted that sanctions did not force the military generals towards democratic reform. Thein Sein said the military generals had planned for gradual democratic transition for the past two decades (Gebert 2013, 4-5).

Table 1 below shows that between May 1995 and December 1996, the UK and France were the second and third largest investors in Myanmar respectively, as approved by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC). However, the MIC official figures did not take into account most of the Chinese and Japanese investments. France's Total Company was a major investor. The figures of UK investment included some oil exploration companies that had been withdrawn.

Table 1: Total Investment Approved by MIC for Existing and Completed Projects (in millions in US dollars)

Country	Number of Projects		Amount Approved	
	May 95	Feb. 96	May 95	Feb. 96
Singapore	27	38	337.16	683.8
United Kingdom	11	18	634.15	666.22
France	1	1	465	465
Thailand	27	29	418.26	421.12
Malaysia	7	9	69.57	227.27
United States	13	14	226.27	241.07
Japan	5	6	101.14	118.21
The Netherlands	2	2	83	83
Austria	1	1	71.5	71.5
Hong Kong	17	17	64.44	64.44
South Korea	9	9	60.59	60.59
Australia	4	6	28.2	30
Canada	1	6	22	25.03
Philippines	1	1	6.67	6.67
China	4	5	5.5	5.85
Bangladesh	2	2	2.96	2.96
Macao	1	1	2.4	2.4
Sri Lanka	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	134	166	2599.81	3096.01

Source: McCarthy 2000, 248

5. 4. UN Involvement

The relations between Myanmar and the United Nations (UN) remained largely peaceful until 1988 pro-democracy uprising and the subsequent nullification of 1990 election result by the Myanmar military government. The UN involvement in Myanmar can be broadly discussed under three different areas: the UN General Assembly, the offices of the Secretary General, and the Security Council. Different bodies or specialized agencies of the United Nations, including the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) also involved in different capacities.

5. 4. 1. Involvement of the General Assembly

Since 1991, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted several resolutions. The first resolution, which was passed on December 17, 1991, urged the Myanmar government to

allow all citizens to participate freely in the political process in accordance with the universal declaration of human rights and take the necessary steps towards the establishment of a democratic state. The resolution, while expressing grave concern over human rights situation, called for its improvement. The resolution also welcomed the UN Secretary General's statement on the award of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi and the call for her release from house arrest (UNGA Resolution 1991, 46/132).

In its resolution adopted on December 18, 1992, the UNGA continued to express concerns over the seriousness of human rights situation in the country. The assembly adopted a resolution urging the Myanmar government, among others, to respect the democratic rights of the people as expressed in the 1990 election and to accelerate the process of transition to democracy, to respect and protect human rights and the fundamental freedoms of ethnic and religious minorities, to release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, to invite international humanitarian organizations, particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for humanitarian activities, to cooperate and extend all possible assistance to the UN human rights rapporteur and provide unrestricted access to any person he wants to meet, and to end the flow of refugees into neighboring countries and to ensure their safe return in accordance with the relevant laws of the United Nations (UNGA Resolution 1992, 47/144).

The UNGA continued to review the situation inside Myanmar and passed resolutions at the end of every year. Until 2004, the UNGA resolutions urged the government to respect the outcome of the 1990 election and transfer power to the elected representatives. As in previous resolutions, the UNGA urged the government to initiate substantive dialogue with the opposition groups, including ethnic minorities, and pave the way for democratic transition and national reconciliation. The UNGA resolution also demanded the release of political prisoners unconditionally, including Aung San Suu Kyi. The General Assembly continued to remind the Myanmar government the importance of improving human rights situation. Since 2003, the UNGA asked the Myanmar authorities to elaborate the details of the government's road-map towards democracy in a transparent manner. It also urged the Myanmar government to ensure that its plan for democratic

transition is an inclusive process by involving all political stakeholders, including ethnic minorities (UNGA Resolution 2003, 58/247).

In 2009, the UNGA shifted its focus to the upcoming general election in 2010. In its annual resolution adopted on December 24, 2009, the UNGA urged the Myanmar government to ensure a free, fair, inclusive and transparent electoral process. The UNGA asked the Myanmar authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that all voters, political parties and all other stakeholders are allowed to participate in the electoral process. The UNGA called upon the Myanmar government to engage in dialogue with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure full compliance of human rights laws and international freedoms. The UNGA also urged the good offices of the UN Secretary General to continue discussions with the Myanmar government on the situation of human rights, transition to democracy and on the question of national reconciliation, and to provide all necessary assistance to UN Special Advisor and the Special Rapporteur to discharge their duties effectively in a coordinated manner. The UNGA also called upon the Myanmar government to immediately end the recruitment of child soldiers and protect children from armed conflict (UNGA Resolution 2009, 64/238). In its 2010 resolution, the UNGA urged the Myanmar government to pursue an inclusive post-election process towards a civilian government based on rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNGA Resolution 2010, 65/241).

5. 4. 2. Offices of the Secretary General

Per the mandate of the UN General Assembly, the offices of the Secretary General presented its report on Myanmar annually since 1994. In each report, the Secretary General updated members of the General Assembly on human rights situation and political development in the country. On February 24, 1994, the Secretary General wrote a letter to Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of SLORC, to hold a meeting to discuss ways in which the United Nations could assist the Myanmar government in resolving the issues of common concern. Subsequently, the first meeting between the two sides took place on October 3, 1994, where the modalities of the dialogue were discussed. The two sides agreed to focus on three areas: the Myanmar government's plans for a

return to democracy, including the 1990 election, the National Convention and the situation of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders; human rights and humanitarian issues; and the question of how the government plans to integrate different ethnic groups into the political process. The UN Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Marrack Goulding and Myanmar Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw met on October 6 and 12, 1994. A follow-up meeting was held in Yangon from November 21-23. The Myanmar government was represented by Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw and the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was represented by his Under Secretary General Rafeeuddin Ahmed. The Myanmar government said it wanted to proceed with a step-by-step process towards multi-parliamentary democracy (Secretary General Report to the UN General Assembly 1994, A/49/716).

The offices of the Secretary General continued to engage Myanmar and presented its annual report to the General Assembly during the years of Kofi Annan (1997-2006) and the incumbent Ban Ki-moon. The engagement nature of the offices of the Secretary General was boosted, at least symbolically, with the formation of the 'Group of Friends of the Secretary General on Myanmar'[14] by Ban Ki-moon himself on December 19, 2007. In the aftermath of the 2007 uprising led by Buddhist monks, the Group of Friends held four further meetings at the level of UN permanent representatives on February 13, March 18, July 23 and September 12, 2008. Subsequently on September 27, 2008, the Secretary General convened the first high-level meeting of the Group of Friends, with the participation of ministers from several concerned countries, as well as the Secretary General of ASEAN and a representative from the EU. As part of the offices of the Secretary General's engagement, a Special Advisor to the Secretary General visited Myanmar and met different political actors, including those in the government and the opposition groups. In those visits, the Special Advisor focused on a five-point agenda which were the key concerns of the United Nations and the international community, also endorsed by the Group of Friends and the UN Security Council: (i) the release of all

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[14] The group consisted of 14 sovereign nations: Australia, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Viet Nam. The purpose was to serve as a consultative forum to help support the initiatives of the Secretary General's good offices as mandated by the General Assembly. The group met informally as and when necessary.

political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi; (ii) the necessity for an all-inclusive and substantive dialogue; (iii) the need for political transition towards a civilian and democratic government; (iv) the improvement of socio-economic conditions; and (v) to regularize the role of the offices of Secretary General between the United Nations and the Myanmar government (Secretary General Report to the UN General Assembly 2008, A/63/356).

In its second meeting held on the sidelines of the UNGA on November 23, 2009, the Group of Friends on Myanmar emphasized the need to engage the Myanmar government and all other relevant parties directly in view of the upcoming general election in 2010. All members of the Group shared a common view that Myanmar's first election in 20 years should be held in inclusive and credible manner to bring stability and development to the country. The Group of Friends agreed to put forward three important demands to the Myanmar government: (i) to urge the Myanmar government to work with the United Nations to ensure an inclusive process of dialogue among the different groups in the country for credible election; (ii) to respect the role and experiences of the United Nations in addressing the challenges of Myanmar, including promotion of national reconciliation, respect for human rights, sustainable development and helping the country towards transition to democracy; (iii) to convey unequivocal message about the international community's willingness to help the people of Myanmar to address their political, humanitarian and developmental challenges (Secretary General Report to the UN General Assembly 2010, A/65/367).

As part of the United Nations engagement, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon made his first trip to Myanmar in May 2008, three weeks after cyclone Nargis devastated the country killing an estimate of 134,000 people. The purpose of the visit was an attempt to convince the Myanmar government to accept assistance from the international community to deal with the collateral damage caused by the natural disaster. Ban Ki-moon met Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the SPDC and military commander-in-chief, and urged him to allow international flights and ships to provide shelter, food, water and medical supplies to the affected people. Following the meeting, the Myanmar government allowed aid workers and international flights with relief materials to enter the

country. The military government also permitted supplies brought in by civil ships and small boats (MacKinnon, 2008).

Ban Ki-moon visited Myanmar for the second time from July 3-4, 2009. Unlike the first visit, which was non-political in nature, the purpose of the second visit was to engage the Myanmar leadership in the country's political transition process. The visit was significant as the Myanmar government was preparing to hold the first election in 20 years. While expressing the concerns of the international community on the overall political situation in the country, the Secretary General offered the United Nations' help in advancing national reconciliation, promoting democracy, respect for human rights and sustainable development. Ban Ki-moon met Senior General Than Shwe and the country's Prime Minister General Thein Sein, but was not given access to Aung San Suu Kyi. In his meetings with the Myanmar leaders, Ban stressed on three fundamental issues: the release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi; the need to begin substantive dialogue between the government and the opposition groups; and the creation of an environment conducive for credible election that is inclusive and has international legitimacy. The Secretary General also met registered political parties and ethnic ceasefire groups and listened to their views and political objectives, which he then discussed with the authorities (Security Council Meeting Record 2009, S/PV/6161).

5. 4. 3. Security Council Involvement

Unlike the General Assembly and the offices of the Secretary General, the issue of Myanmar was not discussed in the Security Council until 2005. The US played a leading role in bringing the Myanmar case to the Council. With the continued flow of refugees into neighboring countries and drug trade activities across the borders, the US argued that the situation in Myanmar was a threat to international peace and security. Several NGOs also expressed their support for the Security Council to place the situation of Myanmar in the Council's agenda. The proposal got boosted in September 2005 by a report titled "Threat to Peace: A call for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to Act in Burma" which was jointly commissioned by Vaclav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic, and Bishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa's pro-democracy and human rights

leader and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. The report argued for a multilateral diplomatic initiative at the Security Council level to push for a change in Myanmar. With support from its Western allies, the US ambassador wrote a letter to the Security Council president on November 29, 2005, expressing concerns of Myanmar being a threat to international peace and security and that the Council be briefed on the situation. Subsequently on December 3, 2005, a consensus was reached that the Council would receive a briefing from a senior Secretariat official during informal consultations (Security Council Report 2005).

At the request of the Council members, the UN Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari briefed the Council on May 31, 2006 regarding his recent visit to Myanmar. The briefing took place just four days after the Myanmar government extended the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi for another year despite the international community's demand for her release. During his meeting with Senior General Than Shwe, Gambari urged the release of Suu Kyi. The UN Secretary General also made a personal appeal to Than Shwe for Suu Kyi's release. Moving away from its traditional policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its members, ASEAN called for the release of Suu Kyi. Apart from releasing statements, there was no immediate action from the UN Security Council. The US proposed a draft resolution on Myanmar and began bilateral consultation with individual Council members (Security Council Report 2006). In its meeting on September 15, 2006, Myanmar was added to the Council's formal agenda for discussion. On January 12, 2007, a draft resolution was tabled for a vote at the Council by the US and the UK, but it was vetoed by China and Russia. Out of the fifteen Council members, 9 voted in favor of the resolution; 3 voted against; and 3 abstentions. The draft resolution, had it been passed, called for an end to military attacks on civilian population in ethnic minority areas, and the government to begin a substantive dialogue that would lead to genuine democratic transition. The draft resolution also called for the Myanmar government to cooperate with the mission of the UN Secretary General's good offices; freedom of expression, association and movement; the unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi; the removal of restriction on all political leaders and citizens; and allowing the NLD and other political parties to operate freely (Security Council 2007, SC/8939).

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Despite the failure to produce any concrete result, the Security Council occasionally released Press Statements or Presidential Statements. In its Press Statement (SC/9171) issued on November 14, 2007, the Council, among others, deplored the detention of many prisoners and the new arrests. It also called on the Myanmar government to create conducive environment for dialogue and national reconciliation, and stressed the need for the earliest return of Ibrahim Gambari, the Secretary General's Special Advisor, to the country. The Press Statement (SC/9228) issued on January 17, 2008 expressed concern over the slow progress of the UN proposal for the Myanmar government to create the necessary condition to begin dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and all other concerned parties, including ethnic minorities that would pave the way for national reconciliation. The Press Statement (SC/9662) issued on May 22, 2009 expressed concerns over the political impact of recent developments following Suu Kyi's imprisonment. The Press Statement (SC/9731) issued on August 13, 2009 reiterated the importance of the release of all political prisoners and expressed concern over the conviction and detention of Aung San Suu Kyi. The Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2007/37) issued on October 11, 2007 deplored the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators and called for the early release of prisoners. And the Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2008/13) released on May 2, 2008 called for inclusive and credible process of referendum on a draft constitution in May 2008 and the general election in 2010 (Security Council Report 2010).

5. 5. ASEAN Engagement

Since its formation in 1967, the traditional policy of ASEAN has been non-interference in the internal affairs of member states (Ramcharan 2000, 60). Historically, the non-interference policy is based on three guiding principles. Firstly, it discourages member states from criticizing or interfering in the internal affairs of other member states. Secondly, it commits member states to deny sanctuary or support to any groups that attempt to subvert or overthrow governments of member states. Thirdly, during the 1960s and 1970s, it discouraged members from extending support to external powers that may be subversive to member states. The non-interference policy is closely linked to its pioneer members - Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in the 1960s. For example, Indonesia and the Philippines opposed the creation of independent Malaysia that would

include the territories of Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. Brunei and some factions in Sabah and Sarawak also opposed their inclusion. Indonesia was engaged in aggressive acts towards Malaysia, known as Konfrontasi, by providing training and other forms of support to subversive groups in Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, and mainland Malaysia which threatened to destabilize the new nation, Malaysia. The presence of Britain, the USSR, the US, and the Netherlands further complicated the situation. Indonesia feared that Malaysia would cooperate with Britain against its interests and the US would use the Philippines as a base to support the Netherlands. The demise of Konfrontasi ended the internal and external factors that could undermine ASEAN member states (Katanyuu 2006, 826).

The prospect of extending membership to Myanmar caused a concern to ASEAN's traditional policy. There was pressure from human rights groups and the Western governments not to grant legitimacy to the SLORC government which refused to recognize the overwhelming electoral victory of the NLD in 1990 election. Despite the diplomatic pressure from the US and the EU, the ASEAN ministerial meeting in 1991 chose to engage the Myanmar government with the hope that human rights situation would improve gradually and its membership in the regional bloc would go smoothly. When Manerplaw, the KNU headquarters, in Thailand-Myanmar border was attacked and destroyed by the Myanmar army in 1995, more people fled to Thailand. Moreover, the Myanmar army often crossed into Thailand to pursue dissidents fighting against the Myanmar government. In the first half of 1998, about forty Myanmar's Tatmadaw (armed forces) incursions took place. Despite the rampant human rights violation by the Myanmar army, ASEAN admitted Myanmar into its bloc in 1997 (Ramcharan 2000, 66-67).

Non-interference does not mean non-engagement. In fact, ASEAN policy towards Myanmar has been "constructive engagement" for the past several years. Historically, constructive engagement was an effort to pursue the strategic and economic interests of ASEAN dominant elites who wanted to establish regional trading networks by moving away from the security framework of major world powers during Cold War period. Constructive engagement was more concerned with regional stability than regime

change. Even if there were political or regime change, it would have to be a gradual process with the consent of concerned elites and not through mass movement or sanctions. The goal of ASEAN engagement policy was to socialize elites in the Myanmar government by engaging them and gradually changing their perceptions. For example, Malaysia and Singapore encouraged its domestic firms to invest in Myanmar so that such engagement would help improve the economic condition of the country. By engaging constructively with Myanmar, especially by improving the economy and living standards of the people, ASEAN had hoped to reduce drug-related businesses across the border, stimulate the growth of Thailand economy, and minimize Myanmar dependence on China. ASEAN leaders claimed that their goal towards Myanmar was the same as that of the Western countries, though with a different approach. Like the Western nations, ASEAN's ultimate goal was to gradually convince Myanmar to embark on the path towards democracy and market economy, which was the long-term interest for both Myanmar and the region (Jones 2008, 273-74).

Against its traditional policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, there were a few instances when ASEAN came under heavy pressure from its Western partners to push the Myanmar government on issues such as human rights and political dialogue with the opposition groups, including ethnic minorities. During its 11th summit in 2005, ASEAN leaders overtly put pressure on the Myanmar government to expedite the democratic reform process and release political prisoners. Myanmar was also reluctantly convinced to accept ASEAN delegation to visit Yangon to assess the political development. Because of the international community's concerns over human rights violations and lack of democratic reforms, ASEAN leaders asked Myanmar to forfeit the bloc's 2006 rotating chairmanship (Katanyuu 2006, 845).

In the aftermath of the 2008 cyclone Nargis when there were calls from the international community for Myanmar to accept humanitarian assistance, ASEAN foreign ministers convened a special meeting in Singapore in mid-May. The leaders informed the Myanmar government that the natural disaster could be the final opportunity to allow the regional bloc to serve as a conduit or play a facilitating role between the Myanmar government and the international community. The Myanmar government accepted

ASEAN's suggestion which allowed Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan to lead ASEAN's humanitarian task force, which then led to the establishment of a tripartite core group - ASEAN, UN, and the Myanmar government - to coordinate relief activities. Such coordinated effort increased mutual trust among different partners which led to an international conference on relief assistance in Yangon. The conference was co-chaired by the secretary generals of ASEAN and UN which involved 51 countries and 24 different UN agencies and international NGOs. The Myanmar military leader Than Shwe told the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon that all international relief experts would be granted access to the cyclone hard-hit areas. The Myanmar government also agreed to accept international assistance without conditions (Haacke 2008, 371). The ASEAN leaders minus Myanmar also urged the Myanmar government to release political prisoners in 2009 and 2010 (Kipgen 2012a, 100-101).

5. 6. China's Engagement

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the bilateral relations between the two countries have largely been mutually beneficial. In the past several decades, the diplomatic relations of the two countries have been based on five principles of peaceful co-existence agreed upon by Myanmar, China and India in 1954, which includes: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; respect for mutual equality and to work for mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence. The bilateral relationship was also strengthened by the personal diplomacy of leaders from both countries (Than 2003, 190-191). The bilateral relation was strained in the aftermath of anti-Chinese riots and the expulsion of Chinese communities from Burma in 1967. The relations then improved significantly in the 1970s. On August 5, 1988, China signed a major trade agreement, legalizing cross-border trade including military aid to Burma. When the Western nations condemned and put pressure on Burma in the aftermath of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, the two countries bolstered their ties, thereby rapidly increasing China's influence in Burma.

As some scholars rightly put it, China's foreign policy towards Myanmar has multi-dimensions - strategic, economic, political and security - that have gradually developed over the years. First, China wants to secure access from Southwest China to the Indian Ocean by establishing road, rail and air connection from Yunnan province through Myanmar to the Indian Ocean, and also construct water, oil and gas pipelines. Second, China wants to maintain the security and stability of its border areas with Myanmar of about 1,369.5 miles. There are several armed groups along the China-Myanmar border, demanding greater autonomy which can potentially have implications for the safety and stability of Southeast China. Third, China wants to enhance its energy security by constructing China-Myanmar oil pipeline to import crude oil from the Middle-East and Africa and transport overland via Myanmar to Yunnan. China also wants to import Myanmar's natural gas. Fourth, China wants to promote its economic cooperation with Myanmar which has natural resources such as water, energy, timber (especially teak and rosewood), gems, boulders, nonferrous metals (such as copper, iron, manganese and tin) and land. China needs Myanmar not only for importing raw materials, but also a market for selling its finished products. Fifth, China wants to balance the rising India which aspires to become a global power. For China, India is a big neighbor with whom it had fought a border war in the 1960s, and suspicion still lingers. India's look-east policy and a closer ties between India and Myanmar on security and energy issues is viewed by many as an effort to limit or prevent China's access to the Indian ocean. Finally, China wants to maintain brotherly relations with Myanmar by strengthening existing cooperation. When Myanmar came under heavy criticism and pressure from the Western nations for its human rights violation and lack of democratic reforms, China often defended Myanmar stressing the importance of non-inference in the internal affairs of other countries (Chenyang and Fook 2009, 257-262). One such vivid example was in January 2007 when China, along with Russia, vetoed a draft resolution on Myanmar at the UNSC.

5. 7. India's Policy Shift

India and Myanmar share historical and cultural ties since colonial period, both countries were under British India. After independence from the British in 1947 and 1948

respectively, the two countries continued to strengthen bilateral relations by signing the Treaty of Friendship in 1951. Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu, the first Prime Ministers of India and Burma, worked together in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. The bilateral relations were somewhat patchy during the years of military rule under General Ne Win (1962-1988). There was diplomatic friction in the 1960s when thousands of people of Indian origin were evicted by the Ne Win government. However, during the same period, the two countries successfully signed the Land Boundary Agreement (1967) and the Maritime Boundary Agreement (1986). Between 1988 and 1990, the bilateral relations reached its low ebb as a consequence of India's support for democracy when the Burmese military government brutally suppressed the pro-democracy uprising and subsequently took over power. The relations began to improve with the introduction of India's look-east policy in 1991 (Yhome 2009, 1). The look-east policy began during Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's (1991-1996) Congress government but became significant during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's (1998-2004) National Democratic Alliance government.

The policy shift from support for pro-democracy movement to pro-military government was necessitated by India's attempt to maximize its national and security interests. Some believe that the move was also partly to counterbalance the growing influence of China in the region. However, during my conversation with the Indian Ambassador to Myanmar Gautam Mukhopadhaya in Yangon on February 27, 2014, he says the concept of India's look-east policy was not in the context of Myanmar. When the policy initially started, Myanmar was a "marginal player" and it was "incidental." The look-east policy is in the context of India's broader foreign policy. India saw that East and Southeast Asia were growing which coincided with India's "economic opening" stage. India was looking for "economic opportunities, foreign investments, learning from each other, partnership trade, and market access." Mukhopadhaya says engagement with Myanmar was a bilateral issue. The role of China and India's competition in Myanmar has been "overemphasized by some scholars, mainly to hype other rivalries that they would rather not draw attention." Security concern was one important reason for engagement. The engagement policy also has to do with the historical cultural ties between the two countries, and Myanmar is a bridge to a dynamic ASEAN countries.

After all, "neighbors are neighbors and you can't control the water that is going from one compound to the other." In order to be able to deal with different issues, India was obliged to deal with the Myanmar military regime. In the aftermath of 1988 pro-democracy uprising, India provided shelter to a lot of people from Myanmar, and in many cases it was a stepping stone for people who continued to move on to other countries. They left behind large communities, including political figures, who were still connected to Myanmar. "A regime is not the country; a regime is not the people. You don't like the regime doesn't mean you just cut off the people" and that "there should be no border trade." "We are dealing with the government because we have to deal with the government." Engaging with the Myanmar military government provided India at least "some access" and "some contacts" with the people. With a functioning embassy, it gave the Indian government the opportunity to understand what was going on inside the country (Mukhopadhaya, 2014).

While the bilateral relations between India and Myanmar have improved considerably since 1993, thereby overcoming tensions related to drug trafficking, the suppression of democracy and the rule of military junta, many in the international community, particularly the Western democracies and the Myanmar pro-democracy forces saw India's engagement, being the largest democratic country, as a setback for democratic movement.

5. 8. Conclusion

Scholars such as Huntington (1991), Pinkney (2004), Potter (1997), and Grugel (2002) say that democratic transition may have been triggered by external agencies. Democratic nations and their pro-democratic institutions tend to put pressure on authoritarian regimes which depend on external agencies for loans, aid and trade. Huntington asserts that policies of global actors such as the US and the EU caused democratization during the third wave in the 1970s and 1980s. The pressures generated by global political economy are influential in promoting democracy because they can penetrate societies dependent on external assistance. Pinkney says that with globalization comes the growth in free global market policies. The impact of global market means the manipulation of global economy

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by the most powerful countries and the institutions they dominate, especially on third world countries that heavily depend on foreign trade. Nevertheless, Grugel argues that external intervention can fail if there is no significant support from domestic groups. Similarly, external assistance will only serve a supporting role if democratization is generated by internal social pressures.

Some scholars working on Myanmar see the role of external agencies in varying ways. For Naidu, international organizations did not play any significant role in Myanmar transition. He argues that "Neither the placement of Myanmar as the UNSC permanent agenda nor sanctions played any significant role in democratic transition." Naidu further argues that Western sanctions were only symbolic and they were ineffective as there were other countries, such as China and India which provided the necessary economic aid for the military government to sustain. Japan also provided financial assistance to the Myanmar government. Along similar line, Sundararaman, another scholar, argues that "The Western economic and political sanctions had not been effective to bring forth democratic change. The simple reason was that there were other nations that established normal diplomatic relationship with Myanmar when Western sanctions were in place."

Trivedi, however, sees the role of Western sanctions differently. Though several resolutions of the United Nations, particularly the General Assembly, did not yield any concrete result, the economic sanctions "played an important role in triggering the transition. Sanctions isolated the regime, and therefore, ruined the economy. Had not the economy been ruined, the military leadership would not bother to open up the country to the outside world." Yhome, another scholar on Myanmar, says that Western sanctions, particularly that of the United States, did not have a significant impact in influencing the military leadership to change its policy, but "the isolation of Myanmar at various international forums had its political stigma. Placing Myanmar in the permanent agenda of the United Nations Security Council had some effect, but such international pressures did not yield democratic change."

On the issue of engagement, Sundararaman sees ASEAN strategy as a more pragmatic approach than the Western sanctions. By accepting Myanmar into ASEAN in 1997 and with its constructive engagement policy, ASEAN had the "opportunity to

engage the Myanmarese leadership directly." Especially in the aftermath of the 2007 Saffron revolution and the 2008 cyclone Nargis, some members in ASEAN openly expressed their frustration and disappointment towards the Myanmar leadership, and even there was talk of the possibility of expelling Myanmar from the regional bloc. Trivedi says that though ASEAN has traditionally pursued a non-interference policy in the internal affairs of member states, the bloc became more vocal about democracy after a democratic transition in Indonesia. Along similar line, Yhome argues that the constructive engagement of ASEAN was "able to put pressure on Myanmar's military leadership." Moreover, Yhome believes that the Arab Spring which led to the disgraceful downfall of dictators such as Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya was a reminder to Myanmar military leaders that they cannot hold on to power indefinitely.

On the role of sanctions, Sarah E. Hutchison of the US embassy in Yangon believes that despite its limited influence because of the engagement policy pursued by some nations, sanctions played a role in the democratic transition process, and the targeted sanctions of Specifically Designated Nationals (SDN) continues to play a role as a leverage. Hutchison, during interview on February 13, 2014, says that sanctions are symbolic as well as political gesture; they restrict or affect the sanctioned government's ability to do business and in putting pressure on the authorities to improve human rights situation. Sanctions policy was pursued in two key areas – economic and diplomatic. The economic leverage was more effective than the diplomatic one. And on the question of why the US government opted to engage the Myanmar's military government, Hutchison says that the US government received indications that the Myanmar government was willing to amend diplomatic relations. The initial interest for engagement did not always come through official channel, but sometimes through the Myanmar diaspora community as well as human rights groups. There was mutual interest from both sides to engage; it was in the US government's interest to have a partner in the region in areas such as education, tourism and investment. It was also the US government's interest to play a part in the process of establishing a participatory democracy in Myanmar.

During my interview with a Western diplomat on February 18, 2014 in Yangon (who does not want to be identified) says that sanctions were intended to influence leaders in the government to pursue democratic reforms and also to specifically target leaders by disrupting or freezing their foreign assets, including bank accounts. The diplomat says that Western sanctions had impacts but difficult to measure. However, it was clear that the Myanmar government had to undertake drastic democratic reforms in order for the Western sanctions to be lifted. Since the international community, particularly the Western governments, considered the 2010 election as rigged and flawed, sanctions were not lifted even after the election. Sanctions were lifted only after the Myanmar government implemented some of the core demands of the sanctioning governments, such as releasing of hundreds of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi. The diplomat says that lifting of sanctions was in response to the initiatives taken by the Myanmar government. Despite the impact sanctions had, the diplomat says that external forces alone cannot effect a democratic change.

During an interview in Yangon on February 26, 2014, Canadian Ambassador to Myanmar Mark McDowell says over the past few years, Myanmar had a desire not to be over dependent on China or any other single foreign country. Myanmar gradually realized that it was crucial to get the help of the international community, especially from developed nations, for improving the country's infrastructure and in extracting its natural resources. Like the other Western diplomat, McDowell believes that the political transition was an internally-driven process though external agencies/forces had played a role in pushing the country towards democracy. The lifting of sanctions was triggered by the gradual democratic reforms inside the country, such as release of political prisoners and the NLD's decision to participate in the 2012 by-election.

Gautam Mukhopadhaya says that Myanmar, being part of ASEAN, was able to see where the rest of Southeast Asia was going and where it was stuck. The military leaders also saw that ASEAN policy and its working methods were broadly acceptable to them. Members of ASEAN, which were like a support group, played an important role in Myanmar's reengagement with the rest of the international community. As sanctions isolated Myanmar, it turned to countries such as China and North Korea that were willing

to engage. Besides the geopolitical factor, Myanmar and China have historical similarity in suppressing pro-democracy uprising in 1988 and 1989 respectively. Democratic transition was partly triggered by an internal desire within the military leadership for economic reforms by opening up the country to foreign investments. Mukhopadhaya says that India would have taken the same engagement approach had the NLD came to power after the 1990 election.

During a focused group meeting in Mandalay on February 19, 2014, faculty members of Mandalay University's International Relations Department say that external agencies played some role in the democratic transition. The ASEAN policy shift from non-intervention to constructive engagement convinced the Myanmar government to accept international assistance in the aftermath of the 2008 cyclone Nargis, thereby reconnecting Myanmar with the international community, particularly the Western nations which imposed sanctions. Myanmar's desire to assume ASEAN chairmanship role in 2014 and a desire to reduce its overdependence on China were also important in Myanmar's interest to improve ties with the Western governments. Unlike many other interviewees, Sai Khaing Myo Tun, a faculty member of Yangon University during an interview in Yangon on February 26, 2014, says that the carrot and stick diplomacy of the United States was important to the democratic reforms. Since Myanmar wanted to improve its international credibility and legitimacy, the US constructive engagement was a driving force for democratic transition. Tun also says that the non-interference policy of China and India had not contributed to the democratic transition.

CHAPTER - 6

Institutions and Democratic Transition

6. 1. Introduction

Some scholars (Dahl 2005, Grugel 2002, Vanhanen 1992, Hirst 1994, Schedler 2002) say that the role of institutions is important for democratic transition. Institutions here mean the structures of power set up. There are different structures of power that constrain the behavior and thinking of elites and individuals in society, such as economic, social and political. Every individual is born and grown up with certain structures and practices them though the individual may later be influenced by the surrounding environment. Certain structural patterns can be conducive to democracy and others to authoritarianism. The existing structures can become a hindrance or constraint to democracy. Elites and individuals may take decisions, but such choices can only be explained with reference to the structural constraints and opportunities of the time. This chapter analyzes the government's (SLORC/SPDC) seven-step roadmap towards democracy, the 1990 election and the entrenchment of military role, the 2010 general election and the first steps towards restoration of democracy, the understanding reached between the SPDC government and NLD, and the institutional role of *Sangha* (Buddhist monks) in the 2007 Saffron revolution.

6. 2. Government's Roadmap towards Democracy

The SLORC government refused to transfer power to elected representatives after the 1990 election on the ground that a new constitution has to be drafted first. The government with its declaration number 11/92 dated April 24, 1992 stated that it will coordinate a meeting of leaders of Hluttaw representatives of legally existing political parties and individual Hluttaw members within two months, and upon its completion will convene a National Convention within six months. Accordingly, the government called a session on June 23, 1992 where elected members of the 1990 election deliberated on how many members would form the National Convention, though the final decision was

rested on the SLORC government. Subsequently, 15 delegates from the NLD, six delegates from the SNLD, three delegates from the NUP, one delegate each from four ethnic-based political parties, and one independent delegate were selected. Several concerns were raised, including whether there will be freedom of expression during the National Convention (Siemers 1993, 252).

The SLORC order number 13/92 of October 2, 1992 established a Convening Commission for the National Convention, which included 10 military officers and eight civilians. The same order outlined the duties of the Convening Commission to convene a National Convention which would lay down the principles on which the constitution will be drafted. The principles would be in accordance with: (i) non-disintegration of the Union; (ii) non-disintegration of national solidarity; (iii) consolidation and perpetuation of sovereignty; (iv) emergence of a genuine multi-party democratic system; (v) development of eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality in the state; (vi) participation of the *Tatmadaw* (armed forces) in the leading role of future national politics. Out of the six objectives, the first four of them had been discussed for quite sometimes, while the last two were new addition. It was evident from the objectives of the Convention that the authorities had planned to establish a strong centralized government, with the military playing a major role. On November 5, 1992, the date for the National Convention was set for January 9, 1993 (Siemers 1993, 253).

Through a carefully planned election, delegates were nominated for the National Convention by the SLORC government in each state, division and district to ensure all major ethnic groups were represented. Active military officers were also appointed to represent the *Tatmadaw* (Badgley 1994, 155). After a five-month long recess, the National Convention was reconvened and a number of provisions were agreed upon, including a significant role for military in politics. One of the guidelines prevented citizens with foreign relatives from being elected to the parliament (Callahan 1995, 204). Though it was initially announced that a new constitution would be ready by end of 1993, only a number of previously announced principles and ideas were completed by end of 1994, which were largely endorsed without any amendment. The military continued to play a major role in the three branches of government – executive, legislative, judiciary.

The *Tatmadaw* was given autonomy from cabinet control as well as the right to intervene in cases of national emergency. The new constitution removed some socialist features that were included in the 1974 constitution, and introduced self-administered regions in ethnic minority areas with a view to providing some form of autonomous administration (Taylor 1995, 244).

Between January 1993 and March 1995, the National Convention discussed three leading issues: the principles of the state, the state structure, and head of the state. The Convention confirmed 104 basic principles of the constitution; excluded Aung San Suu Kyi from the post of presidency, and guaranteed the dominance of *Tatmadaw* in the nomination process and the formation of government from top to the lowest levels. The brief session in March-April 1995 discussed which ethnic groups should be granted self-administered areas. In October, the Convention discussed three other chapters on legislature, administration, and the judiciary (Guyot 1996, 263). The Convention was then adjourned sine die since 1996. On August 25, 2003, the SPDC Secretary-1 and Intelligence Chief Khin Nyunt was promoted to Prime Minister, and simultaneously Soe Win and Thein Sein were promoted to the posts of Secretary-1 and Secretary-2 respectively. Then five days later on August 30, Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in his speech to government officials and representatives of the NGOs introduced a seven-step roadmap for democratic transition in accordance with the National Convention (Hlaing 2004, 89).

The seven-step roadmap were: to reassemble the National Convention, which had been suspended since 1996; to implement a step-by-step requisite tasks for establishing a democratic system when the National Convention successfully concludes; to draw up a draft constitution based on the general concepts and principles discussed in the National Convention; to hold a national referendum on the draft constitution; to hold a free and fair election for the formation of national legislative bodies (Hluttaw); to convene a meeting of elected representatives; leaders, government and authoritative bodies elected by the Hluttaw to continue with the task of constructing a new democratic state. The opposition groups rejected the roadmap alleging that it was an attempt by the government to divert the attention of the Myanmar people as well as the international community

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from the May 30, 2003 attack on Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade and her subsequent detention. The Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (ENSCC) proposed an alternative roadmap that would be acceptable to all the ethnic groups that have been fighting against the Myanmar government. However, the ceasefire groups welcomed the initiatives of the military government. The government mobilized the public to support the Convention by holding public meetings across the country, but did not elaborate the details of the Convention objectives (Hlaing 2004, 89-90).

In protest against the nature of the National Convention, NLD party members first walked out and they were later expelled in 1995. Subsequently in 1996, the SLORC government passed law 5/96 prohibiting any criticism of the Convention and the constitution. The Convention did not meet for seven years and when it met again in 2004, different political stakeholders such as the SPDC, NLD, and ethnic minorities understood the importance of discussing the issue of power sharing. But NLD and some minority parties decided to boycott the Convention in 2004 because of the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD's deputy leader U Tin Oo. On the other hand, the SPDC used the Convention as a means to placate the international community's pressure. It was evident that the *Tatmadaw* was more concerned with preserving the status quo of military rule. The purge of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, who had engaged in talks with Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD in 2001, in October 2004 brought uncertainty regarding the future of ceasefire groups and dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi (McCarthy 2006, 419). On the other hand, there was some optimism that the roadmap to democracy would convince the United States to re-engage Myanmar by reversing its sanctions policy (*Ibid.* 425).

When the National Convention reconvened on February 17, 2005, out of the total 1,081 delegates, 1,075 attended the opening plenary session. One ceasefire group, the Shan State Army-North, Special Region (3), requested that it be exempted from sending delegates due to pressing internal matters. The Convention was then adjourned on March 31, 2005 after deliberating the details of sharing legislative, executive and judicial powers between the central and state governments (Than 2006, 184). Even during recess, the state media continued to advocate the aims, objectives and importance of the Convention and advised the people to be vigilant of subversive activities from within and outside the

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country that could destroy national unity. Moreover, government-sponsored associations for women, business and war veterans and the USDA urged the people to support the government's roadmap during their meetings and rallies. The authorities also highlighted the importance of the Convention to the international community. The National Convention Convening Commission (NCCC) conducted separate briefings for the diplomatic community, representatives of UN agencies, military attaches and representatives of local and foreign media. By the time the National Convention reconvened on December 5, 2005, the Shan State Army-North, Special Region (3) attended but the New Mon State Party, a major ceasefire group, sent only observers. The Convention continued throughout December and by year-end, it claimed to have completed about 70 percent of the draft constitution (Than 2006, 185).

While the National Convention was gaining momentum, the SPDC announced in November 2005 that the government would start moving to a new capital in Nay Pyi Taw though construction works were still underway. By mid-February 2006, all government ministries officially began functioning from the new capital. By October-December 2006, over 1,000 of the Convention delegates approved the detailed principles of the fundamental rights and duties of citizens and the role of armed forces. The Convention also finalized the proposals for election, political parties, and provisions for state of emergency. Though the constitution had to be drafted by a committee of experts, the detailed discussions on the principles meant that they required no substantive revision. The principles of the constitution laid the foundation for a multi-party system of government with regular elections and a guarantee of some basic human and ethnic rights. The constitution also guarantees the dominant role of military in key areas, including the parliament and presidency. For example, the constitution states that the president must be elected not by a popular vote but by electoral college and must be well versed in military affairs. The military is guaranteed 25 percent of seats in the parliament, as well as key ministries such as defense, home affairs and border areas for both central and state/regional governments. Moreover, the military is given the constitutional right to assume power in case of national emergency, pertaining to sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity (Pedersen 2007, 220-21).

With the conclusion of the Convention final session, which was the first of the government's seven-step roadmap towards democracy, a 54-member committee was appointed to draft the constitution on October 18, 2006. The next step was to hold a referendum on the constitution, which would be followed by general election (Taylor 2008, 248). Per the government's timeline, a referendum on the new constitution was held on May 10, 2008 despite the cyclone Nargis that devastated the country a few days earlier. The referendum was, however, postponed in 47 townships that were mostly affected by the cyclone in the Irrawaddy delta to May 24. There were several allegations about the referendum, including reports of voters being given ballots that were already marked 'yes' in support of the constitution. In many places, particularly in the cyclone-affected areas, there were only few voters showing up for the referendum and they were required to write their national identification numbers on their ballots. On the polling day, there were reports that the 'yes' votes were only 53 percent in Yenangyaung township in Magwe region, 67 percent in Meiktila township in Mandalay region, and even lower in some parts of the Shan state. However, when the authorities announced the referendum result at the end of May, 98.12 percent eligible voters reportedly cast their votes and out of which 92.48 percent voted 'yes' in favor of the constitution (Seekins 2009, 169).

6. 3. The 1990 Election

The role of military in Myanmar politics has been historically significant (Kipgen 2011, 52). Following the military takeover on September 18, 1988, the SLORC government enacted election law on May 31, 1989 which would serve as the guiding principle to elect representatives for Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly) in a free and fair multi-party general election. The political volatility in the country generated high expectations from the general public to choose responsible representatives.

Amidst months of political unrest and mounting grievances across the country, the military leaders felt that general election could bring the country back to normalcy. Because of its ability to maintain the country's territorial integrity for over the past two decades, the military was confident about its future role in politics. The government announced the election date, but restricted freedom of speech and press, and some leaders

from the non-state sponsored political parties were detained throughout the campaign process. In an attempt to clarify the doubts and criticisms of the Myanmar people as well as the international community, the SLORC government reiterated the importance of the election. Four months before the election, the military junta chief, General Saw Maung, said at a meeting of SLORC coordinating committee on January 10, 1990:

> The reason why the rule of law and order and the prevalence of peace and tranquility is being given so much emphasis is because the Pyithu Hluttaw [People's Assembly] election to be held this year is not an ordinary one. It is an election of historic significance, a veritable milestone in the annals of history marking the change from one era to another, from one system to another and a turning point in our history itself (*Working Peoples Daily* 1990).

Allegations and complaints marred the entire electoral process, mainly between the military-backed NUP, a transformed party of the BSPP, and the NLD. The nomination of Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been placed under house arrest since July 19, 1989, was challenged by the NUP candidate who filed nomination paper for the same constituency. The charge was based on Suu Kyi's connections with Great Britain through her marriage with a British scholar Michael Aris, and alleged links with ethnic armed groups, particularly the KIO. Consequently, Suu Kyi was disqualified from contesting the election, which drew widespread condemnations from within and outside the country. The NLD Chairman Tin Oo was also arrested and subsequently disqualified from contesting the election.

The authorities denied allegations of harassment and intimidation, but admitted that some people were summoned for questioning. Conditions for election campaign were set by SLORC order 3/90, which required that rallies and speeches would have to be pre-approved by the authorities. Any speeches and publications that could be interpreted as undermining the sovereignty, independence or territorial integrity of the country, threatening the unity of the country and ethnic minorities, undermining the dignity or unity of the military institution, disturbing the education of the country, and or inciting ethnic and religious violence were banned. NUP was the only party that had advantage

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over other political parties under tight election regulations. Unlike other parties, the NUP inherited many offices and infrastructures owned by the BSPP. Political parties were allocated a 15-minute radio address and another 10 minutes on state television program, with the condition that the messages had to be pre-approved by the authorities. Requests from the international community to allow foreign election observers, especially from the United States Congressman Stephen Solarz, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, were rejected, although 30 foreign journalists were issued visas just a few days before the polling began. The authorities deployed different strategies to discredit the opposition groups, while praising the achievements of the BSPP government. The SLORC Chairman, General Saw Maung, verbally attacked Aung San Suu Kyi and foreign media such as the *New York Times, Bangkok Post*, *All India Radio*, and *Malaysian Radio* for their alleged bias coverage against Myanmar and the military leadership (Guyot 1991, 209).

While the military was prepared for general election, its actions sent mixed signals as to what the post-election political scenario might entail. Martial law was gradually lifted in several townships suggesting that the military government was loosening its repressive authority. At the same time, most of the SLORC leaders were promoted to higher ranks, including General Saw Maung, who was promoted to the rank of Senior General in early March 1990. It became clear on April 12 when the Secretary 1, Major-General Khin Nyunt, who was widely perceived to be the second most powerful leader in the SLORC government, stated that the military would remain in power even after the election until a new constitution was drafted and a strong central government was formed. The 10:00pm to 4:00am curfew imposed in the aftermath of 1988 pro-democracy uprising was still remained in effect (Taylor 1991, 201).

Before the election, the authorities introduced several measures to ensure their victory. First, the military leadership paid little or no attention to its critics and listened to issues selectively. Therefore, it overestimated the support from within the military institution, members and loyalists of the former BSPP. Second, it allowed the formation of a plethora of political parties to weaken the voice of the pro-democracy voters. Third, the military adopted different strategies to threaten and intimidate potential challengers,

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and even arrested them. Fourth, it also restricted campaign activities in different ways to limit the influence of other political parties. The implementation of these steps gave confidence to the military leadership for an easy electoral victory (Fink 2001, 63). Moreover, the SLORC government set up military tribunals across the country to arrest and detain anyone opposing or challenging the *Tatmadaw* and the NUP, raising concerns about the promised free and fair election. The government imposed martial laws in major cities, closed colleges and universities, and forcefully relocated a half-million urban dwellers to shabby satellite towns outside of Rangoon city (Maung 1990, 619-20).

The student community supported the formation of an interim government that would write a new constitution and hold election, as demanded by the NLD. To achieve their political objectives, student bodies formed political parties. For example, members of All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) in Rangoon organized the Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS), which conducted seminars on political education and advocated the issues of farmers. In Mandalay, the second largest city in the country, many high school and university students wanted to continue their political works through underground activities. Realizing that such underground activities, which were illegal, would tarnish the image of NLD, some students formed a political party called Organization of Students and Youth for National Politics (OSYNP). Subsequently, as many as 16 student groups, including groups led by ethnic minorities were formed.

In the midst of ideological differences, student organizations attempted to form a united body. Lack of trust between the rural and urban people, ethnic tension between minorities and the Burmans prevented them from forming a strong united political alliance. Some of the larger student groups could not accept the notion why they cannot represent the people. Disunity and mistrust was also a problem for senior and veteran politicians. Whenever conflict erupted within an organizational structure, leaders tend to leave the group and form a new one, rather than seeking a compromise.

Ethnic minorities that supported participation in general election were also divided on the question of whether to join NLD or form their own political parties. Some wanted to join NLD because they believed that it was the only party that had the best chance of winning the election and bring about change. However, some other minority

groups argued it was in their best interest to join ethnic-based political parties that could do well in their respective areas and offer more space for voicing their demands for equality of rights. Like other organizations, the NLD also had differences of opinion within its leadership, but nevertheless it was by far the most successful party in bringing together diverse groups of people. The NLD leadership was comprised of ex-military generals, intellectuals and students. Because of the charismatic leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD attracted more than three million members, and usually large crowds attended its political rallies. Unlike many other political leaders, Suu Kyi wore the costumes of the local people during election campaign trips, which convinced many ordinary citizens to believe that she was the leader who could address the concerns of ethnic minorities (Fink 2001, 64-65).

In accordance with the election law, the SLORC government held election on May 27, 1990. The unpopularity of the military government was evident from the result that the NLD won a landslide victory, while its party General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. Article 2(a) of the *Pyithu Hluttaw* Election Law No.14/89 dated May 31, 1989 stated that the election was for People's Parliament and not for a Constituent Assembly. The election was officially held under the supervision of a five-member civilian commission headed by Ba Htay and Hanson Kyadoe. The commission members, however, privately admitted that they had little choice but to obey orders from the SLORC government (Smith 1999, 412).

Table 1: The 1990 Election Result by Political Parties

Name of Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won
National League for Democracy (NLD)	447	392 (80.82%)
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)	58	23 (4.74%)
Arakan League for Democracy (ALD)	25	11 (2.27%)
National Unity Party (NUP)	413	10 (2.06%)
Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF)	19	5 (1.03%)
National Democratic Party for Human Rights (NDPHR)	8	4 (0.82%)
Party for National Democracy (PND)	3	3 (0.62%)
Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD)	13	3 (0.62%)
Kachin State National Congress for Democracy (KSNCD)	9	3 (0.62%)
Union Paoh National Organization (UPNO)	15	3 (0.62%)
Zomi National Congress (ZNC)	4	2 (0.41%)
Naga Hills Regional Progressive Party (NHRPP)	6	2 (0.41%)
Kayah State Nationalities League for Democracy (KSNLD)	8	2 (0.41%)
Ta-ang (Palaung)National League for Democracy (TNLD)	9	2 (0.41%)
Democratic Organization for Kayan National Unity (DOKNU)	3	2 (0.41%)
Patriotic Old Comrades League (POCL)	3	1 (0.21%)
Democracy Party (DP)	105	1 (0.21%)
Karen State National Organization (KSNO)	3	1 (0.21%)
Graduates and Old Students Democratic Association (GOSDA)	10	1 (0.21%)
Shan State Kokang Democratic Party (SSKDP)	2	1 (0.21%)
Union Danu League for Democracy (UDLD)	4	1 (0.21%)
Kamans National League for Democracy (KNLD)	3	1 (0.21%)
Mara People's Party (MPP)	4	1 (0.21%)
Union Nationals Democracy Party (UNDP)	247	1 (0.21%)
Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization (MKNSO)	4	1 (0.21%)
Lahu National Development Party (LNDP)	7	1 (0.21%)
United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD)	4	1 (0.21%)
Independents	87	6 (1.24%)

Source: Han 2003

Above data (Table 1) includes the total number of political parties that contested the election, the number of seats won and the percentage of victory across the country in all

the seven states and seven divisions. Table 2 below provides the specific data in all the 14 states and divisions with the number of townships and the respective constituencies.

Table 2: Summary of Constituencies

State / Division	Number of Townships	Number of Constituencies
Arakan (Rakhine)	17	26
Chin	9	13
Irrawaddy (Ayeyawady)	26	51
Kachin	18	20
Karen (Kayin)	7	14
Karenni (Kayah)	6	8
Magwe (Magway)	25	39
Mandalay	29	56
Mon	10	20
Pegu (Bago)	28	51
Rangoon (Yangon)	42	61
Sagaing	38	58
Shan	52	62
Tenasserim (Teninthayi)	10	13
Total Constituencies	**317**	**492**

Source: Han 2003

Although 235 different political parties initially registered, only 93 of them fielded candidates. Student-led and other smaller political parties that did not field candidates in at least three constituencies were deregistered. Many political parties registered by ethnic minorities were declared illegal. Out of the total 492 constituencies across the country, election was successfully held in 485 constituencies. Six constituencies in Shan state and one constituency in Kachin state were cancelled because of insurgency related problems. To the surprise of many observers and the SLORC government, the NLD secured 392 seats out of the 447 candidates it fielded. The SNLD won 23 seats, ALD 11 seats, NUP 10 seats, MNDF five seats, and the other remaining political parties combined won 38

seats. Six independent candidates were elected, and the only one candidate from the UNDP was also elected (Han, 2003).

When the election result became clear, the SLORC government conceded its defeat. The military leadership miscalculated the possible outcome of the election. The election result suggested that many within the rank and file of the *Tatmadaw* did not vote for the military-backed NUP. Two months after the election, on July 27, 1990, the government issued an order 1/90 reneging from its earlier statement of transferring power to elected representatives. According to the order, the military would remain in power until a national convention could be convened and a new constitution is drafted, and claimed that it was the desire of majority political parties that contested the election. The SLORC government prevented the NLD from forming a government with an interim constitution. Elected NLD representatives met at Gandhi Hall in Yangon with the objective of adopting a provisional constitution to allow power transfer and to convene People's Parliament. The proposed provisional constitution was based on the 1947 constitution, but excluded the clauses pertaining to ethnic nationalities, which were sidelined for further deliberation.

The NLD put pressure on the government to transfer power to the democratically elected representatives, which the SLORC rejected. In response to the NLD's pressure, Major-General Khin Nyunt stated at the 100th SLORC press conference:

> If a political party convenes a parliament and forms a government according to its own wishes, then such a government can only be a parallel government. If that happens, the SLORC Government, which is a legal government, will not look on with folded arms. Representatives from political parties which are to build a new democratic state must consult among themselves on a new constitution stage by stage (Tonkin 2007, 41).

The government objected convening of a parliament and forced the NLD to accept the SLORC's order 1/90 on December 9, 1990. The government used different tactics to dismantle the opposition groups, such as repressive activities against the NLD and other smaller political parties, detaining and dismissing elected representatives, and forcing

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others to resign. Many political parties that contested the election were declared illegal. Elected representatives were threatened with land confiscation, ban on educational opportunities and the right to enter monkhood, and more elected members were dismissed on offences such as discussing the formation of an interim government (*AIPMC* 2005).

The government used ethnic problems as an excuse for its delaying policy and claimed that the army played an important role in preventing the union of the country from disintegration. Calling ethnic diversity as a complex and unresolved issue, the military leaders considered a possible creation of a state for the Wa ethnic group in an attempt to show that the government was keen on addressing ethnic problems first. As if it were to counterbalance the influence of ethnic minority parties, a SLORC official, on condition of anonymity, said:

> Burma has 135 ethnic races and 27 parties won seats in the election. Burma has now had three independence constitutions: in 1943 under the Japanese, in 1947 and in 1974. Look at the problems after the caretaker administration of 1958-60. Things did not work out then and the army had to take power again in 1962. This time we do not want a repeat of any of those mistakes. The NLD can't just rush through any constitution they like. The views of all the peoples and parties must be taken into account, and this could mean the creation of new ethnic states and divisions (Smith 1999, 416).

The anonymous statement was later repeated virtually word for word by General Saw Maung and Major-General Khin Nyunt who were believed to be the two most powerful leaders in the military hierarchy.

The SLORC government continued to ignore several demands from the NLD, including the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. The government, instead of giving into the NLD's pressure, resorted to more arrests. The military reinforced the streets of Yangon with the army's 22nd Light Infantry Division, which played important role in clearing the streets during the 1988 military takeover. With the authorities continuing to arrest, 28 elected representatives fled to the Thai-Myanmar border and formed the National

Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), an organization which envisioned spearheading democracy movement to the international community. After facing constant threat and repression, by mid-November 1990, the NLD and other political parties had signed over to SLORC the rights to write a constitution (Guyot 1991, 210-211). One important objective of the NCGUB was to rally public support and to undermine the legitimacy of the SLORC government. However, no sovereign government came forward to officially recognize the organization as an alternative or parallel government (Steinberg 1992a, 152).

Students and monks, particularly in Mandalay, engaged in different forms of civil disobedience movement to put pressure on the government. Throughout the election campaign, the monks either openly supported the NLD or used religious rituals to express their discontent with the authorities. On August 8, 1990, to protest against the government, students gathered to commemorate the 1988 uprising. The students came with black-colored flags in remembrance of those who were killed a year ago. The army ordered the students to lower their flags, which the students were reluctant to do. The army then began to beat up a student leader in front of the crowd. When a monk who intervened was also beaten, the crowd began to throw stones at the soldiers. The soldiers retaliated with live bullets, killing two monks. Consequently, the monks in Mandalay boycotted the military regime, by not accepting alms from the government soldiers and their families. When the religious boycott went on for about two months, on October 20, 1990, the military leadership in Mandalay was ordered by higher authorities to disrobe and arrest recalcitrant monks and disband Buddhist organizations that supported political activities. A few days later, the army raided monasteries in Mandalay. Subsequently, the religious boycott ended and the monks began accepting alms again (Fink 2001, 70-71). Forcing the monks to submission and threatening or arresting elected representatives was a testament that the military leaders were unwilling to transfer power to a civilian government.

By resorting to suppressive activities, the SLORC government had two important objectives - to delay or avoid the transfer of power as long as possible, and to use every possible means to disrupt the activities of opposition groups to the point until they either

gave up or were subdued. The SLORC government insisted that a power transfer could only happen after a constitution was drafted. In 1993, three years after the election, the government selected 699 delegates for a National Convention to draft a constitution. Out of the 699 members, only 90 were from the NLD. The government handpicked the vast majority members who were sympathetic to SLORC officials and their agenda (Alamgir 1997, 345).

6. 4. The 2010 Election

While the referendum on the 2008 constitution was widely criticized by the international community on the ground that it was fraudulent, the SPDC government announced that a general election for the Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw) and the Upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw) will be held in 2010 in accordance with the provisions of the newly approved constitution. Under the provisions of the constitution, 25 percent of seats in the parliament are appointed by the commander-in-chief of the country's Defense Services. The lower house has 440 members and the upper house has 224 members, and the seats in regional and state assemblies vary depending on the population (Martin 2010b, 1-8).

The 2008 constitution lays the foundation for the 2010 general election. The news of holding an election in over two decades received mixed responses from the country's pro-democracy groups, including ethnic minorities. The NLD decided to boycott the election by not re-registering the party under the election law, which would require expelling its leaders who were convicted and languishing in jails, including party General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi. Against party's decision, some NLD leaders decided to form a new political party under the guidelines of the election law and contest the election, which gave birth to National Democratic Force (NDF). There were also differences of opinion among ethnic minorities. While some were ready to participate in the election, others voiced their concerns and grievances that the government had not reciprocated their reconciliation gestures in the past. The division among ethnic minority groups led to the formation of new political parties such as Kayan National Party and Kayin People's Party.

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The SPDC set certain conditions for organizations and political parties to take part in the election. For example, ethnic ceasefire groups that wished to participate in the election must agree to serve under the direct command of the Myanmar army, the proposal which was opposed by most ceasefire groups. It also stated that each candidate was required to deposit US$500 to file a nomination paper, the amount which many could not afford. Funding their campaign activities was a major problem for all political parties, except the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), which transformed into USDP before the election. There were several other campaign-related issues that worried the opposition groups, including post-election economic and development opportunities, removal of domestic travel barriers, equal employment opportunity in public services, language education in minority areas across the country, personal security, access to water, food, shelter and electricity (Cook, 2010). The 2008 constitution put tremendous pressure on ceasefire groups, such as limited political autonomy, transforming their armies into Border Guard Force (BGF), and to participate in the electoral process by distancing from armed movement. While some armed groups were ready to accept the government's terms and conditions, others were reluctant to comply with the military's directives (Haacke 2010b, 158).

Many suspected that the SPDC and the Union Election Commission (UEC) were conspiring to ensure an overwhelming electoral victory for the USDP candidates across the country. The UEC notification released on September 14, 2010 approved 37 political parties to contest in the election, but dissolved five previously registered parties, including NLD, and cancelled five new political parties for failing to field names of at least three candidates. The UEC refused to accept the registration of five political parties that were associated with ethnic minorities. The election campaign officially began on September 24, 2010. There were several restrictions on campaign activities and instances of members of the opposition parties being intimidated. The election commission rejected broadcasting of some of political parties' statements. Some students and Buddhist monks were arrested on charges of advocating election boycott. The opposition parties were weak with the exception of states where there was a vast majority of ethnic minority population (Martin 2010b, Summary Page).

Learning a lesson from its humiliating defeat in the 1990 election, the SPDC used different tactics to ensure the USDP's victory. Alleged manipulation of votes cast in advance for those who were unable to cast their votes on the election day was one major issue of criticism. Though the UEC chairman said the number of advance votes cast was small, the International Crisis Group (ICG) analysis suggests that there were around six million votes, representing about 10 percent of the total votes cast. Advance votes were collected in a non-transparent manner, with allegations of disproportionate distribution of advance ballots as compared to the actual votes on the polling day. Advance votes for 64 out of 1,154 parliamentary constituencies could not have been solely responsible for the USDP's landslide victory, which suggest that there were other forms of manipulations. In some unmonitored polling stations, the results overwhelmingly went to the USDP, and there were reports that the authorities changed the votes cast in favor of the USDP, by forcing other candidates to sign the amended results (ICG 2011, 2).

Table 3: The 2010 Election Result by Political Parties

Name of Party	Seats Won	Percent
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	883	76.52%
National Unity Party (NUP)	63	5.46%
Shan Nationals Democratic Party (SNDP)	57	4.94%
Rakhine Nationals Progressive Party (RNPP)	35	3.03%
All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP)	16	1.39%
National Democratic Force (NDF)	16	1.39%
Chin Progressive Party (CPP)	12	1.04%
PaO National Organization (PNO)	10	0.87%
Chin National Party (CNP)	9	0.78%
Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP)	9	0.78%
Kayin People's Party (KPP)	6	0.52%
Taaung (Palaung) National Party (TPNP)	6	0.52%
Wa Democratic Party (WDP)	6	0.52%
Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State (UDPKS)	4	0.35%
Inn National Development Party (INDP)	4	0.35%
Democratic Party (Myanmar) (DPM)	3	0.26%
Kayan National Party (KNP)	2	0.17%
Kayin State Democracy and Development Party (KSDDP)	2	0.17%
National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD)	2	0.17%
88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar) (GSY)	1	0.09%
Ethnic National Development Party (ENDP)	1	0.09%
Lahu National Development Party (LNDP)	1	0.09%
Independent candidates	6	0.52%
Total	**1,154**	**100%**

Source: ALTSEAN-Burma 2010

Above data (Table 3) provides a listing of all political parties that contested the general election with seats won and the percentage of the victory across the country in both People's Assembly and the National Assembly. The election result was announced in phases on November 8 and from November 11-18, 2010. A total of 1,154 candidates won in the election, with 1,148 candidates representing 22 different political parties and six independents for their respective seats in different legislatures - People's Assembly, National Assembly and 14 Regional and State Assemblies. The election result shows that the USDP secured the vast majority of seats, winning 883 out of 1,154 seats, a landslide victory of 76.5 percent in all legislatures. The party won 78.7 percent in the Union Legislature (People's Assembly and National Assembly), and 74.9 percent in the State

and Regional Legislatures. With its 1,112 candidates, the winning percentage of the USDP was 79.4 percent. Backed by the military establishment, the USDP had organizational and financial advantages over other political parties.

The NUP, a military-backed party during the 1990 election, was the second largest winning party in the election, with a total of 63 seats, which is 5.5 percent. With the party fielding 995 candidates across the country, the percentage of win was 6.3 percent. The third and fourth majority seats were won by the Shan Nationals Democratic Party (SNDP) and the Rakhine Nationals Development Party (RNDP), with 57 and 35 seats each, which is 4.9 and 3.0 percent respectively. Both SNDP and RNDP are political parties from ethnic minorities. NDF, a splinter group of NLD, secured a fifth place in the poll, by winning 16 seats, which is 1.4 percent.

In the absence of NLD, the NDF did not perform quite well in the election, with only 16 got elected out of the 162 candidates it fielded. However, the election of 16 candidates in Yangon region alone suggested the support of pro-democracy voters in the former capital. Yangon is the largest city in the country where a vast majority of businesses and industries are based. Many of the affluent, well-educated and middle-class citizens reside in the city. The residents are more informed about developments in both domestic and international affairs, which enable them of greater political consciousness. Moreover, due to the presence of several diplomatic offices and other members of the international community, voting was relatively freer in Yangon than other parts of the country, which means that the mobilization and fraudulent activities of the USDP was also less effective in Yangon (Toshihiro 2011).

Table 4, 5 and 6 (below) show the number of seats won by each political party in states and regional assemblies, exclusive of the People's Assembly and the National Assembly.

Table 4: Number of Seats by Region and State (People's Legislature)

	7 Regions		7 States		Total	
	Seats	Ratio	Seats	Ratio	Seats	Ratio
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	192	92.8%	67	56.8%	259	79.7%
National Unity Party (NUP)	7	3.4%	5	4.2%	12	3.7%
National Democratic Force (NDF)	8	3.9%	0	0.0%	8	2.5%
Ethnic minority parties (1)	0	0.0%	45	38.1%	45	13.8%
Independents	0	0.0%	1	0.8%	1	0.3%
Total	207	100.0%	118	100.0%	325	100.0%

Source: Toshihiro 2011

Note: Ethnic minority parties (1) refer to 12 parties including the SNDP

Table 5: Number of Seats by Region and State (National Legislature)

	7 Regions		7 States		Total	
	Seats	Ratio	Seats	Ratio	Seats	Ratio
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	79	94.0%	50	59.5%	129	76.8%
National Unity Party (NUP)	1	1.2%	4	4.8%	5	3.0%
National Democratic Force (NDF)	4	4.8%	0	0.0%	4	2.4%
Ethnic minority parties (2)	0	0.0%	29	34.5%	29	17.3%
Independents	0	0.0%	1	1.2%	1	0.6%
Total	84	100.0%	84	100.0%	168	100.0%

Source: Toshihiro 2011

Note: Ethnic minority parties (2) refer to 12 parties including the SNDP

Table 6: Number of Seats by Region and State (Region/State Legislature)

	7 Regions		7 States		Total	
	Seats	Ratio	Seats	Ratio	Seats	Ratio
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	364	89.2%	131	51.8%	495	74.9%
National Unity Party (NUP)	31	7.6%	15	5.9%	46	7.0%
National Democratic Force (NDF)	4	1.0%	0	0.0%	4	0.6%
Democratic Party (Myanmar) (DPM)	3	0.7%	0	0.0%	3	0.5%
88 Generation Student Youths (GSY)	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Ethnic minority parties (3)	5	1.2%	103	40.7%	108	16.3%
Independents	0	0.0%	4	1.6%	4	0.6%
Total	408	100.0%	253	100.0%	661	100.0%

Source: Toshihiro 2011

Note: Ethnic minority parties (3) refer to 17 parties including the SNDP

In the People's Assembly, ethnic-based political parties won nearly 40 percent of seats in the seven states across the country, but none in the seven regions. Similarly, in the National Assembly, ethnic-based parties won 34.5 percent of seats in the seven states, but none in the seven regions. In State and Regional legislatures, ethnic-based parties won five seats (1.2 percent of all the seats) in seven regions, and 103 seats (40.7 percent of all the seats) in the seven states. Ethnic-based parties could have won more seats, at least in their respective states, had some of them not boycotted the election. Like NLD, major ethnic-based political parties that contested the 1990 election boycotted the 2010 general election by not re-registering. They demanded that a constitution be drafted first based on the tenets of the 1947 Panglong agreement that would establish a federal Union of Myanmar which guarantees democracy and equality of rights to all ethnic nationalities, including the minorities (Maung 2010). The data in Table 4, 5 and 6 suggest that there is an ongoing distrust between ethnic minorities and the majority Bama or Burmans. It indicates that the Burmans are more unlikely to support candidates belonging to ethnic-based parties than minorities supporting political parties led by ethnic Burmans.

Table 7: Overview of 2010 Election in Comparison with the 1990 Election

	2010	1990
Total number of constituencies	1171	492
Number of constituencies with election (including single-candidate constituencies)	1154	485
Number of political parties applying for registration	47	235
Number of political parties participated	37	93
Number of eligible voters (approximate figure)	29 million	21 million
Number of candidates	3069	2296
(of which, independents)	(82)	(87)
Average acceptance rate	2.7 times	4.7 times
Voter turnout for the People's Legislature	77.3%	72.6%
for National Legislature	76.8%	
for Region and State Legislatures	76.6%	-

Source: Toshihiro 2011

Originally, the number of constituencies in 2010 general election was 1,171, comprising 330 seats for the People's Legislature, 168 seats for the National Legislature, and 673 seats from 29 political parties representing ethnic minorities from 14 Regional and State Legislatures. However, the UEC cancelled election in several regions for security concerns, thereby reducing the number of contested seats in the People's Legislature by five, and Regional and State Legislatures by two. Subsequently, the total number of constituencies was reduced to 1,154 seats. Constituencies that had only one candidate were declared elected without voting. Candidates in 10 constituencies in the People's Legislature, eight in the National Legislature, and 37 seats in the Regional and State Legislatures were declared elected without election being held.

6. 5. Understanding between SPDC and NLD

Since the party was banned before the 2010 general election, NLD did not engage in any official activities after the release of Aung San Suu Kyi on November 13, 2010. However, after nine months of political tensions, President Thein Sein invited Suu Kyi for a meeting on August 19, 2011. It was a result of rounds of meeting between the Labor Minister Aung Kyi and Suu Kyi. Subsequently, more than 100 youth members of NLD

met at its party headquarters in Yangon with the objective of revitalizing the party. In an apparent political thaw, the government expressed its willingness to work with NLD, the party it declared illegal after failing to register for the 2010 election. On August 12, 2011, the government Information Minister Kyaw Hsan said:

> In view of national reconciliation, the government is delicately and carefully handling the issue of the NLD, which has no legal right to exist, offering it opportunities to serve the national interest in cohesion…If the NLD wants to get involved in politics, it should set up a legal party through formal procedures. Anyhow, the government is doing its best to invite NLD to its national reconciliation process (*BBC* 2011a).

As the government officially invited NLD to take part in national politics, about 100 leaders of the party met at its headquarters in Yangon to take a decision on the issue on November 18, 2011. After a detailed review and discussion of the government's invitation, the NLD leadership unanimously decided to re-register the party. After the meeting, the party released a statement which stated that: "We unanimously decide that the National League for Democracy (NLD) will register according to party registration laws, and we will take part in the coming by-elections." The party also decided to field candidates for all 48 seats in the 2012 by-election. The seats were vacant due to the appointment of government ministers (*BBC* 2011b).

The NLD's decision to re-register the party was a significant development. Prior to this, the NLD denounced the 2010 electoral process, including the election result. The party boycotted the 2010 election primarily on the ground that neither a former political prisoner can contest the election nor can a party of such member be registered. After entrenching the role of military in politics through the 2008 constitution, the SPDC government saw no significant threat from NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. The government then decided to remove the clause in the election law which banned political prisoners from becoming a political party member and contesting in election. The NLD's decision to re-register the party and to enter in national politics was greatly influenced by party General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi who said, "I stand for the re-registration of the

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NLD party. I would like to work effectively towards amending the constitution. So we have to do what we need to do" (BBC 2011b). After successfully re-registering the party with the UEC on December 23, 2011, the NLD officially began preparing for the 2012 by-election. Election was held in 45 constituencies across the country, and NLD won 43 out of 44 seats it contested. The party lost one seat to USDP in the constituency where its candidate was disqualified.

6. 6. The 2007 Saffron Revolution

In a predominantly Buddhist society Myanmar, Buddhism is practiced by about 89 percent of the population. The monks, collectively known as the *Sangha*, are highly venerated members of the society. There are approximately 400,000 monks, the size similar to the country's military. Therefore, it has often been said that Myanmar is a country of two colors - green for the military and orange for the monks. The monks play an important role in everyday lives of the people, not only in spiritual leadership but also in social welfare activities. Monastic schools play a vital role in providing basic education in areas that are neglected by the government, or for students who cannot afford to go to government schools. The religious rituals performed by the monks are taken seriously by devout Buddhists, including government officials. In the event of the monks either refusing to perform religious rituals or accept alms, it is a gesture of protest which is tantamount to excommunication. Though it is a religious institution, the Sangha also play an important role in politics. One most vivid example was seen during the 2007 people's uprising. It was the first most significant mass movement since the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. Unlike the 1988 uprising which was led by students, the 2007 uprising was led by tens of thousands of Buddhist monks, which was popularly known as the *Saffron* revolution (Rogers 2008, 115-16).

The *Saffron* revolution initially started with protest against the price hike of petrol and diesel by 100 percent and the Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by 500 percent in August 2007. As residents of Yangon heavily depended on diesel-operated generators for electricity and buses and taxis run by CNG, the price increase tremendously affected the people. Bus fares were increased to double overnight which means for some people 40

percent of their salary was spent on transportation. As there was a strong disapproval of the National Convention, which was in the final stage, the price hike was a good opportunity for the 1988-generation student leaders to show their discontent to the authorities (Taylor 2008, 255). A series of protests began on August 19 in Yangon with few dozens of protesters marching in the streets, and pictures of the protests were obtained by the international media. As the international media attention grew, the authorities began to harass and arrest protest leaders. The NLD and 88-generation student leaders described the National Convention as sham, the allegation which was supported by the US and the UK. However, they were concerned that other members of the international community, including the UN and neighboring Asian countries, would support the National Convention as the legitimate channel of power sharing between the military and civilians who are willing to participate in the process. On the other hand, the Myanmar government accused members of the NLD and 88-generaation students as traitors and that they should be suppressed by the people who wanted to establish a disciplined and flourishing democracy. After protests in August were suppressed forcefully, the Buddhist monks in Pakokku town in Magway region staged protest and held hostage some government officials. The authorities prevented the protest from spreading to other monasteries though there were reports that monks in other cities threatened to launch similar protest (Taylor 2008, 255-56).

Protests were halted for a few weeks but on September 17, 2007, monks and the public demonstrated in Sittwe in Rakhine state, demanding the government to apologize for using force to suppress protesters in Pakokku. At the same time, about a hundred monks were also marching through the streets of downtown Yangon. The monks then expanded their demand to include the plight of the people due to bad economy, especially since 2003 when the US imposed trade ban. The closure of textile factories initially laid off about 80,000 people, especially young women. Moreover, the tightening of rules regulating economic activities made it life much more difficult for the people. Due to poverty in the urban areas, many parents sent their children to monasteries which caused extra burden to the institution. Following September 17, marching continued and monks from different monasteries joined the demonstration. The demonstrators were intent on continuing their protests and on September 22, a group of monks and other protesters

breached the security cordon near Aung San Suu Kyi's home. She came out to the gate to pay respect to the protesters. On September 24, the Minister of Religious Affairs accused the demonstrators as NLD extremists, remnants of Communist Party, and being influenced by foreign radio stations. The government issued directive 93 and also reissued earlier directives from 1984, 1990, 1991, and 1996 instructing the monks to stay away from political and secular activities. Monks participating in such activities were treated as violating the role of the *Sangha*, and therefore, the authorities could take necessary action upon them. Subsequently, the army and police raided a number of monasteries in Yangon, with alleged beating and killing involved. The next day on September 25, 2007, more monks joined the demonstration and there were approximately 100,000 demonstrators. On that night, the authorities conducted more raids in several monasteries and imposed a 9 pm to 5 am curfew and banned the gathering of more than five persons. As a result of continued confrontation between the demonstrators and security forces, the authorities claimed that a total of nine people died on September 27; eleven demonstrators including one woman injured, and thirty one security personnel were also injured. However, Western diplomats claimed that the number of deaths could be much higher. In November, a UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights reported that a total of thirty one people were killed. The authorities detained over 3,000 people, all but 91 of them were subsequently released (Taylor 2008, 257-59).

6. 7. Conclusion

Scholars such as Dahl (2005), Grugel (2002), Vanhanen (1992), Hirst (1994), and Schedler (2002) discuss the importance of institutions in explaining the pattern of democratic transition. For example, Grugel (2002) discusses that some of the most important institutional changes necessary for democratic transition are holding of elections, developing party system, and how the relationship between the executive and legislative branches function. Election matters as it provides a sign of democratization, or it can be the dawn of democracy. However, holding of election per se is not a guarantee for democracy. Sometimes, election may be held to sustain the non-democratic regime, where political parties are weak and or controlled by the authorities. It is, therefore, important that there is a healthy competition between political parties. Similarly, Dahl

(2005) asserts that certain institutional arrangements are necessary for democracy to emerge, such as elected officials, free, fair, and frequent elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy, and inclusive citizenship. And Schedler (2002) says that manipulation of elections lead to stable regime equilibrium - a two-level game in which electoral competition and the struggle for electoral reform simultaneously develop. Under such circumstances, opposition parties usually do not accept flawed elections as the endpoint of democratization, but rather as a step towards genuine democracy. Transition through manipulated election does not institutionalize democratic institutions but set countries to the path of democratization.

During my interview with some scholars working on Myanmar, they have slightly varying views about the role of institutions with regard to democratic transition. Naidu, who believes that the military played a crucial role in the transition, says: "The military wanted to implement some democratic reforms while retaining some elements of the military institution. It was similar to the military-backed Golkar party in Indonesia which reserved certain elements of the military institution during transition." He argues that the military will continue to play an important role in politics as long as ethnic problems are not resolved, and also believes that the military and Buddhist monasteries form two important institutions in the country. While highlighting the differences within the military institution, Sundararaman says that the division was "meticulously subdued by the regime's top leadership" and while the "moderates wanted to gradually move towards democracy, hardliners were in favor of military control of the country's administration." Along similar line, Trivedi says that though there were internal differences within the military hierarchy, they were "effectively purged." There were ideological differences between the older officers trained by the Japanese and the younger officers who were influenced by the forces of globalization. And the younger officers were relatively more open to reforms than the older officers.

Yhome, on the other hand, describes how the military forms an integral part of the Myanmar society:

The military saw itself as the savior of the country, and holds the perception that the country is vulnerable without them. Even as the Burman-controlled Burmese military

was working on nation-building not very different from that of the civilian Prime Minister U Nu, it's primary concern was to prevent the country from disintegration, rather than Burmanization, promoted by U Nu. The military used arms to consolidate its rule, and to quell any popular uprising. However, some within the military hierarchy thought the use of force during the 2007 September monk uprising and the army's response to the 2008 cyclone Nargis and other subsequent events was excessive. There was uneasiness within the military and its institution. Though the top military generals enjoyed a luxurious life, the lower ranking soldiers were terribly poor (Yhome 2013).

During my field trip, Htay Oo explains the role of USDP in the run up to the 2010 general election and its role in the democratic transition process. According to him, USDP had the support of the country's majority population as it was renamed from USDA which he claimed had 26 million members, including government employees. The party believes in people's power and takes decision based on majority votes in the larger interest of the nation. The USDP, which believes in multi-party democracy, recognizes the importance of the role of smaller and ethnic-based political parties because they themselves know best their interests. The party invited other political parties to work together in areas of common interest and address their differences in the parliament. On the question of why the NLD boycotted the 2010 election but later participated in the 2012 by-election, the USDP leader says the government did not stop the NLD from participating in the election. The NLD decided not to participate because the leaders initially did not believe in the government's seven-step roadmap process, but once they believed in it they participated in the by-election. The USDP leader admits that the whole political transition process is implemented in accordance with the seven-step roadmap process. Similarly, former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt attributes the political transition process to the seven-step roadmap process which he launched in 2003.

During a focused group meeting with representatives of Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF), there is a broad agreement that ethnic-based political parties played a role in the democratic transition process over the past few years. In the 1990 election, ethnic groups participated in two ways - either by supporting NLD or by forming their own parties. The reason for supporting NLD was to defeat the military-backed NUP

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nationwide. However in the 2010 election, the situation was different. Since all ethnic-based political parties that competed in the 1990 election boycotted the 2010 election, new parties were formed. Unlike the 1990 election, there was no major pro-democratic party the ethnic minorities could lend their support. Some ethnic minorities were disappointed with the fact that the NLD had to boycott the election which gave the military-backed USDP a win-win situation.

Sai Nyunt Lwin, a Shan ethnic leader, says the role of ethnic-based parties in Myanmar democratic transition process has been crucial. There are three main groups in Myanmar politics – the military, the Burman opposition and ethnic forces. The SNLD, along with other ethnic-based political parties, have been demanding democratic government under a federal union. For example, the SNLD attended the National Convention from 1993 to 1996 but refused to attend when it was reconvened because of its undemocratic nature. The party, along with others, has been demanding the amendment of the 2008 constitution. The SNLD has been part of the formation of the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) for drafting a new federal constitution. As an ally of the NLD, the SNLD has been supportive of the understanding reached between the Thein Sein government and the NLD towards achieving a successful democratic transition. The Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP), formed with a coalition of other 1990 election winning parties, was abolished when the NLD decided to participate in the 2012 by-election.

On the question of why the NLD boycotted the 2010 election but returned to participate in the 2012 by-election, Min Zaw Oo, Director of Ceasefire Negotiation and Implementation at Myanmar Peace Center, says it was not a result of an "agreement" between the government and the NLD. The NLD realized that boycotting the 2010 general election was a missed opportunity and decided that it would be a better political strategy to come back to the political mainstream. Moreover, the NLD had to take into account the pressure from the international community. But NLD leaders Nyan Win and Tin Oo say it was because the party leadership saw the entire 2010 electoral process as undemocratic. Participating in the election would require the dismissal of several party

leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo and Win Tin who were under house arrest. On the question of why NLD participated in the 2012 by-election, the two leaders say the decision was taken after President Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi had a meeting. Though the NLD did not get everything it wanted from the government, an understanding was reached for the NLD to participate in the electoral process. Moreover, there was pressure from the Myanmar people as well as the international community, including EU and USA for the NLD to participate in the by-election. Subsequently, the NLD decided that it was the right strategy to work with the government as the two sides also agreed in principle on issues such as education and social capacity building. NLD Member of Parliament Su Su Lwin says by participating in the 2012 by-election, the NLD was hoping to gradually amend the 2008 constitution through the legislative process. On the issue of boycotting the 2010 election, the parliamentarian says the conditions were such that participation would be tantamount to condoning the military's undemocratic values which might even hinder the democratic transition process.

Khin Maung Swe, who left NLD and participated in the 2010 election by forming a new political party, says his NDF party's participation in the democratic transition process was by not boycotting the 2010 election, advocating for peace and human rights, and for the establishment of a democratic society. He says NLD and its allies of ethnic-based political parties made a mistake by boycotting the 2010 election. The election boycott was unbeneficial to the country, the people and for democratic transition. If all parties had participated in the election, the government could have paid more attention to the peace process and the amendment of the 2008 constitution. On the question of why NLD reached understanding with the government after the 2010 election, Swe says there was no exit strategy for Suu Kyi and her party other than accepting the government's terms and conditions. Suu Kyi and her party had no choice but to abandon its confrontational role. Until it agreed to participate in the by-election, the NLD demanded the recognition of the 1990 election result.

On the role of the *Sangha* in democratic transition, Ashin Eindarchakkarbivinsa, Chairman of Mandalay Buddhist Monk Association and one of the six general secretaries of Myanmar's Buddhist Monk Association, says the *Sangaha* engages in national politics

and not in party politics. The *Sangha* neither supports nor opposes any political party but teach people the right things to do through religious teachings and other civic activities. The position of the *Sangha* is that whatever done for the good of the people and the country is politics. For example, the monks' participation in the 2007 revolution, which initially started as petrol price-hike, was crucial for the ongoing democratic transition. The *Sangha* involvement was to highlight the plight of the common people who were gravely affected by the deteriorating economic situation. Similarly, Christian leaders during my interaction with them at Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) say that their role in the democratic transition process was advocacy works through their religious and secular educational institutions.

The faculty members of Mandalay University's International Relations Department say that though other institutions had contributed to some degrees, it was the military institution that was behind the political transition. The political changes were an "imposed transition" which initially started with the convening of National Convention and then later continued with a step-by-step implementation of the seven-step roadmap. The military leaders were worry about their security and the 2008 constitution was used as a safety exit strategy. On the role of *Sangha*, Sai Khaing Myo Tun of Yangon University says though they have been some kind of a driving force behind the democratic transition, religious issue became a dangerous factor for democratic transition in the past couple of years, particularly in Rakhine state where violence erupted between Muslims and Buddhists.

CHAPTER - 7

Conclusion

Most developing nations of the world face a huge challenge of democratization, democratic transition, and democratic consolidation in the contemporary world. We saw a series of democratic transitions for the past three decades in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe have undergone various stages of transitions following different roots with different trajectories. For example, in recent years, the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in 2010, sparked off another wave of democratic transition in the Middle East and North Africa. This thesis attempts to analyze such a kind of process by taking the case of Myanmar. By looking at the various aspects of democratic transition, in light of the theories that civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions play a role in democratic transition, this thesis shows that while all these factors are important, the critical aspect of democratic transition is the willingness and the ability of the elites to arrive at a negotiated settlement in which the respective interests are taken care of.

Civil society is important for democracy since it provides space between private and public spheres where activism takes place. The most democratic function of civil society is its engagement with the state for a democratic change. During the AFPFL government, professional and social organizations were formed mostly in the urban areas where considerable space existed between the state and society, except for religious groups which had their presence in the rural areas as well. There were close links between civil society groups and the state. Though civil society groups were theoretically independent, the AFPFL government either influenced or co-opted professional and social organizations to advance the former's interests. Law and order problem as a result of armed insurgencies, tensions between the communists and the AFPFL government, and the internal crisis within the AFPFL party made it difficult for a vibrant civil society to sustain. In rural areas, the prevalence of armed insurgencies made it difficult for the existence of a stable and independent civil society.

With the inception of the BSPP government, the military abolished private sector and nationalized businesses and institutions held by private individuals or companies or groups. The state was centralized under a unitary system of government. The government pursued zero tolerance to political dissent. There was no significant challenge or threat to the military rule. Even the students' protest, such as the U Thant uprising was suppressed which led to the death of hundreds of students inside the university campus. The military successfully ensured that the military power remained intact. When the government exercised absolute control from the capital down to village-level administrations, it was impossible for autonomous civil society to emerge.

The power transfer from BSPP to SLORC government remained largely nominal as power remained in the hands of the military. However, for the first time in years, a multi-party system was introduced, which Ne Win suggested before he stepped down as head of the BSPP government in 1988. Though several restrictions were imposed on politicians and political parties, space for civil society groups and other social organizations began to develop. Some of these groups took part in mobilizing the people for the 1990 election. Though fully not independent, civil society groups - social and professional organizations - established their networks in both urban and rural areas. Some degree of autonomy was present in the rural areas, particularly in the areas where ceasefire was maintained. The formation of USDA and its nationwide networks also helped in social mobilization. Most independent civil society groups were active along the Thailand-Myanmar border, where NGOs and INGOs assisted the refugee population in both formal and vocational skills trainings. These organizations also collaborated with people inside Myanmar to help the IDPs.

Civil society groups gradually developed, particularly in areas where the government was weak or unable to provide basic services to the people. Either through partnership or in collaboration with local communities, NGOs and INGOs began to engage in non-political activities, particularly in education sector. Buddhist and Christian institutions served as learning centers for both formal education and other vocational trainings, especially for people who could not afford to attend government schools. Since the political environment was still difficult for civil society groups to register officially,

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support from across the borders was essential. The cyclone Nargis gave greater space for civil society groups to carry out their activities with their expanded networks. In some cases, these civil society groups operated independently of the government's control even without official registration. After long suppression, civil society groups became strong in recent years. Over the years of Myanmar's democracy movement, the student community in different capacities formed an important element of civil society. Students first spearheaded the pro-democracy demonstrations inside Myanmar and later worked with NGOs and INGOs to keep alive the spirit of democracy movement from the countries where they were based outside Myanmar.

Democratization theory suggests that civil society is conducive or essential for democratic transition. However, in the case of Myanmar, civil society does not seem to have played a significant role as it did in democratic transition elsewhere. Civil society groups and their networks gradually developed, more significantly during the SPDC government. However, they largely operated within the confines of the government's control. Therefore, it is argued that though civil society played a role in the democratic transition process, it was not vibrant enough to be a triggering factor for the transition in Myanmar.

Because of their power and influence in society, it is generally considered that elites play an important role in democratic transition. The AFPFL elites led by U Nu played an important role in running the government. U Nu was the key figure who had the trust of AFPFL constituent units - army, socialists, and communists. He impressed his colleagues with his leadership qualities. He was seen as energetic, sincere, and honest with his actions. He was also known for his ability to bring together people of conflicting ideas. However, the downfall of U Nu and his government became imminent when AFPFL split into 'Clean' and 'Stable' factions in 1958. The elites of ethnic minorities also played a role in the demise of the AFPFL government. Leaders of federal demand group, who were the elites of their respective ethnic groups, demanded the formation of a federal government. The government was also constantly threatened by different armed insurgent groups. The military elites intervened to prevent the country from what they then described as imminent disintegration of the union. The political instability and the

worsening of economic condition, coupled with ethnic minorities' demand for autonomy under a federal government, were the reasons for Ne Win and his fellow military elites to stage a coup in 1962. The elites were responsible for the survival as well as the downfall of the first civilian government.

Under the BSPP government, Ne Win and his military colleagues initiated several steps to consolidate their power and entrench the role of military in every sphere of society, including the introduction of the *Burmese Way to Socialism*. During the years of Ne Win, there were internal dissensions and tensions within the military hierarchy, including alleged assassination attempt on the life of Ne Win himself. Despite the challenges, Ne Win meticulously handled the perceived threats by using different tactics, including arrest and imprisonment. After 26 years in power, the era of Ne Win came to an end in 1988. Ne Win was not forced to resign by colleagues or his subordinates and regional commanders. The deepening economic crisis and the political chaos in the aftermath of 1988 pro-democracy uprising convinced the veteran military leader that it was time for him to step down and pave the way for political transition. Before his retirement, Ne Win suggested that a referendum be held to decide whether the people want a multi-party or single party system. During the BSPP era, the Burmese society was so militarized that there was no space for civilian opposition elites. At the end of BSPP era, there was a brief period where the civilian elites had the chance to form an interim government, but could not do so due to differences among themselves.

Under the SLORC and SPDC governments, the dominant role of military elites continued. Similar to the Ne Win era, there were internal tensions within the military rank and file which resulted in purges and imprisonments, including the house arrest of Prime Minister and MI chief General Khin Nyunt. Before the 1990 election, the NLD and ethnic minority elites were determined to bring an end to decades-old military rule. However, after the election, the NLD, as the single largest party, was denied a chance to form a civilian government on the pretext that a constitution has to be written first. The understanding reached between NLD and the SPDC government, after the 2010 general election, was crucial for political transition. During the 1990 and 2010 elections, ethnic minorities were divided among themselves - ceasefire groups either cooperated or

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supported the government's initiatives and the non-ceasefire groups opposing them. Nevertheless, the relentless ethnic armed movement sustained the momentum of pro-democracy movement for decades. The retirement of Than Shwe and his deputy Maung Aye from politics and the dissolution of SPDC government was a milestone in the democratic transition process, which paved the way for President Thein Sein to head the new government.

Democratic transition is largely dependent upon the decisions of elites on what, how and where they take. The analysis of the role of different elites in Myanmar suggests that elites, especially the military, played a crucial role in the whole process of democratic transition. The cooperation and participation of NLD and ethnic minority elites also contributed to this process. However, the military elites played a major role in the process because of their control over the state's apparatus. Unlike what Welzel (2009) argues in his work in *Theories of Democratization*, despite the simmering tensions in the military hierarchy, there was no major split or division within the military elites which could pressure the liberal reform faction to enter dialogue with the opposition elites. Only after the military elites entrenched the role of military in politics through the seven-step roadmap process, including the 2008 constitution, and no longer saw significant threat from the opposition groups, they reached out to the NLD and other ethnic minority groups for reconciliation. Therefore, it is argued that the role of elites is important in democratic transition when the process is initiated and directed by elites of the dominant party. The nature of democratic transition in Myanmar corroborates the argument of Roberts (2002) that stability in transition from authoritarian state to pluralist society is most reliable when the weaker challengers accept the conditions set by the dominant elites, that is, military in the case of Myanmar.

The pressures generated by global political economy are influential in promoting democracy because they can penetrate societies dependent on external assistance. Democratic transition in one's country may have been influenced by external agencies. Democratic nations and their pro-democratic institutions tend to put pressure on authoritarian regimes which depend on external agencies for loans, aid and trade. The study shows that imposition of sanctions was primarily aimed at sending a message of

disapproval to the Myanmar government's behavior, and to express a symbolic support to the pro-democracy movement. Sanctions were also intended to put pressure on the military government to change its course of action and embark on democratic reforms. Advocates of sanctions believed that if the military government was pressurized through sanctions, it would lead to regime collapse either through popular uprising or a revolt by disgruntled or reformist army officers, or both. They also believed that sanctions would bring economic hardship to the people who would then have nothing to lose but rise up against the authorities. Another dimension of sanctions was to isolate Myanmar and its leadership at various international forums, either by boycotting meetings or attending but not engaging in any official bilateral activities.

Since 1991, the UNGA began passing non-binding resolutions urging the Myanmar government, among others, to recognize the will of the people as expressed in the 1990 election and pave the way for democracy. Per the mandate of the General Assembly, the offices of the Secretary General presented its annual report since 1994. The Group of Friends of the Secretary General was formed to serve as a consultative forum to help support the initiatives of the Secretary General's good offices. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon personally visited Myanmar with a view to directly engaging the military leaders. Like other UN bodies, the Security Council was also involved by issuing press releases or presidential statements, and by unsuccessfully attempting to pass a resolution on January 12, 2007.

The policy of ASEAN has been constructive engagement, which basically aims at achieving the strategic and economic interests of ASEAN member states. Traditionally, the organization has been more concerned with stability of the region than regime change. The bloc was against the policy of Western sanctions, and believed in a gradual change of the perception of Myanmar leaders on several issues of international concern, including human rights and democratic reforms. Despite the non-interference policy on the internal affairs of member states, there were some instances in which the ASEAN leadership was visibly frustrated with the Myanmar government. Myanmar was forced to skip the 2006 ASEAN chairmanship because of pressure from within ASEAN member states and Western democracies. While the US and EU threatened to boycott ASEAN

meetings if Myanmar were to assume the role of chairmanship, some ASEAN members (Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore) feared that it would damage the image of ASEAN internationally. China's engagement with Myanmar has been multi-dimensional - strategic, economic, political and security - which have mutually benefited both countries in different ways.

The conflicting approaches of sanctions and engagement hampered the democratization process. The engagement policy spearheaded by ASEAN, China, and India did not trigger democratic reforms by itself. Similarly, the Western sanctions did not produce the intended result i.e. democratic reforms. Engagement was ineffective because it simply had no priority agenda of delivering democratic reforms. It was largely business-oriented diplomacy thereby putting all other pressing issues on the back burner. On the other hand, sanctions or isolationist policy was ineffective because of the engaging nations, under which the military junta could easily manipulate. The approach of the US and EU was also ineffective partly because it did not opt for a unilateral military intervention. The UN was ineffective because it did not have the unanimous support of the Security Council. With its veto power structural system, the UN engagement was largely symbolic despite the secretary general's personal efforts. The two conflicting approaches of the international community emboldened the intransigent nature of the Myanmar military junta. President Obama administration's willingness to give engagement a chance engendered a new momentum for the international community to adopt a concerted approach.

Some of the most important institutional changes necessary for democratic transition are holding of elections, developing party system, and how the relationship between the executive and legislative branches functions. In the 1990 election, the NLD won overwhelmingly. But the military refused to transfer power to the elected representatives on the ground that a new constitution has to be written first before a civilian government can be instituted. Despite intense pressure from the NLD, the government objected to convening the parliament and used different tactics to disrupt and dismantle the opposition groups, such as detaining and dismissing elected representatives, and forcing others to resign. Elected representatives were threatened with land

confiscation, ban on educational opportunities and the denial of the right to enter monkhood. The elected members were dismissed on offences such as discussing the formation of a parallel government. Many political parties that contested the election were also declared illegal. The military was intent on holding on to power.

The military carefully crafted the National Convention to institutionalize and constitutionalize its dominant role in politics. The Convention delegates were nominated by SLORC military government in each state, division and district. A dominant role for the military is guaranteed in the three branches of government - executive, legislative, and judiciary. The constitution states that the president must be elected not by a popular vote but an electoral college and must be well versed in military affairs. The constitution also guarantees the military 25 percent of seats in the parliament, as well as key ministry portfolios such as defense, home and border affairs. The military is empowered with the constitutional right to assume power in case of national emergency, pertaining to national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The constitution was declared approved in a referendum held in 2008 by over 92 percent of the electorates.

Since the NLD did not participate in the 2010 election, the government-backed USDP won overwhelmingly in both houses of the parliament. Despite its landslide electoral victory, the government lacked the legitimacy and support from the Myanmar people as well as the international community. After her release from house arrest, the government invited Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD to re-register the party and legally enter mainstream politics. The government also invited the NLD to contest the 2012 by-election. The NLD's decision to re-register the party was a significant development. Prior to this, the NLD denounced the entire electoral process, including the election result. The party boycotted the 2010 election primarily in protest against the election law which stated that neither a former political prisoner can contest in the election nor can a party of such member be registered. After entrenching the role of military in politics through the seven-step roadmap process, including the 2008 constitution, the SPDC government no longer saw significant threat from the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. Subsequently, the government removed a clause in the election law which banned political prisoners from becoming a political party member and contesting in the election.

The transition to parliamentary democracy following the 2010 general election was a landmark development in Myanmar's political history. However, the reforms and political changes were implemented after the military entrenched its institutional role through the seven-step-roadmap process which was prevalent in all the three branches of government - legislative, executive and judiciary. By entrenching its dominant role in all spheres of the Myanmar society, the 2008 constitution also guaranteed immunity to the military generals for their past actions, including human rights violations. By reaching out to Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, the military was seeking the recognition and legitimacy it sought from the Myanmar people as well as the international community. On the other hand, the NLD leadership realized that it was in the best interest of the party and its leadership to make a compromise with the military for the party's survival and for the gradual achievement of its political objectives. Reaching an understanding was a pragmatic approach taken by both parties which was mutually beneficial, with certain compromises on both sides.

On the question of whether the ongoing democratic transition can be successfully sustained, the general impression among different political stakeholders is that the process is unlikely to revert back to an authoritarian regime or another military coup. There are, however, two schools of thought - one group which has greater optimism on the success of the democratization process and the other group which is cautiously optimistic. While the first group sees that there is no chance of retreating back, the second group questions the sincerity of the government, particularly the role of military.

In summary, the research shows that democratizing agents such as civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions all contribute to the political transition from authoritarian regime to democracy in varying ways. It shows that the transition in Myanmar is systematically implemented in accordance with the military's seven-step roadmap towards a "disciplined and flourishing democracy." A democratic transition under the conditions of absolute military control need not be understood as eliminating any role for the military in the democratic political set up by vesting all powers in the elected government. Democratic transition may be understood as a process rather than an event. If authoritarian and democratic regimes are two points on the extremes of a

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continuum, we notice that there are different intervening stages that fall in between these two extremes. The routes to which such a transition takes place may also depend upon the nature of authoritarianism and the intensity with which the forces of democracy in a society exert pressures towards transition. While the process of democratic transition can be considered complete when a government that comes to power through a popular and fair election and exercises *de facto* authority and does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*, there can be stages in which non-elected institution such as the military continues to exercise authority. Thus in the context of Myanmar, we can say that military elites tend to be more inclined to relinquish political control when institutional arrangements are worked out in such a way to ensure a place for military/authoritarian elements in alternative democratic set up. Therefore, the transition from a non-democratic regime to a democratic government is possible when contending parties realize their respective limitations, willing to compromise and work towards a negotiated transition for gradual change.

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SYNOPSIS

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MYANMAR: PATTERNS OF POLITICAL CHANGE

Thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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Significance and Objectives of the Study

Transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic form of government is one of the biggest challenges many countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa face. Some countries have seen a smooth transition while some others have gone through a painful process. The challenge continues in some countries and Myanmar is one such a nation. The ruling elites and the opposition forces have been engaged in a negotiated transition to democracy. It is pertinent for social science research to analyze the circumstances and conditions under which transition to democracy takes place. There seems to be no one single model of transition that is universally applicable. Democratic transition may be triggered by a single event or a protracted process marked by a series of events. In any case, a complex set of interacting factors and the abilities of the actors matter a great deal in steering a nation towards democratization or its failure to do so.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military government held election on May 27, 1990 in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory with over 80 percent of the national parliament seats. However, the SLORC military government refused to recognize the election result and the parliament was never convened. Consequently, the military continued to rule the country under an authoritarian regime. After two decades of military rule, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military government held general election on November 7, 2010. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won a landslide victory with over 70 percent of seats in both houses of the parliament - House of Nationalities (Upper House) and House of Representatives (Lower House). Subsequently, the USDP convened a parliament, which paved the way for a calibrated political transition from decades of military rule to parliamentary democracy. It took over a quarter century of military rule for an election to be held in 1990, and it took two decades for another election held in 2010. The 1990 election led to the continuation of military rule, while the 2010 election holds the promise of institutionalizing parliamentary democracy in Myanmar.

This thesis presents a case study of democratic transition in Myanmar. The objectives of the thesis is to understand the factors that contribute to democratic

transition, the circumstances and the ways in which transition takes place in a country ruled by military for nearly five decades. For several decades before the 2010 general election, the military had been hostile to the idea and practice of democracy. The study attempts to explain why the opposition groups - NLD and ethnic parties - decided to work with the military-dominated government with which they fought for several decades. Thus, the study seeks to explain the change that came about over the past two decades paving the way for the establishment of democratic political institutions in Myanmar. In doing so, the thesis examines the role of civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions.

The overarching question sought to be answered through this research has been grounding in the literature available on democratic transition, which provides a theoretical and comparative perspective to locate the transitional issues in Myanmar. Studies that exist on Myanmar's political transition have also been reviewed (Bünte 2011, Lidauer 2012, McCarthy 2012, Hlaing 2012). However, studies on Myanmar either focus on certain democratizing agent(s) or aspect of the transition. For example, Bunte focusses on the role of military; Lidauer and McCarthy on civil society; and Hlaing on leadership, economic problems and the role of Western democracies. These works center around either the 2010 general election or the 2012 by-election. There has not been a comprehensive study of different possible democratizing factors between the 1990 and 2010 election that may have changed the dynamics of politics. This research attempts to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge on democratic transition in Myanmar.

Research Question

When do non-democratic regimes relent and yield to pressures for transition to democracy?

This thesis proceeds with a surmise that a non-democratic political regime (military in the case of Myanmar) is more inclined to relinquish absolute political control when institutional arrangements are worked out in such a way to ensure a place for military/authoritarian elements in alternative democratic set up. Transition to democracy is possible when contending parties (non-democratic regime and those who advocate for

democracy) realize their respective limitations, willing to compromise and work towards a negotiated transition for gradual change.

Methodology and Sources of Data

The thesis adopts qualitative descriptive research method. Descriptive research aims at a comprehensive summary of events to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon we are interested (McNabb 2009). It allows the researcher stay close to the primary data and to the accounts of events that are relevant to the study (Sandelowski 2000). Primary data has been collected by conducting elite interviews. The importance of elite interviews in social science research is well-recognized (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, Dexter 2006, Tansey 2007). As part of the research, leaders of political parties, civil society groups, officials, diplomats, academics and representatives of ethnic minorities were interviewed. Besides making use of the information gathered from elite interviews, the research draws upon government documents, official reports, newspapers and periodicals.

Chapterization

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The introduction chapter analyzes theoretical debates in political science literature on democratization, democratic transition, and democratic consolidation. It focusses on some of the widely studied democratizing agents such as civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions which are considered having relevance to Myanmar. By analyzing these theoretical debates, an attempt is made in the following chapters to identify the factor(s) that trigger democratic transition in Myanmar. It also discusses the statement of the problem, significance and objectives of the study, and the gaps in existing literature on democratic transition with regards to Myanmar. It presents the research question and outlines the methodology of the research, the sources of data, and the structure of the thesis.

The objective of the second chapter is to understand the history of Myanmar that would provide the necessary background information to understand the pattern of political change from democracy to military rule. It looks at the formation of the Union of

Burma, how the country gained independence from the British in 1948 and the subsequent years of parliamentary democracy under Prime Minister U Nu and his Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). It examines the insurgency problems and the tensions within AFPFL which entailed the resignation of Prime Minister U Nu; the dissolution of parliament; and the installation of military caretaker government. It analyzes the results of general elections before and after the split of AFPFL, the only dominant political party during the civilian government. It examines the circumstances which led to military coup in 1962 and how the country was militarized and institutionalized under the authoritarian rule of General Ne Win. It also attempts to understand the circumstances which may entail military intervention in politics.

The third chapter examines the role of civil society in democratic transition. It first briefly discusses the historical and theoretical concept of civil society. Then, it chronologically examines the status and role of civil society since the country's independence: civil society under the AFPFL government; the state of civil society under Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP); the state of civil society under State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC); the state of civil society under State Peace and Development Council (SPDC); and civil society under Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). It looks at the activities of civil society groups inside the country as well as civil society across the borders. Civil society across the borders refer to the networks and organizations formed by Myanmar expatriates or people who had been forced to leave the country during the years of military rule. It also examines the role of students and media as civil society groups.

The fourth chapter analyzes the role of elites before 1990 and 2010 elections and beyond. It examines the role of elites during the AFPFL government, BSPP government, SLORC government, SPDC government, and the role of NLD and ethnic minority elites in the process of democratic transition. It analyses how the military elites, as a dominant group, systematically implemented the transition process. It also examines the circumstances under which the government and the NLD reached understanding, and how the government reached out to ethnic armed groups.

The fifth chapter analyzes the role of external agencies (foreign governments, international organizations, etc.) in democratic transition. It examines the debates surrounding the effectiveness of sanctions versus engagement policies pursued by the international community with respect to democratic transition. It specifically looks at the politics of sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union, the involvement of the United Nations, and the engagement of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the People's Republic of China, and the policy shift of India.

The sixth chapter examines the role of institutions in democratic transition. It analyzes the convening of National Convention in the aftermath of the 1990 election, the military's seven-step roadmap towards democracy introduced in 2003, the role of *Sangha* (Buddhist monks), the 1990 election and the entrenchment of military role, the 2010 general election and the first steps towards restoration of democracy, and the 2012 by-election and the emergence of parliamentary democracy. It also examines why and how the military-backed SPDC government and the NLD reached understanding after the 2010 general election.

The last chapter presents summary of the work and its conclusion. An attempt is made to theorize on democratic transition based on Myanmar's case study. It also discusses the future prospect of democratic transition.

Conclusion

The research shows that democratizing agents such as civil society, elites, external agencies, and institutions all contribute to the political transition from authoritarian regime to democracy in varying ways. It shows that the transition in Myanmar is systematically implemented in accordance with the military's seven-step roadmap towards a "disciplined and flourishing democracy." A democratic transition under the conditions of absolute military control need not be understood as eliminating any role for the military in the democratic political set up by vesting all powers in the elected government. Democratic transition may be understood as a process rather than an event. If authoritarian and democratic regimes are two points on the extremes of a continuum,

we notice that there are different intervening stages that fall in between these two extremes. The routes to which such a transition takes place may also depend upon the nature of authoritarianism and the intensity with which the forces of democracy in a society exert pressures towards transition. While the process of democratic transition can be considered complete when a government that comes to power through a popular and fair election and exercises *de facto* authority and does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*, there can be stages in which non-elected institution such as the military continues to exercise authority. Thus in the context of Myanmar, we can say that military elites tend to be more inclined to relinquish political control when institutional arrangements are worked out in such a way to ensure a place for military/authoritarian elements in alternative democratic set up. Therefore, the transition from a non-democratic regime to a democratic government is possible when contending parties realize their respective limitations, willing to compromise and work towards a negotiated transition for gradual change.