

Aung San Su Kyi's Role Among the United States, China, and Domestic Dilemmas in Myanmar's Democratic Transition

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Abstract

It is difficult to understand fear if you have never faced it. The people of Myanmar have been afraid of the military government for decades. The consequence of fear is hatred. People's fear was changed to hatred and the military dictator was itself afraid of people's hatred. And the military's fear was the beginning of Myanmar's democratic transitions. The leader was Aung San Su Kyi who was the daughter of General Aung San, the father of Myanmar's Independence. She participated in Myanmar's politics since 1988 Democracy Reform and she had been under house arrest for two decades but she was one of the practical politicians who was not afraid and didn't have hatred, very fond of human rights which is the value of Democracy. The heavy bloodshed of the people and the military regime's gunfire drew her to take part in Myanmar's politics at this time. The military relied on China for many decades for both economy and politics because of the U.S. and the European Union's sanctions. Myanmar's democratic transition was going on since 2010 election more openly and the U.S. stood for democracy, China was a watcher and domestic conflicts went on in this very country Myanmar, and then Myanmar's democratic transition was the road map of the military government's 2008 Constitution. Among these dilemmas, the author mentioned how Aung San Su Kyi took her role and handled to establish "the democratic state" in this article.

Keywords: Aung San Su Kyi, The U.S., China, Domestic Dilemmas, Democratic Transition.

Introduction

Aung San Su Kyi's father was assassinated in his attempt to achieve Myanmar's independence. But there were so many differences between her and her father for Myanmar people who didn't know about her too much before the media openness because they have been under military control and propaganda for long decades. In reality, she has always been a politician that she said and Myanmar people waited for the professional politician since the country got independence. And finally, they attracted Aung San Su Kyi by their blood in the 1988 Revolution. On the other hand, people were worried about she got married a foreigner, and many supporters of democracy are outsiders so if she got power, she would probably accept western ideas and Buddhism might be press, and so many foreigners would come to Myanmar and take Myanmar's natural resources as the colonial period. Moreover, she has been spending her life in most Democratic countries so they doubt her understanding of domestic people who have been living under the military junta for their whole life without knowing the outside world. Although they have been worrying above things, finally they chose Aung San Su Kyi to be the leader in the demonstration since 1988.

Aung San Su Kyi's Role in Myanmar's Democracy Reform

Nevertheless, Aung San Su Kyi's perseverance and her manner of speaking have attracted the public. When the international community and the people in domestic stood with Aung San Su Kyi for Democracy, the junta decided to cut her off from all her supporters. The people's choice was perfectly right that Aung San Su Kyi was Myanmar's avatar to open their mind, to communicate the world and she herself loves Myanmar as much as her father. Myanmar's remaining hopes depended on Aung San Su Kyi who was the only of a potent symbol to oppose the military government as stability. When she was going through the

armed military group which pointed their guns at her public meeting, all people behind her closed their eyes to hear a military officer's "fire or shoot" but instead of this word, the military returned their station. She became an international icon stand for Human Rights which is Democracy's value.

The generation would never forget when there was bleeding and losing lives under the military gunned people down in 1988 Democracy Revolution and Aung San Su Kyi came into Myanmar's politics as an essential Democracy icon. The entrance of her political life was full of blood, but things were changed when she was under house arrest. International supporters and domestic pro-democratic people tried her to release as much as they could whenever they got chances.

The junta thought the people and the whole world would forget about her when they put her under house arrest. There were civil wars going on in almost all ethnic states. Economics was a disaster. She was under house arrest. The country's education downing deep day by day. Corruption was anywhere. Many countries, including the United States, have been cut diplomatic relations off with Myanmar and put economic sanctions. Myanmar has been isolated since the economic downturn. The problem of unemployment and the refugee camps had disturbed neighboring countries. Regional ASEAN only accepted Myanmar as an observer.

Aung San Su Kyi's bravery made the people be patient and still to work hard to get democracy. The international community recognized her eloquence and persistence and she got the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 while she was under house arrest. Myanmar was the military dictatorships' rule and there were human rights abuses so the country was isolated as lonely land, her only one exit was China. Eventually, the junta tried to use Aung San Su Kyi as a pawn and tried to play with the world on international relations' chessboard. The military junta released her the first time and they got a chance in ASEAN by negotiation of Japan and there was the United States behind Japan. Since the 1990s, the junta has been preparing for the democratic transition of Myanmar systematically. The NLD won the 1990 election but the junta did not recognize it. When the power was transferred to the Democracy government, it was necessary for the safety of the entire army and they made the 2008 constitution.

Aung San Su Kyi in Myanmar's Democratic Transition

In 2008 Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar and the government couldn't hide Myanmar's reality behind the curtain, coincidentally, the military government announced the 2008 Constitution to reduce military power step by step and to form a semi-civilian government to rule Myanmar. Under this Constitution, SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) held the 2010 election, the people didn't carefree and fair election because they have never heard of that. After the 1990 election, the people didn't believe that the government said about the election, they went to the voting station because if they didn't, they thought they would get punishment somehow. So, the U Thein Sein government took the state power, the people interested in food and job opportunities how to create themselves or how to go abroad as blue color workers instead of changing government. At that time, the U Thein Sein government showed a card up his sleeve at the public. She was Aung San Su Kyi.

She was appeared at the public as an old woman with trucked flowers into her hair when she was released in November 2010. Her hair was streaked with gray but her head still stands to quest for democracy. She spent hours and hours by reading books and listening radio to know what was happening in the world in her enforced solitude time. Times took her beauty and young but could never destroy her persistence, mature, dignity, and feminism

from her. People felt that a heavy shroud black cloud over them was being covered off finally they hope. She was the only one avatar who was going to bring Myanmar people's hope.

She was house arrest for twenty years under the military government. Like a hiding flower, as soon as she was released from house arrest, Myanmar's politics took her in to meet the people who were hungry about her and she was selected as representative in 2012 by-election to participate in U Thein Sein's parliament. That wining was the rout of the NLD party and Aung San Su Kyi's success because the former military junta had never officially accepted the NLD's won before. Thousands and thousands of people had greeted her motorcade wherever she went for election camping.

As soon as she released from the house arrest, the first ambassador who met Aung San Su Kyi was Chinese one and people are almost confused about it. From 1988 to 2010, people believed that China stayed away from Myanmar's politics, and Japan, America, and Europe were her democracy supporters. At this point, Chinese diplomatic skill amazed the world and even China itself is a Communist country but they showed that they were willing to accept Aung San Su Kyi as an opposite party leader of the present government. Moreover, this is also showing that Beijing recognized Aung San Su Kyi and her effort to get democracy in Myanmar although China had great relations with the former Myanmar military government and the present U Thein Sein's too. The United States used to support Democracy growing around the world and she stood for Aung San Su Kyi either. But in this case, China took both Aung San Su Kyi and the world's attention first by her diplomatic way.

In 2011 Hilary's visit brought Obama the president to visit Myanmar in 2012 together with Hilary and they met Aung San Su Kyi and U Thein Sein the president both separately. In 2012 Aung San Su Kyi visited China and she was welcome as a state official role by the Chinese government. Barack Obama visited Myanmar on 14 November 2014 at the same time Myanmar was a presidential chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Derek Mitchell was the first ambassador of the United States put in Myanmar for more than 20 years lacking the U.S. ambassador in Myanmar. He was playing an American's representative in Myanmar's Democratic Transition but he said that "the United States involved in Politics not in economics" early time he arrived at Myanmar.

President U Thein Sein who was retired military general and the prime minister of the SPDC government took the state power in March 2011 and the name of the government was the Democratic Republic of the Union of Myanmar. He was a historic transformer in Myanmar's Democratic Transitions and the last wall of Myanmar's military government. The SPDC government prepared the 2008 Constitution to establish a civilian government without hitting the military and brought U Thein Sein as a puppet president at an international look. But he tried his best in negotiating the cease-fire agreement with ethnic militant groups at the end of 2011, held 2012 by-election to bring Aung San Su Kyi into the parliament to work together with the present government, accepted the United States' dramatic warmly relations and visited Washington, suspended the Chinese biggest investment in Myanmar "Myitsone Dam Project" in 2011 because of public opinion, and he released media sensor press for some journals and newspaper, even allowed the people demonstration by pre-admission, pressed the 2012 foreign direct investment bill, took part in ASEAN active and seek for the country's interests and benefits.

Warmly Myanmar-American dramatic relations probably hit China's business in Myanmar, at this point Washington reduced Chinese influence in Myanmar's economy. And Chinese investments were reduced with waiting for Myanmar political changes.



Figure (1) Chinese Investments in Myanmar from 2008-2019 \$ million

Chinese invested in Myanmar \$ 856 million in 2008-2009, \$ 2.5 million in 2009-2010, \$ 8269 million in 2010-2011, \$ 4345.73 million in 2011-2012, \$ 231.77 million in 2012-2013, \$ 56.16 million in 2013-2014, \$ 511.42 million in 2014-2015, \$ 3323.85 million in 2015-2016, \$ 482.59 million in 2016-2017, \$ 1359.22 in 2017-2018, and \$ 309.8 million in 2018-2019 beget years. Chinese companies used to invest especially in Oil and Gas factors.¹

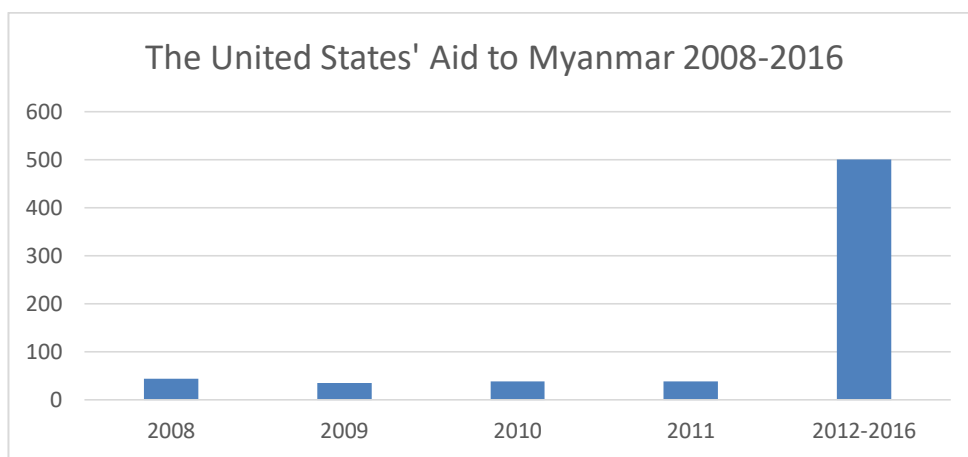


Figure (2) The U.S Financial Assistant in Myanmar from 2008-2016 \$ million

The United States helped Myanmar as financial assistant as 43.7 million \$ in 2008, 35.4 million \$ in 2009, 38.6 million \$ in 2010, 36.5 million \$ in 2011 and 500 million \$ from 2012 to 2016.² After that Myanmar’s financial affairs with the United States became a part of ASEAN countries and Asia Pacific Programme. Obama lifted sanctions against Myanmar on 14 September 2016, but the United States’ investments didn’t come yet until 2019 in economy. It was confirmed by the ambassador Scot Marciel word “the U.S has invested more

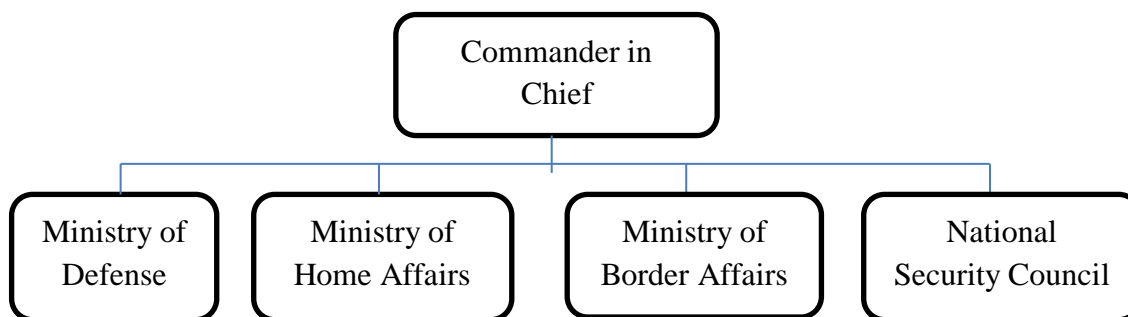
¹ Infographic: 30 Years of Chinese Investment in Myanmar, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/infographic-30-years-chinese-investment-myanmar.html>

² U.S State Department Website

than \$ 176 million in health and a total of nearly \$ 1.5 billion in U.S. assistance to Myanmar for the last twenty years”³. The United States Provides \$16.5 Million in Assistance to Myanmar to Respond to COVID-19.⁴

Domestic Dilemmas and Aung San Su Kyi

The biggest one is the 2008 Constitution, it mentioned that the power of the Commander in Chief very firmly.



Major powers of the Commander in Chief

There are many articles to support the military power in the government which the new government and the people have to amend this constitution. They are-

(1) Chapter 1, Basic Principles of Union 6; the Tatmadaw (Military) must take the lead in politics.

(2) Chapter (1) article 14; the Tatmadaw (Military) has to work and participate in the Union level, the state level and local level.

(3) Being the only patriotic army under article 20; All military personnel have the right to freely exercise and manage their affairs. The Tatmadaw is primarily responsible for the protection of the Constitution.

(4) According to article 60 (b) (3); the military is in the executive level of the country.

(5) Under Chapter 7, article 338; no other armed force except the Tatmadaw is allowed.

(6) According to the Article 412,341, and 413 and 419; the military has been authorized to take military power in emergency situations and can be prescribed for up to one year under section 417. There is no time limit for military rule.

(7) No one shall interfere in the affairs of the Tatmadaw.

(8) According to Article 20, the Tatmadaw can handle directly all military affairs to be carried out without any other government's order.

³ The United States Provides \$7.3 million in Assistance to Respond to COVID-19 in Myanmar, April 28, 2020, U.S. Embassy in Burma, <https://mm.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-provides-7-3-million-in-assistance-to-respond-to-covid-19myanmar/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20has%20invested,U.S.%20Ambasador%20Scot%20Marciel%20said.>

⁴ <https://mm.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-provides-16-5-million-in-assistance-to-myanmar-to-respond-to-covid-19/>

(9) Chapter (4) article 74, 109, 141, and 161; 25% of the Military representatives are in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) and the legislative branch.

(10) Articles 115 and 147 (b); Defense and Security Issues; Only military personnel have the right to do so in military affairs.

(11) According to article 121 (j); the military has been given the privilege.

(12) According to article 201, Defense; Home and border affairs; And the appointment of the deputy ministers under section 232 and 234, and the appointment of deputy ministers.

(13) Under article 262, the Commander-in-Chief is responsible for the defense of the State and Border Affairs, Resignation of military representatives; Stopping In all cases, the Tatmadaw has the right to do so.

(14) According to article 258, the Nay Pyi Taw Council, which is controlled by the military, gives the state supreme power.

(15) In an emergency, Chapter 11 article 412, 413, 418 and 432 In accordance with the provisions, the legislature, Administration, The Tatmadaw is able to carry out the judiciary and allow the Tatmadaw can coup for unlimited time.

(17) Chapter 14 article 443, 445 and 447 in accordance with the provisions; the heirs to the military government inherit, the continued use of the junta's laws.⁵

The other are human rights issues as the Muslim people in Rakhine case in ICJ International Court of Justice, the Peacemaking Process among ethnic groups, negotiating between the military and militant ethnic groups, building democratic country and managing federal democratic Union. And the economy, education and need is anywhere to work hard in this country.

The author said the role of “Aung San Su Kyi’s in Myanmar “national reconciliation for federal democracy” and “the constitution.” In fact, the United States and international community either over expected but she would never be a president of Myanmar because of the 2008 constitution that was preparing to satisfy the military by themselves. Mending constitution was impossible by the military control. Moreover, “Some observers argued that the ground in Myanmar was shifting although Aung San Su Kyi maybe popular but her party, on the whole, was weak.”

Discussion

U Thein Sein’s openness media made Aung San Su Kyi more popular not only in domestic but also in international. And the United States attracted the world media to emphasis on her as an international democracy icon, came into Myanmar’s top-down democratic transition in a leadership role especially in parliament and involved in ethnic militant groups and military affairs as a peacemaker or negotiator, human rights affairs like Rakhine state Muslim people’s conflict and public society and Myanmar’s national reconsolidation and the peace process. And the U.S. her image beside Myanmar in ASEAN since 2012 and 2014 if she performed as Myanmar’s supporter or performed as a powerful player of Asia Pacific region to counteract China’s power?

Aung San Su Kyi was decisively won in the 2015 election and her government took the state office in March 2016. She was a state counselor that was created by her party’s judicial advisor because article 59 (f) of the 2008 Constitution denied her to be president. As

⁵ The 2008 Constitution

soon as she took state power, she held the human rights issue about Muslim people and Rakhine state and visited her neighbor countries, the most interesting point was before her visit to the United States, she went to China first. The world watchers assumed that Aung San Su Kyi was a very practical politician as cold pragmatic since that time.

She focused on National Reconsolidation among ethnic groups and the military, renewed U Thein Sein's NCA to be the 21st Century Penglone Conference for discussing with ethnic groups to establish Democratic Federal Union State, tried to get foreign direct investments to improve country's economy as much as she could. Although how much she worked in domestic and international, there were so many obstacle challenges at her like to amend the 2008 Constitution, and on-going peace process and the education system's deteriorations. When she was busy as like as a bee in these dilemmas in both domestic and international, the United States made propaganda and criticized her in western media.

Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser of the Obama administration assumed that Aung San Su Kyi was like the ignorant person who stood by for her present government without listening to the westerners' voice who supported her while she was under her house arrest. They pointed out the Myanmar government's violent attacking on ethnics and Muslim people in Rakhine state. The media wrote Aung San Su Kyi was not a wealth of the Nobel Peace Prize anymore because they thought that she was silent in her country's brutal human rights affairs. But she said that "I'm not silent in my country's affairs but they didn't hear what they wanted so they said that I was silent" in the 2017 speech after police stations were attacked by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

Dealing with Ben Rhodes' words, it shows that the westerners didn't understand Aung San Su Kyi's situation in Myanmar's politics and the complicated tradition and culture of Myanmar very well. Before the United States came to Myanmar, Obama's administration knew the 2008 Constitution and how Myanmar's democratic transition would be difficult to establish a pure civilian government. And the United States approached Myanmar's President U Thein Sein and Aung San Su Kyi the opposite party leader warmly and dramatically to take part in Myanmar's top-down democratic transition. And the U.S. tried to handle Aung San Su Kyi as their puppet, did she play as they like?

When the United States' president and secretary of state visited Myanmar, China was only a watcher, she didn't show her excitement that much. China is Myanmar's neighbor, the only trade partner of Myanmar along through her lonely time, China didn't participate in Myanmar's politics barely but there were Chinese hands behind Myanmar's politics ever. Since 2011, China gradually reduced her foreign investments in Myanmar and increased Multi-layer relations with Myanmar like inviting Myanmar services from top to bottom in civil government departments and showed Chinese culture and generosity.

Along through the military regime, Beijing used to communicate with the military government and didn't try Aung San Su Kyi to release from her house arrest in public. But before her house arrest, Aung San Su Kyi and Chinese ambassador had a good relationship to discuss the military junta and even the ambassador himself talked to the military general that Aung San Su Kyi wants. Some scholars used to say that Myanmar is a complicated country as it has a complicated history and according to this point, China can understand Myanmar's politics more than the United States because Eastern mind, tradition, and culture are very similar between them.

In 2016, still, as a president is Obama in the United States and Aung San Su Kyi became a state counselor after the 2015 election's NLD's landslide won. Aung San Su Kyi visited the United States, things are changed although Obama lifted some sanctions and still

pushed to focus on human rights in Rakhine state, Obama is going to leave his office soon and Derek Mitchell the ambassador is also going to leave Myanmar at the end of Obama's time in the United States. What did American hope from Aung San Su Kyi or Myanmar and get it or not? Aung San Su Kyi is always to be a Politian who prefers to focus in the national interest, so did she paly in domestic, regional and international as the U.S. want?

At the same time, the westerners were saying that Aung San Su Kyi was a betrayer of human rights, and China was looking for how to help Myanmar's human rights issues without affection on Aung San Su Kyi's pride. How much difference between these? Like the westerners called Aung San Su Kyi as an avatar of Democracy, an icon of international to against military junta when they liked her. After that, they said that she was not aware of the Nobel Peace Prize, an ignorant person for human rights issues, how they changed their view on her. Aung San Su Kyi is a professional politician, of course, she prefers her country to be peaceful and prosperous one among countries in this world. She used to say that "thank you for your support in long term Myanmar's Democratic Transition, one day my country and my people will stand themselves and live without helping from you these are our goals of this Democratic Transitions processes". Before Myanmar is a Federal Union Democratic country, she is playing her role as much as she could but not to please the westerners or not, none professional politicians don't care international and media's voice more than domestic.

She and Myanmar people will never forget about the western politicians especially John Macane the senator, Ambassador Derek Mitchell, Secretary of state Hilary Clinton, President Obama, and the people who supported and stood for Myanmar's democratic transitions from the United States. But every country has a different culture, tradition, and different domestic issues like complicated country Myanmar has more and Aung San Su Kyi understands her country more than others, she just needs time to develop her people's physical and mental things. Democratic transitions are still going on in Myanmar, did American leave Myanmar, it was not a miracle because Asia Pacific Pivot didn't intend to develop Myanmar's Democracy just intend to contain China obviously.

Who was hit by the United States' involvement in Myanmar's democratic transitions? It was China but while Beijing was looking for workable ways by diplomatic and economic investments, the deputy national security adviser of Obama's administration said that "Aung San Su Kyi was a person who can make the other people believe that she said", so what did it mean? Before the United States came to Myanmar, they knew that Myanmar had a lot of problems in human rights issues, military and ethnics conflicts, lacking rule of law, unmaturred parliament, challenges of the 2008 Constitution, economic problems and they also probably saw coming government's power-sharing with the military so if the United States really wanted to grow Democracy in Myanmar or just came and show her image to compete for the Chinese influence in Myanmar and giving lip-services Myanmar people.

Conclusion

In historical point of view, politics is always changing in the world so we used to listen and look at the past to get lessons to build the better world in present. Myanmar has long enough fighting history for independence, and still struggling to build federal democratic country in this very day. In 21th century, between the United States and China's power competing in Sought East Asia region, Myanmar could take the best to establish the democratic country, but China is her neighboring country, how a country could build a peaceful and prosperous one without neighbors' support so Aung San Su Kyi will never leave China for America which supported to grow up democracy in Myanmar. She is hardly playing her role in international and domestic since her government took the state office. Any

watchers cannot guess that Myanmar's democratic transition is a successful transition or fail down transition depends on the government's power-sharing with the military until today. But which country can do her democratic transition in over one night? It will take time, near election 2020 is coming, Aung San Su Kyi is still standing for democracy by devoting to her people. How much her democracy bargaining among these dilemmas' answer is going to be the result of the 2020 election.

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