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Debating the situation in Myanmar since the military coup in 2022

ASEAN

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Introduction

The civil war in Myanmar has been going on since 2021. The underlying issues are, however, rooted in years of colonialism and unstable ruling of the nation. A country that was once praised for its democratic, progressive regime, despite its geographical location, is now in turmoil and has lost all its grasp of a stable democracy and even a stable government. Myanmar is no stranger to coups, having had two previous successful ones. This coup originated from distaste towards the military, in contradiction to previous cases when the military acted on the disapproval of the public. The 2021 coup has, therefore, also been met with much more resistance. There have been more protests than ever before, and these have now also escalated to violence. Many ethnic groups are fighting the military with ethnocentric beliefs. The military itself is struggling under constant pressure and has resorted to conscription of the people. The issue of the people in Myanmar is overshadowed by the other ongoing conflicts in the world. But it is also the people of Myanmar that are in dire need of humanitarian support. It is also the Rohingyas in need of protection and a safe country to return to. In this research report, we will address the underlying causes of the civil war, discuss the current situation, and confront the possible future for Myanmar.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic Army

An ethnic army is an ethnic group that fights with not a nationalistic belief but an ethnocentric belief; this means that they are fighting for ethnic superiority.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's ethnic group is superior to another. Ethnocentric individuals believe they are better than other individuals for reasons based solely on their heritage. In Myanmar, there are many of these groups, and they have formed ethnic armies. These are people

of the same ethnic group who share the feeling of superiority. These armies are all individually fighting against the government.

Junta

A junta is a military group that claims power over a country. After one of the coups in Myanmar, a junta took power and led the region. Junta comes from the Spanish word *jungere*, to join.

General Overview

Since Myanmar gained independence from Britain after the Second World War, it has been an unstable region. After gaining its independence, Myanmar upheld a parliamentary democracy, as was the norm for countries gaining independence in the region. Continuous poverty and post-colonial instability were met with distaste towards the current regime. This distaste was finalized when General Ne led a military coup in 1962. General Ne nationalized a new constitution, making Myanmar (Then Burma) an isolationist state, focussing on expanding its large business enterprises. These two plans could not coincide and led to a near-total collapse of the economy. A black-market economy took over, and the government had lost its grasp on the national economy. This led to widespread corruption, more poverty, and food shortages. The government tried to enforce new economic plans, but the damage had already been done, and it could not be restored. The population, feeling the increasing struggles, protested against the government and its policies in 1988. These protests were, however, short-lived as the army stepped in to defuse the situation. This led to over 3000 civilian casualties. After General Ne had stepped down as chairman, a new group attempted a military coup. This regime changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar, moving further away from its colonial past. 2007 marked the so-called Saffron Revolution, the largest protest since 1988. These protests were caused by the government raising the fuel prices by 500%. The protests were initially cracked down easily by the military. Many arrests were made, and a manhunt for the organizers was issued. The protests only really caught traction when Buddhist monks joined the rallies. The government's continued failure escalated the protests until over 100.000 people were gathered at once. The movement was only stopped once soldiers from east Myanmar were sent in. These soldiers were trained more rigorously and were considered the elite soldiers, after they fired shots and threw teargas, the size of the protest had decreased, but it had not been nullified yet. Small-scale protests in the thousands persisted for the following months. The junta began to lose control, and international interference increased. Therefore, they were forced to

step back, convinced that they could keep instilling their influence on Myanmar. They hoped that this action would also attract foreign investment and trade, as that was only the case with China. In 2008, the constitution, which is still upheld now, was introduced. This new ruling placed Myanmar under civilian rule but with immense military influence. The junta and civilian rule formed a civilian parliament in 2011. It was, however, still controlled by the military. In 2015, Myanmar held its first democratic national election, where Mister Kyaw was appointed President. Mister Kyi, the party leader, had the power in hand even while Kyaw was the president. Kyi was appointed state counsellor and, in turn, governed the civilian government. The military still had a huge influence and managed foreign relations and national defence.

In the most recent 2020 elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party that had also won in 2015, gained the most seats. They had the most votes, even more than last time. The military party, the USDP, had seen a decrease and was against the decision. They called for a rerun of the votes and electoral fraud. The electoral commission rejected both claims. The USDP also asked to delay the date at which the government would meet. The senior general warned of consequences if the USDP's wishes were not adhered to. On the first of February 2021, the first meeting of the new parliament, the military seized power in a coup. NLD leaders were detained, and General Swe became president. In only his first day in office, he declared a one-year state of national emergency. The president argued that the coup was to solve any irregularities following the previous 'fraudulent' elections and that after the state of emergency, fair, democratic elections could be held. Only a few months later, the government extended their state of emergency until 2023. The coup was faced with vehement backlash internationally but also internally. Large groups made small efforts to oppose the government, and in April, a shadow government was created. A shadow government mimics the real government but opposes its decisions and tries to enforce its own without having the actual power to do so. These largely peaceful acts were trampled by the military. The continuous rebellion and fighting have left Myanmar in a dire humanitarian situation and nearly entirely nullified its economy.

In 2016, Myanmar's junta launched a mission to crack down on the inhabitants of the Rakhine state. The majority of the people are Rohingya Muslims, and since the 1970s, the Buddhist government has been persecuting the Rohingyas. The junta was accused of ethnic cleansing by various UN organizations. The UN found evidence that the human rights of the Rohingya people have been violated, they have been mass executed, raped and villages have been burned down. In total, at least 25.000 Rohingyas have been killed and many hundreds of thousands displaced. Many

fled to Bangladesh, subsequently creating the largest asylum seekers centre in the world. Bangladesh was unable to host such a large influx of refugees and thus signed a contract with Myanmar to facilitate the return of the Rohingyas into the region. This decision was revisited after the UN gave clear requirements for the adequate return of the Rohingyas.

The military has recently been struggling to remain in power after facing constant pressure from all angles for the last three years. The military is struggling to keep its ground, and its track record against ethnic armies is surprisingly low. The military is also becoming weaker, and their soldiers consist of more forced civilians than the ethnic armies fighting out of nationalistic principles. While the junta's position is weakening, the problems have not yet come to an end. There are still millions of people being displaced and many unnecessary civilian casualties. The question also arises of what will happen once the military has been exiled. Many experts believe that, as the ethnic groups opposing the military are nationalistic, the troubles will not end. Many groups are lacking the qualities to govern the regions they already control. Furthermore, the dissolution of power could lead to a whole other civil war. While ethnic armies are now fighting against a common enemy, the groups are not fond of each other. This could lead to a new war on how the power would be divided. In addition, these groups do not have democratic pillars instated in their constitution and are ethnocentric groups. This means that most of the parties that would fight for power would not uphold democratic elections or fair treatment of the population.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
1948:	Myanmar gains independence. Ethnic minorities, seeking autonomy, clash with the central government.
1962:	A military coup establishes one-party rule under General Ne Win, starting decades of military dominance.
1988:	Pro-democracy protests lead to the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi but are violently suppressed by the military.

2015	The NLD wins the first-ever national elections but the military stays in control of key governmental institutes.
February 1st, 2021	Military overthrows the NLD government, citing election fraud. This triggers mass protests and a civil disobedience movement.
Oct. 27, 2023	The Three Brotherhood Alliance, a coalition of ethnic armies, launches Operation 1027 in northern Shan state, seizing control of key areas from the military, marking a key victory for the resistance and a turning point in the war.

Major Parties Involved

Bangladesh

During and after the mass persecution of Rohingyas in 2017, many sought any means necessary to escape from the Rakhine region and fled to Bangladesh. As a result, Bangladesh is now housing the largest refugee camp in the world. It is unclear how many people are exactly inhabiting the camp, but estimates exceed 900,000. The camp puts a lot of strain on Bangladesh as the costs of such a large camp are immense. Bangladesh, therefore, does not have the resources to facilitate the refuge, and the quality of the camp is poor. This, combined with the fact that the region is prone to monsoon season and tropical storms, places added strain on Bangladesh to increase its infrastructure to such a level that it is liveable for the Rohingyas, even when the bad weather persists.

Myanmar

The civil war in Myanmar has had unmeasurable effects on the inhabitants. The civil war has nearly completely altered daily life, and people are living in immense poverty and with extreme food shortages. The civil war has subsequently brought the already weak economy to a near-complete standstill. This leads to a lack of basic humanitarian needs. Furthermore, the junta has implemented

conscription of men and women. Many people are fleeing Myanmar, and the remaining people are either at great risk or fighting for an ethnic army. Myanmar faces issues now, but the issues in the future may be far greater. Once the junta has been exterminated, it leaves the risk of a race to power between the many ethnic armies. This could lead to a repetition of the situation the parties were only just collectively fighting against. Furthermore, many experts feel these armies lack the governmental skills to run a country, as many groups are already failing to govern the regions they now occupy from the military.

The United States

The United States has publicly called the persecution of Rohingyas genocide and heavily opposes the government. They are funding human rights initiatives but struggle to make comprehensive solutions in the Security Council as they are met with vetoes from China and Russia.

The People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation

Support from China and Russia is the main reason that the junta is still sustaining itself. They support the government for numerous reasons. Firstly, Myanmar has many natural resources that are important to both China and Russia. Russia also boosts its economy by selling its advanced weaponry to the junta. Secondly, the political alignment: Myanmar's regime opposes Western influence. Both Russia and China align with this idea and thus see it as their job to fund an 'anti-western' regime. Lastly, both countries profit from the sphere of influence that Myanmar buys them. China gets access to the Indian Ocean, while Russia can influence Southeast Asia.

ASIAN

ASEAN has been vehemently against the military coup and has refused to let the Myanmar general attend ASEAN. They have proposed a peace plan called the Five-Point Consensus. The five steps of the plan are as follows: an immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogue to seek a peaceful solution, a Special Envoy of ASEAN will facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance, and the Special Envoy shall visit Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned. As of now, the consensus has not had enough leverage to force the government to change. Many nations are criticizing ASEAN for its management of the situation and call their 5PC too weak.

UNHCR

The UNHCR is the main body safeguarding the rights of the Rohingyas. They help Bangladesh

in facilitating the refugees and increase political awareness. They are also working with Myanmar and Bangladesh to debate the repatriation of the Rohingyas in the Rakhine region.

Possible Solutions

Prioritising the Rohingyas' humanitarian needs

The Rohingyas are a heavily oppressed group and have faced years of hardship. In Myanmar, they are persecuted by Buddhist soldiers, and in Bangladesh, they are living in inhumane conditions due to their immense size. It is, therefore, very important for the delegates to create awareness for this group and to create comprehensive, realistic, and long-term solutions. Repatriation in Myanmar is a large task, and with the stability in the country, this is a dangerous option. Improving the infrastructure in the refugee camps so they are more resistant to the weather would be a start but only a short-term solution. A lasting solution could be the possibility of granting Rohingyas Bangladeshi citizenship and subsequently improving their living conditions in the process.

Strengthening regional and international pressure on the junta

The junta is already facing instability due to the sheer size of the rebellion. International pressure by, for example, ASEAN or the Security Council could lead to the expulsion of the junta. If there is an already enhanced global involvement, it could also lead to a smoother, more democratic statement of a new government. The UN could also instate an organization that would function as an interim government while the region stabilizes and elections can take place.

Taking clear stances on the issue and acting accordingly

This measure could lead to further global awareness and lead to enhanced global cooperation. Nations would see this issue as a priority and work together more closely to solve the many side effects and causes of the war. This could be done by having all nations issue clear statements on the situation. If this could also be met with possible solutions, we would have a multinational alliance focussed on combating the problem. Possible actions could be sanctions specifically targeting the junta and pressure on China and Russia. Countries could also multilaterally discuss humanitarian aid for the people of Myanmar and the Rohingyas. Funding would also be easier if an alliance or organization is formed.

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